



First Interim Evaluation of the European Capitals of Culture action 2020-2033

Final Report

Written by Tim Fox, Luca Mobilio, Arthur Le Gall, Emanuele Rolando, Niklas Olausson

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Contact: IMBERT Marie

E-mail: eac-unite-d2@ec.europa.eu

*European Commission
B-1049 Brussels*

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	7
RÉSUMÉ	7
ABSTRAKT	7
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	9
RÉSUMÉ ANALYTIQUE	15
ZUSAMMENFASSUNG	22
1. INTRODUCTION	29
1.1. Objectives of the study and scope	29
1.2. Brief overview of the work conducted	31
1.3. Background of the action	31
1.4. Challenges and limitations	36
1.5. Key data sources of the evaluation	37
2. EVALUATION MAIN FINDINGS	47
2.1. To what extent was the intervention successful and why?	47
2.2. How did the EU interventions make a difference and to whom?	96
2.3. Is the intervention still relevant?	102
3. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE OF THE ACTION	115
3.1. To what extent was the intervention successful and why?	115
3.2. How did the EU intervention make a difference and to whom?	122
3.3. Is the intervention still relevant?	124
3.4. Lessons learnt for cities and Governments	124
4. ANNEXES	126
Annex 1: Intervention logic	127
Annex 2: Evaluation matrix	128
Annex 3: Public consultation findings - A summary report of contributions submitted through the online consultation and an analysis of responses	168
Annex 4: Case studies	175
Annex 5: Methodological annex	239
Annex 6: List of stakeholders consulted for interviews	245
Annex 7: Literature Review Table	248
Annex 8: Statistical Data Mapping	249
Annex 9: Contribution analysis	250
Annex 10: List of title cities and bidding cities	261

ABSTRACT

This report presents the findings of the First Interim Evaluation of the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) Action 2020–2033, conducted in line with Article 16 of Decision 445/2014/EU. The evaluation had two main objectives: (i) to assess the Action's Effectiveness, Efficiency, Relevance, Coherence, and EU Added Value, with a particular focus on its long-term legacy; and (ii) to identify potential improvements for a successor initiative post-2033. The evaluation covers the experience of cities that held the ECOC title between 2013 and 2023, as well as bidding cities for the 2020–2028 titles under the current legal basis.

The study employed a comprehensive mixed-methods approach. It included 64 stakeholder interviews across EU, national, and local levels; six focus groups with experts, titleholders, and candidate cities; and a public consultation collecting 60 responses. Eight in-depth case studies explored city-level implementation and legacy. A targeted literature review and mapping of 199 resources, 38 statistical indicators, and data from previous evaluations were used to inform a structured analysis against 60+ indicators. A final validation workshop supported the refinement of findings and recommendations.

RÉSUMÉ

Ce rapport présente les résultats de la première évaluation intermédiaire de l'action Capitale européenne de la culture (CEC) 2020-2033, réalisée conformément à l'article 16 de la décision 445/2014/UE. Cette évaluation avait deux objectifs principaux : (i) évaluer l'efficacité, l'efficience, la pertinence, la cohérence et la valeur ajoutée européenne de l'action, en mettant l'accent sur son héritage à long terme ; et (ii) identifier les améliorations potentielles à apporter dans le contexte de l'initiative appelée à lui succéder après 2033. L'évaluation inclut l'expérience des villes qui ont détenu le titre de CEC entre 2013 et 2023, ainsi que celle des villes qui se sont portées candidates pour les titres 2020 à 2028 dans le cadre juridique actuel.

L'étude se fonde sur une approche globale combinant plusieurs méthodes. Elle s'appuie sur un total de 64 entretiens menés avec des parties prenantes aux échelons européen, national et local, six groupes de discussion avec des experts, des villes détentrices du titre et des villes candidates, ainsi qu'une consultation publique qui a recueilli 60 réponses. Huit études de cas approfondies se sont penchées sur la mise en œuvre et l'héritage laissé par le programme au niveau des villes. Une revue de littérature ciblée, une cartographie de 199 ressources, 38 indicateurs statistiques et des données provenant d'évaluations antérieures ont contribué à alimenter une analyse structurée couvrant plus d'une soixantaine d'indicateurs. Un atelier de validation final a permis d'affiner les conclusions et les recommandations de l'étude.

ABSTRAKT

Dieser Bericht enthält die Ergebnisse der ersten Zwischenbewertung der Aktion der Europäischen Union für die „Kulturhauptstädte Europas“ im Zeitraum 2020 bis 2033, die gemäß Artikel 16 des Beschlusses 445/2014/EU durchgeführt wurde. Die Bewertung verfolgte zwei Hauptziele: (i) die Beurteilung von Wirksamkeit, Effizienz, Relevanz, Kohärenz und Mehrwert der Aktion für die EU, mit besonderem Augenmerk auf langfristige Ergebnisse; und (ii) die Ermittlung möglicher Verbesserungen für eine Nachfolgeinitiative nach 2033. Die Bewertung bezieht sich auf die Erfahrungen derjenigen Städte, die zwischen 2013 und 2023 Kulturhauptstädte waren, sowie derjenigen, die sich auf der derzeitigen Rechtsgrundlage für den Zeitraum 2020-2028 als Kulturhauptstädte beworben haben.

Für die Studie wurde ein umfassender Mixed-Methods-Ansatz angewandt. Sie umfasste 64 Befragungen von Interessenvertretern auf EU-Ebene sowie auf nationaler und lokaler Ebene, sechs Fokusgruppen mit Experten und Vertretern von Kulturhauptstädten und Bewerberstädten sowie eine öffentliche Konsultation mit 60 Rückmeldungen. Acht eingehende Fallstudien untersuchten die Umsetzung und die langfristigen Ergebnisse auf Ebene der Städte. Eine gezielte Literaturrecherche und eine Bestandsaufnahme von 199 Ressourcen, 38 statistischen Indikatoren und Daten aus früheren Evaluierungen dienten als Grundlage für eine strukturierte Analyse anhand von über 60 Indikatoren. Ein abschließender Workshop zur Validierung diente der Verfeinerung der Ergebnisse und Empfehlungen.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) action aims to highlight and celebrate the rich diversity of cultures in Europe and the common features they share. It is also meant to foster the contribution of culture to the long-term development of titleholding cities. The ECoC action is intended to help host cities enhance the range, diversity and European dimension of their cultural offer, widen participation in culture, strengthen the capacity of their local cultural sector and raise their international profile.

The action, borne in 1985 an inter-Governmental initiative, has become a fully-fledged Community action in 1999. It is now governed by Decision 445/2014/EU, which covers the title-years 2020 to 2033.

Under this legal instrument, each year two Member States are entitled to host the ECoC action in turn, according to a chronological order annexed to the Decision. Furthermore, every third year, a city in an EFTA/EEA country, candidate country or potential candidate may also hold the title. Cities wishing to get the title respond to a call for submission of applications.

The selection is organised by the relevant Member State at national level (and by the Commission for the competition between cities in non-EU Member States) and takes place in two phases: pre-selection (candidate cities are reduced to a short-list) and final selection (one city is recommended for the title). An expert panel assesses the applications and recommends cities for the title. Cities are then officially designated by the relevant national authority in the Member State concerned (by the Commission for cities in non-EU countries),

Once designated, cities are submitted to a monitoring process until the title year under the auspices of the Commission and with assistance of the expert panel, in order to review progress and give guidance.

This study conducted the first interim evaluation of the action under the 2014 Decision. It aimed to contribute to a better understanding of the implementation of the action, in particular in light of the preparation of the next phase of the action beyond 2033, to assess the longer-term impact for titleholding cities and to identify good practices and lessons.

In order to get a better perspective on the longer-term impact of the action, the study covered all cities holding the title between 2013 and 2023 (including therefore cities selected under the previous legal instrument), as well as cities bidding for the title under the current legal basis for the titles 2024-2030.

Evaluation findings

To what extent was the intervention successful and why?

Overall, the ECoC action has successfully delivered against its objectives. The **action contributed to an enhanced cultural offer for host cities**, stimulating a significant increase in the number of cultural activities during the title year. A typical ECoC cultural programme consists of around 1,000-1,200 separate cultural activities, and the volume of cultural activity increases by around 300-500% in host cities compared to a non-ECoC year. There is also an increase in the scope of cultural activity taking place in the host city, particularly in terms of introducing new and sometimes *alternative* genres into the normal cultural calendar of the host city.

Integrating the European dimension into ECoC cultural programmes can be challenging, as implementing organisations often struggle to encourage local projects and cultural operators—who typically focus on local audiences and local target groups—to incorporate a European perspective. Nevertheless, results show that a large share of ECoC projects had partners from other European countries and also focussed on a strong European theme (e.g. diversity, coexistence, equality).

The ECoC action was successful in widening access to and participation in culture in host cities. Around 38.5 million people participated in ECoC-supported cultural activity over the period 2013-2022, either as audience members, curators or project beneficiaries. On average, around six out of ten residents of a host city attended at least one ECoC event or project during the title year. The ECoC action was also successful in widening the type of beneficiaries who consumed culture and in encouraging people who had not previously been active in culture to attend cultural activities. This result was possible, among others, thanks to ECoC supporting culture in non-traditional and more accessible locations of hosting cities as well as a wider variety of genres that broadened the appeal of culture; collaborating with organisations that regularly work with specific target groups, and also providing more opportunities for people to enjoy culture for free, often in public spaces.

The action contributed to strengthening the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors (CCS) in hosting cities. Around half of the studied ECoCs had a specific support programme in place to develop the capacity of their local CCS. Other ECoCs relied on local CCS organisations receiving funding to deliver ECoC-related activities, which in turn helped develop the organisations' capacity. However, while hosting a multi-million-euro cultural programme should mean that benefits in terms of financial support and capacity development trickle down naturally to local CCS, in practice, this was not always the case, suggesting it would be useful for ECoCs to consciously plan for the active involvement of their local CCS.

Hosting an ECoC also helped generate stronger networking within the local CCS, establishing either a formal or informal cultural ecosystem in their city and encouraging them to work together. These relationships tended to last beyond the ECoC year. Delivering an ECoC also greatly helped to strengthen local talent within the CCS through the implementation of often hundreds of cultural projects at a different scale than previously experienced, giving local CCS an opportunity to showcase their work to bigger audiences, with bigger budgets and higher-quality productions.

ECoC contributed to raising the title-holding cities' international profile through culture. An ECoC year often increases visitors' numbers in a host city by around 30-40%, with around 30% of all visitors coming from abroad. A typical ECoC year also generates anything between 10,000 and 58,000 extra mentions or articles about the host city as a direct consequence of the city hosting an ECoC.

There were however a number of **challenges that influenced the effectiveness of ECoC**, namely: the financial and organisational strain linked to implementing such a large event; the political influence and support and the need to involve the wider community.

Overall, the **selection procedure** to identify host cities and the two-step process were effective in ensuring that cities had enough time to submit high-quality bid books and for the expert panel to review and assess them. However, the tight timeline is considered challenging both for those cities that lack sufficient expertise or the required international networks or that have yet to gather sufficient support at local and regional levels, and for experts assessing the bid books, especially in competition that attracts a large number of cities.

The selection criteria are generally perceived as well-designed, proportionate, fair and in line with the cultural policy at the national level. Cities, the smaller ones in particular, might face difficulties to meet the existing criteria linked to availability of infrastructure or the European dimension. The broad definition of the European dimension in the selection criteria can lead to varying interpretations, risking creating misunderstanding and misalignment of expectations.

The **monitoring process** is effective and overall efficient in supporting cities to implement ECoC and allowing the expert panel and the European Commission to identify and address issues promptly. Cities would, however, welcome additional guidance and a shift towards a supervising process where experts advise cities post-award, more than checking milestones. While there are different views in terms of the ideal frequency of monitoring meetings, there is scope for anticipating the first and last monitoring meetings. Finally, the switch to online meetings increased the efficiency of the process and contributed to the sustainability goals of the EU. However, it also somewhat reduced the effectiveness of the experts' work, affecting their ability to make an objective and realistic assessment of the progress of the ECoC as well as providing guidance and support to cities.

The **panel of experts** delivers quality outputs during the selection and monitoring procedures, effectively evaluating bids against the ECoC objectives and criteria and providing precise and actionable recommendations to cities. The composition of the panel encompassing ten European experts and up to two nominated by the relevant national authority of the Member State concerned is also generally positively viewed, with stakeholders highlighting the value of ensuring the panel's diversity in terms of the representation of minorities, geographical diversity, and gender balance, as well as in terms of its skills and competencies.

By design, ECoC is a **cost-effective action** able to leverage public and private funding at a relatively low cost for the Union. The action is efficiently managed by the European Commission directly, through the panel of experts and in collaboration with national authorities. The only direct EU contribution made to the ECoC title is represented by the **Melina Mercouri Prize**, which in most cases accounts for most of the EU funds reported in ECoCs' budgets. It is estimated that each €1 spent on the Melina Mercouri Prize was matched by an additional €30 of other funding from either national, regional or local public purse or private sources.

Overall, the action collectively stimulated around €940 million in funding for cultural activity across the EU between 2013 and 2023. However, the prize value – €1.5 million - has not been changed since 2010 and has depreciated over time, with the equivalent value in today's prices being about €2 million. Beyond its amount, the scheduled payment of the prize, currently set at the beginning of the title year, seems to weaken its link with the legacy of the action that the prize is expected to support.

Evidence of the **use of other EU funding streams** by ECoCs is limited and not consistently collected in cities' evaluation reports. EU funding could have been used directly by cities to finance infrastructural projects linked to ECoC delivery, but which are outside of the remit of their ECoC and thus not counted in ECoC budgets as it does not transit through the ECoC delivery teams. EU funding, therefore, is not prominently featured in ECoCs' budgets.

ECoC is overall internally coherent, being designed and implemented in a way that largely aligns with its objectives. In particular, the process of selecting and coordinating cities helps them connect their ECoC with broader cultural strategies and involve various communities, fostering a sense of belonging to a common cultural area and highlighting the richness of European cultures.

The action's objectives tend to align with local cultural and socio-economic priorities, as cities seek to enhance their cultural profile, stimulate economic growth and engage citizens. Balancing local priorities with a European dimension can be challenging, as some cities place greater emphasis on local issues, which can limit opportunities for broader European collaboration and partnership.

The success of ECoC relied on the involvement of various parties, particularly national stakeholders, who played a vital role as primary funders and active participants. National authorities tend to view ECoC as a matter of 'national importance', aligning it with national goals like promoting cultural tourism, reinforcing CCS, boosting economic growth through culture, and strengthening social cohesion. Overall, the action fostered strong collaboration between national and subnational levels in cultural, social, and economic areas.

ECoC is closely aligned with other EU programmes in culture and related fields. The close ties between ECoC and its umbrella programme, Creative Europe, stand out. Both share common objectives such as promoting cultural diversity, fostering cross-border collaboration, and strengthening the economic and social dimensions of culture. ECoC also tends to align with Creative Europe's priorities on greening and inclusion.

Within the global context, ECoC also feeds into strengthening the EU's enlargement policy by including cities from candidate and potential candidate countries. This offers an opportunity to further align ECoC objectives with EU external policies, in coordination with the European External Action Service, to establish cultural partnerships in countries of strategic interest. By fostering cross-border collaborations and knowledge exchange, ECoC can also enhance cultural international relationship, boost the competitiveness of European cultural sectors, and expand Europe's global position in cultural sectors. Such an approach not only promotes cultural diversity and dialogue but also attracts investment and increases the visibility of European culture worldwide.

How did the EU intervention make a difference and to whom?

Overall, the ECoC action is recognised for being able to sort several impacts that would not be possible without it. It has played a crucial role in promoting **cross-border collaboration** in the cultural and creative sectors across Europe in a way that national-level programmes do not aim to achieve, significantly enriching the cultural offerings of host cities and creating opportunities for artists and cultural institutions to connect globally. The **international prestige** associated with the ECoC status also played a critical role in attracting global attention, generally increasing tourism and international media mentions, far surpassing what could have been achieved through a national initiative.

By providing such an international stage to title cities, the ECoC action gives cities unprecedented access to an international audience to attract, motivating them to develop a **cultural programme of such scope and diversity** that would not be worthwhile without such a large potential audience. The impact of ECoC is particularly strong in cities where cultural movements may have struggled to gain traction without EU support. With approximately 50% of all projects supported through the ECoC having a significant European dimension, the action helped to **promote European values** at the local level, with ECoC projects championing themes such as tolerance, co-existence, peace, and equality.

Several factors, in particular political support, can affect the ECoC legacy and sustainability and whether it remains an isolated event or the catalyst for a sustained cultural change with a strong European element. Although cities are required to have legacy plans, there is no actual monitoring of what actions are implemented to ensure its sustainability post the ECoC year.

Is the intervention still relevant?

The objectives of the ECoC initiative are strongly relevant to the needs of the cities. Although it is now one of the longest-running EU initiatives, the European Capitals of Culture action remains relevant and past ECoCs clearly show strong alignment between the ECoC intervention and the cities' priorities and their socio-economic and cultural development.

The relevance of the ECoC action objectives is particularly noteworthy in terms of the development of **cultural strategies** and the strengthening of the cultural offering of an ECoC. The ECoC bidding process is often an inspirational moment to redesign (and in some cases to design for the first time) or strengthen the city-level cultural strategies and policies. Notable examples include the allocation of resources towards culture-driven urban regeneration across many ECoCs, for instance, for the re-use of abandoned or underutilised buildings for cultural purposes, or the development of a cultural quarter in the city.

The ECoC's objective to 'enhance the range, diversity and European dimension of the cultural offering in cities, including through transnational cooperation' finds relevance in bolstering international efforts of cities, notably to **position CCS organisations in Europe and help them take part in projects beyond the local and national borders**, either as part of the ECoC momentum or as a follow-up to the initiative. The ECoC initiative, with its specific objective to raise the international profile of cities through culture, also plays a relevant role in **promoting sustainable tourism** and the attractiveness of cities.

However, the relevance of the action could be strengthened in light of policy and societal changes. The **environmental and digital dimensions** have gained significant prominence since the adoption of the Regulation in 2014 in terms of policies and actions. The links between **culture and environmental sustainability** are well established, and many cities are developing strategies and actions to connect culture and environmental policies. Whilst this is not directly addressed in the current selection criteria, these are sufficiently open to enable ECoC to address these themes. Nonetheless, environmental sustainability could become a formal criterion, whereas the digital dimension could be embedded in all the other criteria and across the entire ECoC cultural programme.

Conclusion and recommendations

ECoC remains a successful initiative, well-regarded across Europe and able to act as a catalyst for cities' cultural development.

Over the years, ECoC has widened access to and participation in culture, strengthened the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors, and raised the title-holding cities' international profile through culture. The latter impact could be further strengthened through a coordinated EU-level communication strategy enhancing the visibility of ECoC and of the hosting cities.

The ECoC has the potential to have long-lasting effects. However, evidence is limited as no monitoring framework is in place to track the long-term impact of hosting the title. Developing legacy monitoring tools and encouraging cities to use them could allow for better tracking of impacts. The legacy of the action could be further strengthened already at the bidding phase, ensuring bid books include a structured approach encompassing long-term political commitment, sustained skills and capacity, ongoing support for cultural organisations, and clear city-led monitoring and evaluation of the legacy period.

The selection procedure and criteria to identify host cities are effective, well-designed, and proportionate. The European dimension is, however, often hard to interpret, implement, and evaluate—especially for smaller or less experienced cities. Clearer guidelines and

examples could be provided, along with non-prescriptive targets to guide cities. Promoting collaboration between title-holding cities, ensuring access to European cultural networks, and making the European dimension a cross-cutting criterion could also help cities better integrate and implement it.

To strengthen the ECoC expert panel, interinstitutional dialogue could be reinforced to ensure coordination in the selection of the experts and diverse representation and skills. Structured onboarding for new members and transition for departing members would further enhance the panel's effectiveness and the quality of the selection and monitoring processes.

The Melina Mercouri Prize has lost value due to inflation, diminishing its impact and the Commission's leverage with title cities. Increasing its amount to reflect current prices would restore its significance. Additionally, shifting its payment to the end of the title year—or in instalments post-event—would better support the action's legacy objectives.

Establishing a sustainable, actively managed network of former ECoCs would enhance knowledge exchange, capacity building, legacy development and the EU dimension of the initiative. Looking at the legacy more broadly, the action could evolve into a long-term cultural commitment by participating cities, extending beyond the title year to reach its full potential. This would warrant a reflection on the nature of the action and whether it should transition from a one-off event into a continuous process, with progress monitored and recognition earned over time.

RÉSUMÉ ANALYTIQUE

Introduction

L'action des capitales européennes de la culture (CEC) a pour ambition de mettre en évidence et de célébrer la riche diversité des cultures en Europe et leurs caractéristiques communes. Elle vise également à favoriser la contribution de la culture au développement à long terme des villes détentrices du titre. L'action entend aider les villes hôtes à améliorer l'éventail, la diversité et la dimension européenne de leur offre culturelle, à élargir la participation culturelle, à renforcer les capacités de leur secteur culturel local et à améliorer leur image internationale.

Cette action, née en 1985 d'une initiative intergouvernementale, est devenue une action communautaire à part entière en 1999. Elle est désormais régie par la décision 445/2014/UE, qui couvre les titres 2020 à 2033.

En vertu de cet instrument juridique, chaque année, deux États membres ont le droit d'accueillir l'action à tour de rôle, selon un ordre chronologique annexé à la décision. En outre, tous les trois ans, une ville d'un pays de l'AELE/EEE, d'un pays candidat ou d'un candidat potentiel peut également porter le titre. Les villes qui souhaitent devenir capitales européennes de la culture doivent répondre à un appel à candidatures.

La sélection est organisée au niveau national par l'État membre concerné (et par la Commission pour la compétition entre villes de pays non-membres de l'UE) et se déroule en deux phases : présélection (les villes candidates sont réduites à une liste restreinte) et sélection finale (une ville est recommandée pour le titre). Un jury d'experts évalue les candidatures et recommande les villes pour le titre. Les villes sont ensuite officiellement désignées par l'autorité nationale compétente de l'État membre concerné (par la Commission pour les villes des pays non-membres de l'UE).

Une fois désignées, les villes sont soumises à un processus de suivi jusqu'à l'année pour laquelle le titre leur a été décerné. Ce processus, qui se fait avec l'aide du jury d'experts sous les auspices de la Commission, vise à suivre les progrès qu'elles réalisent et à leur prodiguer aide et conseils.

Cette étude constitue la première évaluation intermédiaire de l'action dans le cadre de la décision de 2014. Elle vise à permettre une meilleure compréhension de la mise en œuvre de l'action, en particulier en vue d'informer la préparation de la prochaine phase de l'action au-delà de 2033, à évaluer l'impact à plus long terme pour les villes détentrices du titre et à identifier les bonnes pratiques et les enseignements à tirer.

Afin d'obtenir une meilleure perspective de l'impact à long terme, l'étude a couvert toutes les villes détentrices du titre entre 2013 et 2023 (y compris donc les villes sélectionnées dans le cadre de l'instrument juridique précédent), ainsi que les villes candidates pour les titres 2024-2030 relevant de la décision susmentionnée en vigueur.

Résultats de l'évaluation

Quel a été le degré de succès de l'intervention et pourquoi ?

Dans l'ensemble, l'action a atteint ses objectifs. Elle **a contribué à améliorer l'offre culturelle des villes hôtes**, engendrant une augmentation significative du nombre d'activités culturelles pendant l'année du titre. Un programme culturel typique d'une CEC comprend entre 1 000 et 1 200 activités culturelles distinctes, et le volume de l'activité culturelle augmente d'environ 300 à 500 % dans les villes hôtes par rapport à une année

normale. De même, on constate un élargissement du champ culturel dans les villes hôtes, en particulier grâce à l'introduction de genres nouveaux, parfois alternatifs, dans le calendrier culturel de ces villes.

L'intégration d'une dimension européenne dans le programme culturel des CEC peut s'avérer difficile, car les entités chargées de leur mise en œuvre ont bien souvent du mal à inciter les projets et opérateurs culturels locaux (qui se concentrent généralement sur des publics et groupes cibles locaux) à incorporer une perspective européenne. Néanmoins, il ressort de l'étude qu'une grande partie des projets menés dans le cadre des CEC ont associé des partenaires issus d'autres pays européens et abordé des thématiques fortement européennes (par exemple, les questions de diversité, de coexistence ou d'égalité).

L'action a permis d'élargir l'accès et la participation à la culture dans les villes hôtes.

Environ 38,5 millions de personnes ont participé à des activités culturelles soutenues par les CEC au cours de la période 2013-2022, que ce soit en tant que spectateurs, promoteurs ou bénéficiaires de projets. En moyenne, environ six résidents d'une ville hôte sur dix participent à au moins un événement ou projet CEC au cours de l'année du titre. Par ailleurs, l'action a permis d'élargir le public de la culture et d'encourager des personnes qui en étaient éloignées à prendre part à des activités culturelles. Ce résultat a été possible, entre autres, parce que les CEC ont soutenu des activités culturelles dans des lieux non traditionnels et plus accessibles, ainsi que des genres nouveaux ayant élargi l'attrait de la culture, qu'elles ont développé des collaborations avec des organisations travaillant régulièrement avec certains groupes cibles spécifiques, et qu'elles ont donné aux gens la possibilité de profiter de la culture de façon gratuite, souvent dans des espaces publics.

L'action a contribué à renforcer la capacité des secteurs culturels et créatifs (SCC)

dans les villes hôtes. Environ la moitié des CEC étudiées ont mis en place un programme de soutien spécifique visant à développer les capacités de leur SCC local. D'autres ont compté sur le fait que les organisations locales issues de ces secteurs, en recevant un soutien financier pour mener des activités liées à la CEC, développeraient par ricochet leurs capacités. Toutefois, si l'on peut partir du principe que la tenue d'un programme culturel à hauteur de plusieurs millions d'euros devrait par ruissellement bénéficier aux secteurs culturels et créatifs locaux en termes de soutien financier et de développement des capacités, cela ne s'est pas toujours vérifié dans la pratique ; aussi, serait-il utile que les CEC planifient sciemment la participation active de leurs SCC locaux.

Par ailleurs, le fait d'organiser une CEC contribue à renforcer le travail en réseau au sein des secteurs culturels et créatifs locaux, en établissant un écosystème culturel formel ou informel dans les villes hôtes et en encourageant les différents acteurs à travailler ensemble. Ces relations ont tendance à perdurer au-delà de l'année du titre. L'obtention du titre de CEC contribue également à renforcer sensiblement les talents locaux grâce à la mise en œuvre de centaines de projets culturels à une échelle plus ambitieuse qu'auparavant, donnant aux représentants desdits secteurs l'occasion de présenter leur travail à des publics plus larges, avec des budgets plus importants et par le biais de productions de meilleure qualité.

Être CEC contribue à améliorer l'image internationale des villes détentrices du titre grâce à la culture.

La ville hôte voit souvent le nombre de ses visiteurs augmenter d'environ 30 à 40 % pendant l'année du titre, 30 % de l'ensemble des visiteurs environ venant de l'étranger. En outre, une année de capitale européenne de la culture typique génère entre 10 000 et 58 000 mentions ou articles supplémentaires sur la ville hôte en lien direct avec le titre.

Toutefois, **le degré d'efficacité d'une capitale européenne de la culture dépend d'un certain nombre de facteurs**, à savoir : la pression financière et organisationnelle liée à la mise en œuvre d'un événement d'une telle ampleur, l'influence et le soutien politiques et la nécessité d'impliquer la collectivité au sens large.

De façon générale, la **procédure de sélection des villes hôtes** et ses deux étapes permettent aux villes de disposer d'assez de temps pour déposer des dossiers de candidature de qualité et au jury d'experts de les examiner et de les évaluer. Toutefois, d'aucuns considèrent que les délais serrés posent un défi à la fois pour les villes dépourvues de l'expertise suffisante ou des réseaux internationaux nécessaires, ou devant rallier le soutien des échelons local et régional, ainsi que pour les experts qui évaluent les dossiers, en particulier lorsqu'une compétition attire un nombre élevé de candidats.

Les **critères de sélection** sont généralement perçus comme étant bien conçus, proportionnés, équitables et en phase avec les politiques culturelles nationales. Les villes, en particulier les plus petites d'entre elles, peuvent rencontrer des difficultés à satisfaire aux critères liés à la disponibilité des infrastructures ou à la dimension européenne. La définition large de ce qui constitue la dimension européenne dans les critères de sélection peut donner lieu à des interprétations diverses, au risque de créer des malentendus et un décalage au niveau des attentes.

Le **processus de suivi** est efficace et globalement efficient pour aider les villes à mettre en œuvre leur CEC et permettre au jury d'experts et à la Commission européenne d'identifier et de traiter rapidement les problèmes. Les villes apprécieraient toutefois bénéficier de davantage d'orientations. Elles appellent aussi de leurs vœux une évolution vers un processus de supervision dans le cadre duquel les experts, au lieu de contrôler le respect d'un certain nombre de jalons, leur prodigueraient plutôt des conseils une fois qu'elles ont été désignées. Si les avis divergent quant à la fréquence idéale des réunions de suivi, certaines parties prenantes suggèrent d'anticiper la tenue de la première et la dernière d'entre elles. Enfin, le passage à des réunions en ligne a permis d'accroître l'efficacité du processus et de contribuer aux objectifs de durabilité de l'UE. Cependant, cela a aussi quelque peu réduit l'efficacité du travail des experts, en affectant leur capacité à procéder à une évaluation objective et réaliste des progrès réalisés par les CEC ainsi qu'à apporter conseils et soutien à celles-ci.

Le **jury d'experts** fournit un travail de qualité au cours des procédures de sélection et de suivi, en évaluant efficacement les candidatures par rapport aux objectifs et aux critères de l'action et en donnant aux villes des recommandations précises et exploitables. La composition du jury, qui comprend dix experts européens et jusqu'à deux experts désignés par les autorités nationales compétentes de l'État membre concerné, est généralement appréciée, les parties prenantes soulignant l'importance de garantir la diversité du jury en termes de représentation des minorités, de diversité géographique et d'équilibre entre les hommes et les femmes, ainsi qu'en termes d'aptitudes et de compétences.

De par sa conception, la CEC est une **action qui présente un bon rapport coût/efficacité** et peut mobiliser des fonds publics et privés pour un coût relativement faible pour l'Union. L'action est gérée efficacement par la Commission européenne, soit directement soit par l'intermédiaire du jury d'experts ou en collaboration avec les autorités nationales. La seule contribution financière directe de l'UE aux capitales européennes de la culture est constituée par le **prix Melina Mercouri**, lequel, dans la plupart des cas, représente l'essentiel des fonds communautaires qui apparaissent dans le budget de ces capitales. Selon les estimations, chaque euro dépensé pour le prix Melina Mercouri s'accompagne d'un financement supplémentaire de 30 euros provenant de fonds publics nationaux, régionaux ou locaux ou encore de sources privées.

Dans l'ensemble, l'action a stimulé le financement d'activités culturelles dans l'UE à hauteur de quelque 940 millions d'euros entre 2013 et 2023. Cependant, la valeur du prix (1,5 million d'euros) n'a pas changé depuis 2010 et s'est dépréciée au fil du temps, la valeur équivalente actualisée étant d'environ 2 millions d'euros. Au-delà du montant, le fait qu'actuellement le prix soit déboursé au début de l'année du titre semble distendre son lien avec l'héritage de l'action qu'il est censé promouvoir.

Il y a peu de preuves de **l'utilisation d'autres flux de financement de l'UE par les capitales européennes de la culture** et ces éléments de preuve ne sont pas systématiquement collectés dans les rapports d'évaluation des villes. Des fonds de l'UE ont pu être utilisés directement par les villes pour financer des projets d'infrastructure qui sont liés à la mise en œuvre de la CEC, mais qui ne relèvent pas de l'action à proprement dite et ne sont donc pas comptabilisés dans les budgets des CEC, au motif qu'ils ne transitent pas par les équipes chargées de la mise en œuvre de l'année-titre. Les fonds de l'UE ne figurent donc pas en bonne place dans les budgets des CEC.

L'action des capitales européennes de la culture est globalement cohérente sur le plan interne, sa conception et sa mise en œuvre étant largement conformes aux objectifs définis. En particulier, le processus de sélection et de coordination des villes aide ces dernières à relier leur projet de capitale à des stratégies culturelles plus larges et à impliquer diverses communautés, ce qui favorise un sentiment d'appartenance à un espace culturel commun et met en évidence la richesse des cultures européennes.

Les objectifs de l'action tendent à s'aligner sur les priorités culturelles et socio-économiques locales, les villes cherchant à améliorer leur profil culturel, à stimuler la croissance économique et à impliquer leurs citoyens. Trouver un équilibre entre les priorités locales et la dimension européenne peut s'avérer difficile, car certaines villes mettent davantage l'accent sur les questions locales, ce qui peut limiter les opportunités de collaboration et de partenariats européens.

Le succès d'une capitale européenne de la culture repose sur l'implication de multiples parties, en particulier les acteurs nationaux, qui jouent un rôle essentiel en tant que bailleurs de fonds et partenaires de premier plan. Les autorités nationales ont tendance à considérer la CEC comme une question « d'importance nationale », en l'alignant sur des objectifs nationaux tels que la promotion du tourisme culturel, le renforcement des secteurs culturels et créatifs, la stimulation de la croissance économique par la culture et le renforcement de la cohésion sociale. Dans l'ensemble, l'action a favorisé une collaboration étroite entre les niveaux national et infranational dans les domaines culturel, social et économique.

L'action des capitales européennes de la culture est étroitement liée à d'autres programmes de l'UE en matière culturelle ou dans des champs connexes. Les liens entre la CEC et son programme-cadre, Europe créative, sont étroits. Ces deux initiatives partagent des objectifs communs tels que la promotion de la diversité culturelle, l'encouragement de la collaboration transfrontière et le renforcement des dimensions économiques et sociales de la culture. La CEC tend également à s'aligner sur les priorités d'Europe créative en matière de verdissement et d'inclusion.

Dans le contexte mondial, la CEC contribue également à renforcer la politique d'élargissement de l'UE en incluant des villes de pays candidats et candidats potentiels. Cela offre la possibilité de mieux aligner les objectifs de la CEC et les politiques extérieures de l'UE, en coordination avec le Service européen pour l'action extérieure, afin d'établir des partenariats culturels dans des pays présentant un intérêt stratégique. En favorisant les collaborations transfrontières et l'échange de connaissances, la CEC peut également renforcer les relations culturelles internationales, stimuler la compétitivité des secteurs culturels européens et étendre la position mondiale de l'Europe dans ces secteurs. Une

telle approche permet non seulement de promouvoir la diversité culturelle et le dialogue, mais aussi d'attirer des investissements et d'accroître la visibilité de la culture européenne dans le monde.

En quoi l'intervention de l'UE a-t-elle fait la différence et pour qui ?

Dans l'ensemble, l'action CEC est reconnue comme pouvant générer des impacts qui n'auraient pas été possibles sans elle. Elle joue un rôle crucial dans la promotion de la **collaboration transfrontalière** dans les secteurs culturels et créatifs à travers l'Europe, d'une manière que les programmes nationaux ne visent pas à atteindre, enrichissant de manière significative les offres culturelles des villes hôtes et créant des opportunités pour les artistes et les institutions culturelles de se connecter à l'échelle mondiale. Le **prestige international** associé au statut de CEC joue également un rôle essentiel en attirant l'attention du monde entier, en augmentant généralement le tourisme et les mentions dans les médias internationaux, dépassant de loin ce qui aurait pu être obtenu par une initiative nationale.

En offrant une telle scène internationale aux villes porteuses du titre, l'action CEC leur donne un accès sans précédent à un public international, ce qui les motive à développer un **programme culturel d'une ampleur et diversité** qui ne feraient pas sens, sans la perspective d'attirer potentiellement une audience aussi importante. L'impact de la CEC est particulièrement marqué dans les villes où des mouvements culturels auraient du mal à prendre de l'ampleur sans le soutien de l'UE. Comme approximativement 50 % de tous les projets soutenus par la CEC ont une dimension européenne significative, l'action a contribué à **promouvoir des valeurs européennes** au niveau local, les projets CEC défendant des thèmes tels que la tolérance, la coexistence, la paix et l'égalité.

Plusieurs facteurs, en particulier le soutien politique, peuvent exercer une influence sur le legs et la durabilité d'une capitale européenne de la culture et déterminer si le projet reste un événement isolé ou, au contraire, catalyse un changement culturel durable avec une forte composante européenne. Bien que les villes soient tenues d'avoir des plans pour l'après, il n'y a pas de suivi réel des actions mises en œuvre pour assurer leur poursuite après l'année du titre.

L'intervention est-elle toujours pertinente ?

Les objectifs de l'initiative CEC répondent parfaitement aux besoins des villes. Bien qu'il s'agisse désormais d'une des initiatives les plus anciennes de l'UE, l'action des capitales européennes de la culture reste pertinente et l'expérience des détentrices du titre montre à l'évidence une forte adéquation entre cette action et les priorités des villes, ainsi que leur développement socio-économique et culturel.

Les objectifs de l'action sont particulièrement pertinents pour ce qui est du développement de **stratégies culturelles** et du renforcement de l'offre culturelle des villes. La procédure de candidature est souvent pour les villes un moment d'inspiration pour repenser (et dans certains cas, pour créer) ou renforcer leurs stratégies et politiques culturelles. Parmi les exemples notables, on peut citer le fait que de nombreuses CEC ont été l'occasion pour les villes d'affecter des ressources à la régénération urbaine axée sur la culture, par exemple dans le but de réutiliser à des fins culturelles des bâtiments abandonnés ou sous-utilisés ou de développer des quartiers culturels.

L'objectif de la CEC visant à « accroître l'étendue, la diversité et la dimension européenne de l'offre culturelle dans les villes, y compris par la coopération transnationale » trouve sa pertinence dans le soutien aux efforts internationaux des villes, notamment pour **positionner les organisations issues de leurs secteurs culturels et créatifs en Europe**

et les aider à prendre part à des projets au-delà des frontières locales et nationales, soit dans le cadre de la dynamique de la CEC soit dans celui de la suite donnée à l'initiative. L'initiative CEC, dont l'un des objectifs spécifiques est d'améliorer l'image internationale des villes grâce à la culture, joue également un rôle important dans la **promotion d'un tourisme durable** et l'attractivité des villes.

Toutefois, la pertinence de l'action pourrait être renforcée à la lumière des changements politiques et sociétaux. Depuis l'adoption du règlement en 2014, les **dimensions environnementale et numérique** ont pris une importance considérable. Les liens entre **culture et durabilité environnementale** sont bien établis, et de nombreuses villes développent des stratégies et des actions pour relier culture et politiques environnementales. Bien que ces aspects ne soient pas directement inscrits dans les critères de sélection actuels, ceux-ci sont suffisamment ouverts pour permettre aux capitales européennes de la culture de tenir compte de ces thématiques. Toutefois, la durabilité environnementale pourrait devenir un critère formel, tandis que la dimension numérique pourrait être intégrée dans tous les autres critères de sélection ainsi que, de façon transversale, dans tout le programme culturel d'une CEC.

Conclusion et recommandations

L'action des capitales européennes de la culture reste une initiative qui fonctionne, qui est appréciée partout en Europe et qui peut servir de catalyseur pour le développement culturel des villes.

Au fil des ans, l'action a élargi l'accès et la participation à la culture, a renforcé la capacité des secteurs culturels et créatifs et a amélioré l'image internationale des villes détentrices du titre grâce à la culture. Ce dernier impact pourrait être renforcé par une stratégie de communication coordonnée au niveau de l'UE, laquelle améliorerait la visibilité de l'action CEC et des villes hôtes.

L'action a le potentiel de produire des effets durables. Cependant, les éléments probants sont limités en l'absence d'un cadre de suivi pour évaluer l'impact du titre à long terme. Développer des outils de suivi mesurant le legs et encourager les villes à en faire usage pourraient permettre de mieux saisir ces impacts. L'héritage de l'action pourrait être renforcé dès la phase de candidature, en veillant à ce que les dossiers incluent une approche structurée comprenant un engagement politique de long terme, le développement de compétences et de capacités durables, un soutien continu aux organisations culturelles, ainsi qu'un suivi et une évaluation clairs de l'héritage du titre sous l'égide de la ville.

La procédure et les critères de sélection des villes hôtes sont efficaces, bien conçus et proportionnés. La dimension européenne est cependant souvent difficile à interpréter, à mettre en œuvre et à évaluer, en particulier pour les villes les plus petites ou les moins expérimentées. Des lignes directrices et des exemples plus clairs pourraient être donnés, ainsi que des objectifs non prescriptifs afin de mieux orienter les villes. Promouvoir la collaboration entre les villes détentrices du titre, assurer l'accès aux réseaux culturels européens et faire de la dimension européenne un critère transversal pourraient également aider les villes à mieux intégrer, et mettre en œuvre, cette dimension.

Pour renforcer le jury, il conviendrait d'intensifier le dialogue entre les institutions pour assurer une meilleure coordination dans la sélection des experts et veiller à la diversité des profils et des compétences. Un accompagnement structuré des nouveaux membres et un mécanisme de transition pour les membres sortants permettraient d'améliorer encore l'efficacité du jury et la qualité des processus de sélection et de suivi.

Le prix Melina Mercouri a perdu de sa valeur en raison de l'inflation, ce qui diminue son impact et l'effet de levier que peut exercer la Commission sur les villes porteuses du titre. Augmenter son montant pour refléter les niveaux de prix actuels lui redonnerait de l'importance. En outre, verser le montant du prix à la fin de l'année du titre (ou prévoir un versement fractionné après l'année du titre) permettrait de mieux soutenir les objectifs de l'action liés à l'héritage du titre.

La mise en place d'un réseau durable et géré de façon active par d'anciennes capitales européennes de la culture favoriserait l'échange de connaissances, le renforcement des capacités, le développement de l'héritage et la dimension européenne de l'initiative. Si l'on considère l'héritage de manière plus large, l'action pourrait se transformer en un engagement culturel à long terme de la part des villes participantes, s'étendant au-delà de l'année du titre. Cela justifierait une réflexion sur la nature de l'action et sur l'opportunité de passer d'un événement ponctuel à un processus continu, avec un suivi des progrès et une reconnaissance au fil du temps.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Einführung

Die Aktion „Kulturhauptstädte Europas“ zielt darauf ab, die reiche Vielfalt der Kulturen in Europa und ihre Gemeinsamkeiten hervorzuheben und zu würdigen. Außerdem soll sie den Beitrag der Kultur zur langfristigen Entwicklung der mit dem Titel ausgezeichneten Städte fördern. Die Aktion „Kulturhauptstädte Europas“ soll die Gastgeberstädte dabei unterstützen, das Spektrum, die Vielfalt und die europäische Dimension ihres Kulturangebots zu verbessern, die Teilhabe an der Kultur zu vergrößern, die Leistungsfähigkeit des lokalen Kultursektors auszubauen und ihr internationales Profil zu schärfen.

Die Aktion, 1985 als zwischenstaatliche Initiative ins Leben gerufen, wurde 1999 zu einer vollwertigen Gemeinschaftsaktion. Sie wird nun durch den Beschluss 445/2014/EU geregelt, der die Veranstaltungsjahre 2020 bis 2033 abdeckt.

Nach diesem Rechtsakt sind jedes Jahr zwei Mitgliedstaaten berechtigt, das Kulturhauptstadtjahr auszurichten. Der entsprechende Zeitplan ist dem Beschluss als Anhang beigefügt. Darüber hinaus kann alle drei Jahre auch eine Stadt in einem EFTA/EWR-Land, einem Kandidatenland oder einem potenziellen Kandidatenland den Titel tragen. Städte, die sich um den Titel bewerben wollen, können auf eine Aufforderung zur Einreichung von Bewerbungen reagieren.

Die Auswahl wird auf nationaler Ebene durch den jeweiligen Mitgliedstaat organisiert (für den Wettbewerb zwischen Städten in Nicht-EU-Mitgliedstaaten durch die Europäische Kommission) und findet in zwei Phasen statt: Vorauswahl (die Bewerberstädte werden auf einer Shortlist reduziert) und Endauswahl (eine Stadt wird für den Titel empfohlen). Eine Expertenjury beurteilt die Bewerbungen und empfiehlt Städte für den Titel. Die Städte werden dann durch die zuständige nationale Behörde des betreffenden Mitgliedstaates (bei Städten in Nicht-EU-Ländern durch die Europäische Kommission) offiziell ernannt.

Sobald die Städte ernannt sind, werden sie bis zum Veranstaltungsjahr unter der Schirmherrschaft der Europäischen Kommission und mit Unterstützung der Expertenjury einem Monitoring unterzogen, um die Fortschritte zu überprüfen und Leitlinien vorzugeben.

Im Rahmen der vorliegenden Studie erfolgte die erste Zwischenbewertung der Aktion gemäß dem Beschluss von 2014. Ziel war es, zu einem besseren Verständnis der Durchführung der Aktion beizutragen, insbesondere im Hinblick auf die Vorbereitung der nächsten Phase der Aktion über das Jahr 2033 hinaus, sowie die längerfristigen Auswirkungen auf die mit dem Titel ausgezeichneten Städte zu beurteilen und bewährte Verfahren wie auch wichtige Lehren zu ziehen.

Um die längerfristigen Auswirkungen der Aktion besser einschätzen zu können, wurden in die Studie alle Städte einbezogen, die den Titel zwischen 2013 und 2023 innehatten (also einschließlich derjenigen Städte, die im Rahmen des vorherigen Rechtsakts ausgewählt wurden), sowie die Städte, die sich im Rahmen des aktuellen Rechtsakts für den Zeitraum 2024-2030 beworben haben.

Ergebnisse der Evaluierung

Inwieweit war die Aktion erfolgreich und warum?

Insgesamt hat die Aktion „Kulturhauptstädte Europas“ ihre Ziele erreicht. Die **Aktion trug zu einem verbesserten kulturellen Angebot in den Gastgeberstädten bei** und führte zu

einem deutlichen Anstieg der Zahl der kulturellen Aktivitäten während des Veranstaltungsjahres. Das Kulturprogramm einer ernannten Stadt umfasst typischerweise etwa 1.000 bis 1.200 kulturelle Einzelaktivitäten, und das Volumen der kulturellen Aktivitäten steigt in den Gastgeberstädten im Vergleich zu einem Jahr, in dem sie den Titel nicht tragen, um etwa 300 bis 500 Prozent. Auch der Umfang der kulturellen Aktivitäten in der Gastgeberstadt nimmt zu, insbesondere was die Einführung neuer und manchmal *alternativer* Genres in den normalen Kulturkalender der Gastgeberstadt betrifft.

Mitunter stellt es sich schwierig dar, die europäische Dimension in die Kulturhauptstadt-Programme einzubeziehen, da die durchführenden Organisationen sich oft damit schwertun, lokale Projekte und Kulturakteure – die in der Regel auf ein lokales Publikum und lokale Zielgruppen ausgerichtet sind – zu ermutigen, eine europäische Perspektive zu berücksichtigen. Dennoch zeigen die Ergebnisse, dass ein großer Teil der Kulturhauptstadt-Projekte Partner aus anderen europäischen Ländern einbezog und ein wichtiges europäisches Thema in den Fokus rückte (z. B. Vielfalt, Koexistenz, Gleichheit).

Die Aktion “Kulturhauptstadt Europas” hat erfolgreich dazu beigetragen, den Zugang zu und die Teilhabe an Kultur in den Gastgeberstädten zu erweitern. Im Zeitraum 2013–2022 haben rund 38,5 Millionen Menschen an kulturellen Aktivitäten im Rahmen der Kulturhauptstadt-Aktion teilgenommen, entweder als Zuschauer, Kuratoren oder Projektbegünstigte. Im Durchschnitt nahmen im Veranstaltungsjahr etwa sechs von zehn Einwohnern einer Gastgeberstadt an mindestens einer Veranstaltung oder einem Projekt im Rahmen der Kulturhauptstadt teil. Die Aktion war auch insofern erfolgreich, als sie den Kreis der Kulturkonsumenten erweiterte und Menschen, die bisher nicht kulturell aktiv waren, zur Teilnahme an entsprechenden Aktivitäten ermutigte. Dieses Ergebnis war unter anderem möglich, weil im Rahmen der Kulturhauptstädte Kulturveranstaltungen an nicht traditionellen und leichter zugänglichen Orten der Gastgeberstädte sowie eine größere Vielfalt an Genres gefördert werden, was Kultur attraktiver macht. Hinzu kommen die Kooperation mit Organisationen, die regelmäßig mit bestimmten Zielgruppen arbeiten, und die Möglichkeit, Kultur kostenlos und häufig auch im öffentlichen Raum genießen zu können.

Die Aktion trug dazu bei, die Leistungsfähigkeit der Kultur- und Kreativbranche in den Gastgeberstädten auszubauen. Etwa die Hälfte der untersuchten Kulturhauptstädte verfügte über ein spezifisches Unterstützungsprogramm, mit dem die Kapazitäten ihrer lokalen Kultur- und Kreativbranche ausgebaut werden sollten. Andere Kulturhauptstädte griffen auf lokale Organisationen der Kultur- und Kreativbranche zurück, die Mittel zur Durchführung von Kulturhauptstadt-Aktivitäten erhielten und somit leistungsfähiger wurden. Eigentlich sollte die Ausrichtung eines mehrere Millionen Euro umfassenden Kulturprogramms dazu führen, dass die Vorteile in Form von finanzieller Unterstützung und Kapazitätsausbau auf natürliche Weise an die lokale Kultur- und Kreativbranche weitergegeben werden. In der Praxis war dies jedoch nicht immer der Fall, weshalb die europäischen Kulturhauptstädte die aktive Beteiligung ihrer lokalen Kultur- und Kreativbranche bewusster planen sollten.

Die Gastgeberrolle trug auch zu einer stärkeren Vernetzung innerhalb der lokalen Kultur- und Kreativbranche bei, indem sie den Aufbau eines formellen oder informellen kulturellen Ökosystems in der Stadt förderte und die Branche zur Zusammenarbeit ermutigte. Diese Beziehungen dauerten in der Regel über das Veranstaltungsjahr hinaus an. Die Gastgeberrolle stärkte zudem lokale Talente aus der Kultur- und Kreativszene, da oft Hunderte von Kulturprojekten in einer neuen Größenordnung durchgeführt wurden, was der lokalen Szene die Möglichkeit gab, ihre Arbeit einem größeren Publikum, mit größeren Budgets und höherwertigeren Produktionen zu präsentieren.

Die Kulturhauptstadt-Aktion trug dazu bei, das internationale Profil der jeweiligen Städte im Wege der Kultur zu schärfen. Im Veranstaltungsjahr steigen Besucherzahlen in der jeweiligen Stadt häufig um 30 bis 40 Prozent, wobei etwa 30 Prozent aller Besucher aus dem Ausland kommen. Ein solches Jahr generiert zudem in direkter Folge zwischen 10.000 und 58.000 zusätzliche Erwähnungen oder Artikel über die ausrichtende Stadt.

Allerdings wurde die **Wirksamkeit der Kulturhauptstadt-Aktion durch eine Reihe von Herausforderungen** beeinflusst: die finanzielle und organisatorische Belastung, die mit der Durchführung einer solchen Großveranstaltung einhergeht, der politische Einfluss und die entsprechende Unterstützung sowie die Notwendigkeit, die breitere Öffentlichkeit einzubeziehen.

Insgesamt erwiesen das **Auswahlverfahren** zur Ermittlung der Gastgeberstädte und der zweistufige Prozess sich als wirksam, da sie den Städten in der Regel genügend Zeit zum Einreichen aussagekräftiger Bewerbungsunterlagen und der Expertenjury zu deren Prüfung und Beurteilung ließen. Als Herausforderung wird einerseits der enge Zeitplan für Städte gesehen, denen es an ausreichender Fachkompetenz oder den erforderlichen internationalen Netzwerken mangelt oder die zunächst ausreichend Unterstützung auf lokaler und regionaler Ebene einholen müssen, und andererseits für die Experten, die die Bewerbungsunterlagen beurteilen, insbesondere wenn sich eine große Zahl an Städten bewirbt.

Die Auswahlkriterien werden im Allgemeinen als durchdacht, angemessen und gerecht sowie im Einklang mit der Kulturpolitik auf nationaler Ebene empfunden. Insbesondere für kleinere Städte könnte es jedoch schwierig sein, die bestehenden Kriterien in Bezug auf das Vorhandensein von Infrastruktur oder die europäische Dimension zu erfüllen. Die weit gefasste Definition der europäischen Dimension in den Auswahlkriterien kann zu unterschiedlichen Auslegungen führen und birgt das Risiko von Missverständnissen und falschen Erwartungen.

Das **Monitoring** ist effektiv und insgesamt effizient, da es die Städte bei der Erfüllung ihrer Rolle als Kulturhauptstadt unterstützt und es der Expertenjury und der Europäischen Kommission ermöglicht, Probleme zeitnah zu erkennen und anzugehen. Die Städte würden jedoch zusätzliche Handlungsempfehlung und eine Verlagerung hin zu einem Überwachungsprozess begrüßen, bei dem die Experten die Städte nach der Ernennung eher beraten und begleiten, als die Erfüllung von Meilensteinen zu überprüfen. Auch wenn es unterschiedliche Ansichten über die ideale Häufigkeit der Monitoringsitzungen gibt, besteht Spielraum, das erste und letzte Monitoringmeeting vorzuziehen. Die Umstellung auf Online-Sitzungen hat die Effizienz des Prozesses erhöht und zur Erreichung der Nachhaltigkeitsziele der EU beigetragen. Allerdings wurde dadurch auch die Wirksamkeit der Expertentätigkeit im Hinblick auf eine objektive und realistische Bewertung der Fortschritte der Kulturhauptstadt und die Bereitstellung von Orientierung und Unterstützung für die Städte in gewissem Umfang beeinträchtigt.

Die **Expertenjury** liefert während des Auswahl- und Monitoringverfahrens hochwertige Ergebnisse, indem sie die Bewerbungen anhand der Ziele und Kriterien für Kulturhauptstädte wirksam bewertet und den Städten präzise und umsetzbare Empfehlungen gibt. Die Zusammensetzung der Jury, die zehn europäische Experten und bis zu zwei von der zuständigen nationalen Behörde des betreffenden Mitgliedstaats benannte Experten umfasst, wird ebenfalls allgemein positiv bewertet. Die Interessenvertreter betonen, wie wichtig es ist, die Vielfalt der Jury in Bezug auf die Vertretung von Minderheiten, die geografische Vielfalt und die Ausgewogenheit der Geschlechter sowie im Hinblick auf Fähigkeiten und Kompetenzen zu gewährleisten.

Die Kulturhauptstadt-Aktion ist von ihrer Konzeption her eine **kosteneffiziente Aktion**, mit der öffentliche und private Mittel zu relativ geringen Kosten für die Union mobilisiert werden können. Die Aktion wird von der Europäischen Kommission direkt, über die Expertenjury und in Zusammenarbeit mit den nationalen Behörden effizient gesteuert. Der einzige direkte EU-Beitrag zum Titel als Kulturhauptstadt ist der **Preis zu Ehren von Melina Mercouri**, auf den in den meisten Fällen der größte Teil der EU-Mittel entfällt, die in den Kulturhauptstadt-Budgets ausgewiesen sind. Auf jeden für den Preis zu Ehren von Melina Mercouri ausgegebenen Euro entfallen schätzungsweise 30 Euro aus nationalen, regionalen oder lokalen öffentlichen oder privaten Quellen.

Insgesamt wurden dank der Aktion zwischen 2013 und 2023 EU-weit rund 940 Millionen Euro für kulturelle Aktivitäten bereitgestellt. Die Höhe des Preises – 1,5 Millionen Euro – wurde jedoch seit 2010 nicht mehr angepasst, sodass das Preisgeld im Laufe der Zeit inflationsbedingt an Wert verloren hat; beim aktuellen Preisniveau müsste der Betrag eigentlich bei etwa 2 Millionen Euro liegen. Neben der Höhe des Preises scheint auch die derzeit plangemäß zu Beginn des Veranstaltungsjahres erfolgende Auszahlung des Preises die Verknüpfung mit den langfristigen Zielen der Aktion, die durch den Preis unterstützt werden sollen, zu schwächen.

Nachweise für die **Nutzung anderer EU-Finanzierungsmöglichkeiten** durch die Kulturhauptstädte sind nur in begrenztem Umfang vorhanden und werden in den Bewertungsberichten der Städte nicht konsequent erfasst. Es ist deshalb möglich, dass EU-Mittel von den Städten direkt zur Finanzierung von Infrastrukturprojekten in Zusammenhang mit der Rolle als Kulturhauptstadt verwendet wurden, ohne in den Aufgabenbereich der Kulturhauptstadt zu fallen, und daher nicht über die Veranstaltungsteams geleitet und somit auch nicht in den entsprechenden Budgets berücksichtigt werden. Entsprechend sind die EU-Mittel in den Budgets der Kulturhauptstädte nicht sehr sichtbar.

Das Konzept der Kulturhauptstadt ist insgesamt intern kohärent und wird in einer Weise konzipiert und umgesetzt, die weitgehend mit seinen Zielen übereinstimmt. Insbesondere der Auswahl- und Koordinierungsprozess hilft den Städten, ihre Rolle als Kulturhauptstadt mit umfassenderen kulturellen Strategien zu verbinden und verschiedene Gemeinschaften einzubeziehen, um das Gefühl der Zugehörigkeit zu einem gemeinsamen Kulturraum zu fördern und den Reichtum der europäischen Kulturen hervorzuheben.

Die Ziele der Aktion stehen in der Regel im Einklang mit den lokalen kulturellen und sozioökonomischen Prioritäten, da die Städte versuchen, ihr kulturelles Profil zu schärfen, das Wirtschaftswachstum zu fördern und die Bürger einzubinden. Es kann herausfordernd sein, lokale Prioritäten mit einer europäischen Dimension in Einklang zu bringen, da einige Städte den Schwerpunkt stärker auf lokale Themen legen, was die Möglichkeiten einer breiteren europäischen Zusammenarbeit und Partnerschaft unter Umständen beschränkt.

Ob eine Kulturhauptstadt ihre Rolle erfolgreich ausübte, hing von der Beteiligung verschiedener Akteure ab, insbesondere nationaler Interessenträger, die eine entscheidende Rolle als Hauptgeldgeber und aktive Teilnehmer spielten. Die nationalen Behörden neigen dazu, eine Kulturhauptstadt als eine Angelegenheit von „nationaler Bedeutung“ zu betrachten und sie an nationalen Zielen wie der Förderung des Kulturtourismus, der Stärkung der Kultur- und Kreativbranche, der Ankurbelung des Wirtschaftswachstums im Wege der Kultur und der Stärkung des sozialen Zusammenhalts auszurichten. Insgesamt förderte die Aktion eine enge Zusammenarbeit zwischen nationaler und subnationaler Ebene in kulturellen, sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Bereichen.

Die Kulturhauptstadt-Aktion ist eng mit anderen EU-Programmen in der Kultur und verwandten Bereichen abgestimmt. Besonders hervorzuheben ist die enge Verbindung zwischen der Kulturhauptstadt-Aktion und ihrem Dachprogramm, Kreatives Europa. Beide

haben gemeinsame Ziele wie die Förderung der kulturellen Vielfalt, die Unterstützung der grenzüberschreitenden Zusammenarbeit und die Stärkung der wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Dimension von Kultur. Die Kulturhauptstadt-Aktion deckt sich auch mit den Prioritäten von Kreatives Europa in den Bereichen Nachhaltigkeit und Inklusion.

Im globalen Kontext trägt die Kulturhauptstadt-Aktion auch zur Stärkung der EU-Erweiterungspolitik bei, indem Städte aus Kandidatenländern und potenziellen Kandidatenländern einbezogen werden. Dies bietet die Möglichkeit, die Ziele der Kulturhauptstadt-Aktion in Koordination mit dem Europäischen Auswärtigen Dienst weiter auf die EU-Außenpolitik abzustimmen, um kulturelle Partnerschaften in Ländern von strategischem Interesse aufzubauen. Durch die Förderung der grenzüberschreitenden Zusammenarbeit und des grenzüberschreitenden Wissensaustauschs kann die Kulturhauptstadt-Aktion auch die internationalen Beziehungen im Kulturbereich verbessern, die Wettbewerbsfähigkeit des europäischen Kultursektors stärken und die globale Position Europas im Kulturbereich ausbauen. Ein solcher Ansatz fördert nicht nur die kulturelle Vielfalt und den Dialog, sondern zieht auch Investitionen an und erhöht die Sichtbarkeit der europäischen Kultur weltweit.

Wie und für wen haben die EU-Maßnahmen etwas bewirkt?

Insgesamt wird anerkannt, dass die Kulturhauptstadt-Aktion eine Reihe von Wirkungen erzielt hat, die ohne sie nicht möglich gewesen wären. Sie hat eine entscheidende Rolle bei der Förderung der **grenzüberschreitenden Zusammenarbeit** in der Kultur- und Kreativbranche in ganz Europa gespielt, und zwar auf eine Art und Weise, die mit Programmen auf nationaler Ebene nicht erreicht werden kann. Sie hat das kulturelle Angebot der Gastgeberstädte erheblich bereichert und Künstlerinnen und Künstlern sowie Kultureinrichtungen die Möglichkeit gegeben, sich weltweit zu vernetzen. Das **internationale Prestige**, das mit dem Status einer Kulturhauptstadt einhergeht, spielte zudem eine entscheidende Rolle bei der Erlangung weltweiter Aufmerksamkeit, der allgemeinen Zunahme des Tourismus und der Erwähnung in den internationalen Medien. Dies ging weit über das hinaus, was mit einer nationalen Initiative hätte erreicht werden können.

Indem die Kulturhauptstadt-Aktion den ausrichtenden Städten eine solche internationale Bühne bietet, verschafft sie diesen Städten erstmals Zugang zu einem internationalen Publikum und motiviert sie, ein **Kulturprogramm von einer Größenordnung und Vielfalt** zu entwickeln, wie es ohne ein so großes potenzielles Publikum nicht lohnenswert wäre. Die Wirkung des Titels ist besonders stark in Städten, in denen kulturelle Bewegungen ohne EU-Unterstützung nur schwer Fuß fassen könnten. Da etwa 50 Prozent aller im Rahmen der Kulturhauptstadt-Aktion geförderten Projekte eine signifikante europäische Dimension aufweisen, trug die Aktion zur **Förderung europäischer Werte** auf lokaler Ebene bei. Bei den Projekten standen Themen wie Toleranz, Koexistenz, Frieden und Gleichheit im Mittelpunkt.

Mehrere Faktoren, insbesondere die politische Unterstützung, können die langfristigen Erfolge und die Nachhaltigkeit der Rolle als Kulturhauptstadt beeinflussen und darüber entscheiden, ob diese Rolle ein isoliertes Ereignis bleibt oder zum Katalysator für einen nachhaltigen kulturellen Wandel mit einer starken europäischen Komponente wird. Obwohl die Städte verpflichtet sind, Nachhaltigkeitspläne zu erstellen, wird nicht wirklich überwacht, welche Maßnahmen durchgeführt werden, um die Nachhaltigkeit nach dem Kulturhauptstadtjahr zu gewährleisten.

Ist die Maßnahme noch relevant?

Die Ziele der Initiative "Kulturhauptstadt Europas" sind für die Bedürfnisse der Städte von großer Bedeutung. Obwohl es sich um eine der ältesten EU-Initiativen handelt, ist die Aktion für die „Kulturhauptstädte Europas“ nach wie vor relevant, und frühere Kulturhauptstädte haben deutlich gezeigt, dass die damit einhergehenden Maßnahmen eng mit den Prioritäten der Städte und ihrer sozioökonomischen und kulturellen Entwicklung verknüpft sind.

Die Relevanz der Ziele der Kulturhauptstadt-Aktion ist besonders im Hinblick auf die Entwicklung von **Kulturstrategien** und die Stärkung des kulturellen Angebots einer Kulturhauptstadt bemerkenswert. Der Bewerbungsprozess zur Kulturhauptstadt bewirkt häufig eine Neugestaltung (bzw. in einigen Fällen die erstmalige Gestaltung) oder Stärkung der kulturellen Strategien und Politiken auf kommunaler Ebene. Zu den bemerkenswerten Beispielen gehört die Bereitstellung von Mitteln für eine kulturorientierte urbane Erneuerung in vielen Kulturhauptstädten, z. B. für die Umwidmung ganz oder teilweise ungenutzter Gebäude für kulturelle Zwecke oder die Entwicklung eines kulturellen Viertels in der Stadt.

Das Ziel der Kulturhauptstadt-Aktion, nämlich eine „Vergrößerung des Spektrums, der Vielfalt und der europäischen Dimension des kulturellen Angebots in den Städten, u. a. durch länderübergreifende Zusammenarbeit“, ist gerade für die Unterstützung der internationalen Bemühungen der Städte von Bedeutung, insbesondere für die **Positionierung von Kultur- und Kreativorganisationen in Europa und ihre Beteiligung an Projekten über die lokalen und nationalen Grenzen hinaus**, entweder als Teil der Kulturhauptstadt-Initiative oder als Folgemaßnahme daraus. Die Kulturhauptstadt-Initiative mit ihrem spezifischen Ziel, das internationale Profil von Städten im Wege der Kultur zu schärfen, spielt auch eine wichtige Rolle bei der **Förderung des nachhaltigen Tourismus** und der Attraktivität von Städten.

Die Relevanz der Aktion könnte jedoch angesichts der politischen und gesellschaftlichen Veränderungen gestärkt werden. Die **ökologische und die digitale Dimension** haben seit der Verabschiedung der Verordnung im Jahr 2014 in Bezug auf Strategien und Maßnahmen erheblich an Bedeutung gewonnen. Die Zusammenhänge zwischen **Kultur und ökologischer Nachhaltigkeit** sind hinlänglich bekannt, und viele Städte entwickeln Strategien und Maßnahmen, um Kultur und Ökologie miteinander zu verbinden. Die derzeitigen Auswahlkriterien gehen zwar nicht direkt darauf ein, sind aber offen genug, damit Kulturhauptstädte diese Themen angehen können. Dennoch könnte ökologische Nachhaltigkeit ein formelles Kriterium werden, während die digitale Dimension in alle anderen Kriterien und in das gesamte Kulturhauptstadt-Programm eingebettet werden könnte.

Schlussfolgerung und Empfehlungen

Die Kulturhauptstadt-Aktion ist nach wie vor eine erfolgreiche Initiative, die in ganz Europa hohes Ansehen genießt und als Katalysator für die kulturelle Entwicklung von Städten wirken kann.

Im Laufe der Jahre hat die Aktion den Zugang zur und die Teilhabe an der Kultur erweitert, die Kapazitäten der Kultur- und Kreativbranche gestärkt und das internationale Profil der ausrichtenden Städte im Wege der Kultur geschärft. Die letztgenannte Wirkung könnte durch eine koordinierte Kommunikationsstrategie auf EU-Ebene weiter verstärkt werden, um die Sichtbarkeit der Aktion und der Gastgeberstädte zu erhöhen.

Das Konzept der Kulturhauptstädte hat das Potenzial für langanhaltende Wirkungen. Allerdings sind entsprechende Nachweise nur in begrenztem Umfang vorhanden, da es kein Monitoringsystem gibt, um zu erfassen, welche Langzeitwirkung der Titel hat. Die Entwicklung von Instrumenten für ein Monitoring der Langzeitwirkung und die Ermutigung

der Städte, diese auch zu nutzen, könnten eine bessere Nachverfolgung der Auswirkungen ermöglichen. Die nachhaltige Wirkung der Aktion könnte bereits in der Bewerbungsphase weiter gestärkt werden, indem sichergestellt wird, dass die Bewerbungsunterlagen einen strukturierten Ansatz enthalten, der langfristiges politisches Engagement, nachhaltige Fähigkeiten und Kapazitäten, kontinuierliche Unterstützung für Kulturorganisationen sowie klare, von der Stadt geleitete Monitoring- und Bewertungsmaßnahmen umfasst.

Das Auswahlverfahren und die Kriterien zur Ernennung der ausrichtenden Städte sind wirksam, durchdacht und angemessen. Die europäische Dimension ist jedoch oft schwer zu interpretieren, umzusetzen und zu evaluieren – insbesondere im Falle kleinerer Städte oder solcher mit weniger Erfahrungen. Es könnten klarere Leitlinien und Beispiele sowie unverbindliche Zielvorgaben für die Städte aufgestellt werden. Die Förderung der Zusammenarbeit zwischen den ausrichtenden Städten, die Gewährleistung des Zugangs zu den europäischen Kulturnetzen und die Berücksichtigung der europäischen Dimension als Querschnittskriterium könnten den Städten ebenfalls helfen, diese Dimension besser zu integrieren und umzusetzen.

Zur Stärkung der Expertenjury für die Kulturhauptstädte könnte der interinstitutionelle Dialog verstärkt werden, um die Koordinierung bei der Auswahl der Experten und die Vertretung von Vielfalt und Kompetenz zu gewährleisten. Eine strukturierte Einarbeitung neuer Mitglieder und ein strukturierter Übergang für ausscheidende Mitglieder würden die Effizienz der Jury und die Qualität der Auswahl- und Monitoringverfahren weiter verbessern.

Der Preis zu Ehren von Melina Mercouri hat inflationsbedingt an Wert verloren, was seine Wirkung und den Einfluss der Europäischen Kommission auf die ausrichtenden Städte schmälert. Eine Anhebung des Betrags entsprechend dem aktuellen Preisniveau würde seine Bedeutung wiederherstellen. Außerdem würde eine Verschiebung der Zahlung auf das Ende des Veranstaltungsjahres – oder gestaffelt im Anschluss an die Veranstaltung – den langfristigen Zielen der Aktion eher gerecht werden.

Die Einrichtung eines nachhaltigen, aktiv verwalteten Netzwerks früherer Kulturhauptstädte würde den Wissensaustausch, den Aufbau von Kapazitäten, die Langzeitwirkung und die EU-Dimension der Initiative fördern. Im Hinblick auf die Nachhaltigkeit könnte sich die Aktion zu einem langfristigen kulturellen Engagement der ausrichtenden Städte entwickeln, das über das Veranstaltungsjahr hinausgeht und volles Potenzial entfaltet. Dies würde eine Reflexion über das Wesen der Aktion erfordern und darüber, ob sie von einem einmaligen Ereignis in einen kontinuierlichen Prozess übergehen sollte, bei dem die Fortschritte überwacht und die Anerkennung über einen gewissen Zeitraum verdient wird.

1. INTRODUCTION

This document is the Final Report of the 'First interim evaluation of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) action 2020-2033' (contract number EAC/13/2023). The report presents substantive findings based on extensive data collection and analysis.

1.1. Objectives of the study and scope

This evaluation aligns with the European Commission's obligations under Article 16 of Decision 445/2014/EU¹, with two key objectives:

- To evaluate the action through the lens of the five evaluation criteria (Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Coherence and EU Added value): the study explored the longer-term impact of the intervention to understand the full potential of the legacy linked to hosting an ECoC. The results of this first strand of the evaluation provided good practices and lessons not only for future ECoC cities but also for European cities interested in further developing their cultural strategies and cultural offer.
- To identify a number of potential changes to the ECoC action to be considered for the successor initiative post-2033¹.

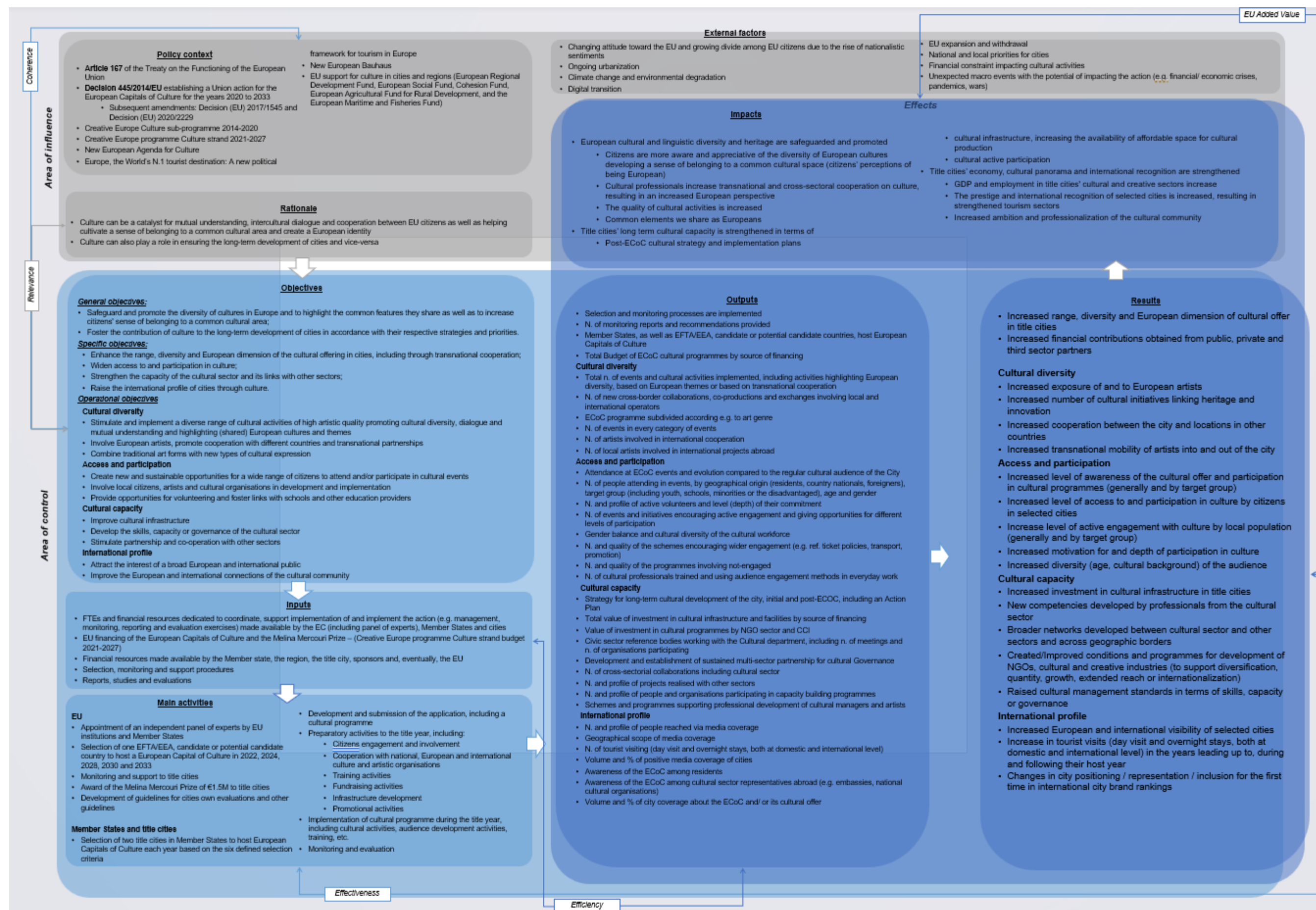
The evaluation covers all cities holding the title between 2013 and 2023, as well as cities bidding for the title so far under the current legal basis, for the titles 2020-2028.

The figure below provides the intervention logic of the action. In particular, in line with Article 2 of Decision 445/2014/EU, the figure highlights the general and specific objectives of the action:

- General objectives:
 - to safeguard and promote the diversity of cultures in Europe and to highlight the common features they share as well as to increase citizens' sense of belonging to a common cultural area;
 - to foster the contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities in accordance with their respective strategies and priorities.
- Specific objectives
 - to enhance the range, diversity and European dimension of the cultural offering in cities, including through transnational cooperation;
 - to widen access to and participation in culture;
 - to strengthen the capacity of the cultural sector and its links with other sectors;
 - to raise the international profile of cities through culture.

¹ [European Parliament and Council. \(2014\). Decision No 445/2014/EU of 16 April 2014 establishing a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2020 to 2033 and repealing Decision No 1622/2006/EC. Official Journal of the European Union, L132, 1–12.](#)

Figure 1. European Capitals of Culture Intervention Logic



1.2. Brief overview of the work conducted

The overall methodological approach is further described in Annex 5. A brief overview of the main data collection tasks performed under this contract that inform the findings of this report is provided below:

- A total of 64 interviews were conducted with EU and national representatives as well as representatives of local authorities and organisations (the full list of interviewees is provided in Annex 6);
- Data from previous evaluation reports of ECoC titleholders were mapped against about 60 key indicators in a tailored data mapping tool;
- A total of 199 resources were used to compile the literature review for this study and 38 statistical data indicators were mapped (the full list of resources explored for the literature review is presented in Annex 7 and the list of statistical data indicators considered is presented in Annex 8);
- Six focus groups with national and European expert panel members, ECoCs and preselected cities were conducted;
- A public consultation was conducted collecting 60 responses (summary of the answers provided in Annex 3);
- Eight case studies were conducted (the full case studies are provided in Annex 4);
- A validation workshop was conducted to discuss the main findings and the potential actions for the future.

The results of the Public Consultation, which closed on 24 September 2024, are summarised in Annex 3. Additionally, this report also presents eight case studies based on this initial data collection (see Annex 4).

1.3. Background of the action

The European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) action aims to highlight and celebrate diversity of cultures in Europe and the common elements they share, to bring this to citizens and to develop their sense of belonging to a common cultural area, particularly within the city context². In achieving this aim, the ECoC action is intended to help host cities enhance the range, diversity and European dimension of their cultural offer, widen participation in culture among residents and strengthen the capacity of the local cultural sector. ECoC also aims to raise the international profile of host cities and help promote and celebrate different European cultures, ensuring that the benefits of hosting an ECoC reach further than those directly associated with the cultural sector.

The full list of title cities and bidding cities is provided in Annex 10.

The special role that cities play in culture was recognised by a 1985 Resolution³ that introduced the 'European City of Culture' concept, later transformed by a 1999 Decision⁴ of the Parliament and of the Council into the ECoC. This sought to create a more predictable, consistent and transparent rotational system for the designation of the title, taking as its legal base Article 151 of the Treaty (now Article 167), which calls on the EU to 'contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and

² <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/culture-in-cities-and-regions/european-capitals-of-culture>

³ [European Commission \(1985\) Resolution of the Ministers Responsible for Cultural Affairs Concerning the Annual Event European City of Culture \(7081/84\).](#)

⁴ [European Parliament and Council. \(1999\). Decision No 1419/1999/EC of 25 May 1999 establishing a Community action for the European Capital of Culture event for the years 2005 to 2019. Official Journal of the European Communities, L166, 1–5.](#)

regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore'. The 1999 Decision was later amended in 2005 in order to integrate the ten Member States that acceded to the EU in 2004⁵.

A further Decision was taken in 2006, which introduced new processes for selection and monitoring for ECoC for the years 2010-19⁶.

The current regulatory framework for ECoC was adopted in 2014, with the Decision No 445/2014/EU⁷ 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', which repealed Decision No 1622/2006/EC. Some key elements of the action remained unchanged, such as the chronological order of entitlement, the two-stage selection process based on year-long cultural programmes created specifically for the event, and the fact that cities will remain titleholders (though bids may continue to involve the surrounding region). Among the main changes introduced by the new Decision from the 2020 title-year are:

- The removal of a need for confirmation of selected cities at EU level, with ECoC titleholders designated directly by the Member State concerned;
- Partial opening of the action to candidate and potential candidate countries (with the European Commission responsible for official designation in these cases);
- More specific and robust selection criteria, including a stronger emphasis on the long-term impact of the action and reinforcement of the European dimension.

The legal basis has been amended over time, in particular to address the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic⁸. Decision (EU) 2020/2229 notably offered the two 2020 ECoCs (Rijeka and Galway) the possibility to extend their ECoC 2020 year until 30 April 2021, while keeping the same year of designation. Furthermore, the ECoC year in Timișoara and in Elefsina was postponed from 2021 to 2023 while the ECoC year in Novi Sad was postponed from 2021 to 2022.

The table below provides an overview of the main differences between legal bases and their implications for the evaluation and data collection.

⁵ [Decision 649/2005/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 April 2005 amending Decision No 1419/1999/EC establishing a Community action for the European Capital of Culture event for the years 2005 to 2019.](#)

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.](#)

⁷ [European Parliament and Council. \(2014\). Decision No 445/2014/EU of 16 April 2014 establishing a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2020 to 2033 and repealing Decision No 1622/2006/EC. Official Journal of the European Union, L132, 1–12.](#)

⁸ [Decision \(EU\) 2020/2229 of 23 December 2020 amending Decision No 445/2014/EU establishing a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2020 to 2033](#)

Table 1. Comparison between the legal bases and implications for data collection

	Decision 1419/1999/EC (applicable to titles 2005–2019) + Decision 1622/2006/EC	Decision 445/2014/EU (applicable to titles 2020–2033)	Implication for data collection
Cities' nomination	The Council of the EU formally designated the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) for the year, acting on a recommendation from the Commission in light of the panel's report and an opinion of the European Parliament.	The nomination is done directly by the Member State concerned. For participating non-EU countries, the European Commission designates the titleholder under the same conditions.	No implications.
Participating countries	Limited to EU Member States, based on a rotation system determining which country could nominate a city for a given year ⁹ . A modified Decision was adopted in February 2005, in order to integrate the ten Member States which joined the EU in 2004. The modification means that for each year from 2009 to 2019, two Member States were entitled to make proposals to the EU: one from the Member States that joined the EU in 2004, and one from the others.	Open to EU Member States as well as EFTA/EEA countries and candidate or potential candidate countries.	No implications.
Panel of experts	Seven independent experts appointed by the European Parliament, Council, Commission, and Committee of the Regions, plus six national experts appointed by the Member State concerned.	Ten independent experts appointed by the EU institutions (Council, Parliament, Commission, Committee of the Regions), plus up to two national experts from the Member State for its selection rounds.	Given the change in the panel composition, title cities from the period pre-2020 could contribute only to a limited extent to the evaluation of this specific aspect.

⁹ European non-member countries could, however, participate in the Action.

	Decision 1419/1999/EC (applicable to titles 2005–2019) + Decision 1622/2006/EC	Decision 445/2014/EU (applicable to titles 2020–2033)	Implication for data collection
Selection process	• A competitive two-stage selection process within each eligible Member State: • Call for applications: 6 years before the title year. • Application submission deadline: minimum 10 months after the publication of the call for applications. • Pre-selection meeting and report: 5 years before the title year. • Revised application submission deadline and selection meeting and report: about 9 months after the pre-selection. • City Designation: 4 years before the title year.		No implications.
Selection criteria	Candidate cities were expected to design a cultural programme with European significance and aiming to foster citizens participation. Annex II of the legal text provided a long list of 'possible planning and evaluation criteria'.	• Introduction of six explicit evaluation categories: • Contribution to the long-term strategy, • European dimension, • Cultural and artistic content, • Capacity to deliver, • Outreach, and • Management. • These criteria require detailed benchmarks and long-term objectives.	Given the change in the selection criteria, title cities from the period pre-2020 could contribute only to a limited extent to the evaluation of this specific aspect.
Monitoring process	Monitoring carried out by a seven members panel, convened twice: two years and one year before the title year.	A structured monitoring phase from the time of designation to the title year. Three formal monitoring meetings are held (three years, eighteen months, and two months before the title year). Cities must submit periodic progress reports and demonstrate compliance with their commitments.	Given the change in the monitoring process, title cities from the period pre-2020 could contribute only to a limited extent to the evaluation of this specific aspect.

	Decision 1419/1999/EC (applicable to titles 2005–2019) + Decision 1622/2006/EC	Decision 445/2014/EU (applicable to titles 2020–2033)	Implication for data collection
Melina Mercouri Prize	- The prize was awarded to the designated cities by the Commission provided that they meet the criteria of the action and have implemented the recommendations made by the selection as well as the monitoring and advisory panels. - The prize was paid three months before the start of the title year.	- The conditionality for receiving the prize is strengthened and linked to five criteria. - The prize is paid at the beginning of the title year.	Given the change in the process and criteria for the award of the prize, title cities from the period pre-2020 could contribute only to a limited extent to the evaluation of this specific aspect.
Ex-post Evaluations	Each year the Commission would produce a report evaluating the results of the previous year's event, including an analysis by the organisers of the latter.	Each city concerned is responsible for the evaluation of the results of its year as a European Capital of Culture, moreover, the Commission shall ensure that external and independent evaluations of the results of the action are produced on a regular basis.	Any assessment based on previous evaluations needs to consider the potential discrepancies in the data collection and presentation. The change in the organisation carrying out the evaluation has limited impact overall as also previous evaluations had to rely on data provided by ECoCs.

1.4. Challenges and limitations

This section outlines the key challenges and methodological limitations encountered over the course of the study.

1.4.1. Limited number of relevant stakeholders

Although there is a wide number of stakeholders and organisations involved in the implementation of ECoCs, challenges were encountered in identifying and engaging with stakeholders with sufficient knowledge of the issues to be evaluated.

Some challenges were encountered in reaching out to individuals who took part in the management of the ECoC during the period 2013-2019 and in securing relevant participants in focus groups from preselected cities. Some individuals who held key positions in relation to the ECoC 2013-2019 (e.g. former members of the local ECoC Foundations) left their positions or moved on to new roles in different organisations some years ago, meaning tracking them down was sometimes challenging.

To mitigate these challenges, national experts from the study team traced back key stakeholders' contact details (where possible) or identified their successor(s) and/or relevant alternative contacts within the local actors (i.e. within the ECoC Foundations that are still active, or relevant members of the city councils/administrations). Moreover, targeted interviews with Culture NEXT, a network bringing together cities that were not selected to become ECoC, were conducted.

Given the specific focus of the evaluation on the operational aspects of the action as well as its long-term impacts, the pool of relevant stakeholders that could answer the public consultation was limited. This is reflected in the low number of responses to this consultation, which collected a total of 60 responses.

It also needs to be considered that, given the changes to the legal basis of the action, in particular regarding the selection criteria and process and the monitoring process, not all stakeholders consulted could provide opinions on all aspects explored by this evaluation. This was particularly evident for representatives of former ECoCs and bidding cities as outlined in the table below.

Table 2. Relevance of stakeholders consulted against specific evaluation aspects

Stakeholder type	Consultation focus
Former ECoCs 2013-2019	• Selection process • Long-term impacts
Former ECoCs 2020-2023	• Selection criteria and process • Monitoring process • Expected long-term impacts
Unsuccessful bidding cities 2020-2029	• Selection criteria and process • Impact of not hosting ECoC

Overall, despite the challenges encountered, the consultation strategy adopted for this evaluation encompassed a wide range of relevant stakeholders, ensuring that different views could be collected and could feed into the triangulation and analysis.

1.4.2. Limited statistical data availability

Despite a wide range of sources being used for the collection of statistical data, many of these sources did not always cover the issues that this evaluation is interested in (e.g. longer-term impact) or did not cover the required period to be useful for this study. Geographical scale was also a limiting factor with many data sources not at a low enough granularity to provide valuable insight. Datasets at the city level were ideal for this analysis, with NUTS 2 and 3 both sufficient but less useful. Some datasets were, however, only available at the national level.

Missing data was, where possible, supplemented through quantitative information collected through interviews and literature review; however, in most cases, the evaluation often had to rely on qualitative evidence.

1.4.3. Missing and inconsistent data from cities evaluations

This evaluation has had to rely heavily on the existing evaluations of past ECoCs conducted by external evaluators and/or title cities. While these evaluations provided a great depth of data, gaps were still identified and, in some cases, cities used different definitions for some data categories. For instance, the indicator ‘number of cultural activities conducted’ was interpreted more loosely by certain cities than others, leading to difficulties in comparing data across the different ECoCs. Nevertheless, this evaluation attempts to use the available data to draw reliable findings and conclusions.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the majority of data compiled relates to the Effectiveness and Efficiency evaluation questions, given the more quantitative nature of these evaluation criteria. Less was found on Coherence, Relevance, and EU added value.

1.5. Key data sources of the evaluation

This evaluation draws from a large number of available data collected over the years by title cities and through external evaluations. The table below provides an overview of the type of documents reviewed, the category of data they provided and the full list of references.

This table can be referred to in order to identify the data source for the evidence feeding the analysis presented in Section 2.

Table 3. List of data sources

External Ex-post Evaluations		
Data retrieved	Cultural Programme final data: • Number of cultural events, projects, and collaborations implemented • Number of artists, performers, and cultural operators involved • International collaborations and cross-border partnerships Audience and Participation final data: • Visitor statistics (e.g., total attendance at events, ticket sales, participation in public art initiatives) • Engagement of local residents vs. international visitors • Accessibility and inclusivity measures (e.g., participation of disadvantaged groups) Economic and Financial Impact gathered data: • Total budget spent vs. initial projections • Breakdown of funding sources (EU, national, regional, private) • Impact on tourism (number of hotel stays, increase in visitors compared to pre-ECOC years) • Revenue generated for local businesses and the cultural sector	Social and Community Engagement gathered data: • Number of volunteers involved in the ECoC programme • Impact on local community cohesion (e.g., engagement of youth, minority groups) • New partnerships formed between cultural, educational, and social institutions Branding and Communication final data: • Media coverage (number of press articles, social media impressions) • Effectiveness of marketing campaigns in international visibility • Growth in cultural tourism and city branding impact Legacy and Sustainability initial gathered data: • Infrastructure built or renovated as a result of the ECoC • Long-term policy changes or strategic cultural plans adopted by the city • Continued funding for culture post-ECoC (e.g., municipal cultural budget increase)
City	ECOC Year	Full Reference
Košice, Marseille-Provence	2013	Nick McAteer, James Rampton, Jonathan France, Mária Taitáková, and Sophie Lehouelleur, Ex-post Evaluation of the 2013 European Capitals of Culture (Brussels: Ecorys, 2014).
Umeå, Rīga	2014	Tim Fox and James Rampton, Ex-post Evaluation of the 2014 European Capitals of Culture (Brussels: Ecorys, 2015).

Mons, Pilsen	2015	Tim Fox and James Rampton, Ex-post Evaluation of the 2015 European Capitals of Culture (Brussels: Ecorys, 2016).
San Sebastián, Wrocław	2016	Tim Fox and James Rampton, Ex-post Evaluation of the 2016 European Capitals of Culture (Brussels: Ecorys, 2017).
Aarhus, Paphos	2017	European Commission, Ex-post Evaluation of the 2017 European Capitals of Culture (Brussels: Ecorys, 2018).
Valletta, Leeuwarden-Friesland	2018	Tim Fox and James Rampton, Ex-post Evaluation of the 2018 European Capitals of Culture (Brussels: Ecorys, 2019).
Matera, Plovdiv	2019	Tim Fox, Luca Mobilio, Assya Pavlova, and Sergio Goffredo, Ex-post Evaluation of the 2019 European Capitals of Culture (Brussels: Ecorys, 2020).
Multiple (2007-2019)	2007-2019	European Commission, Compendium of Recommendations from Ex-post Evaluations of European Capitals of Culture 2007-2019 (Brussels: European Commission, 2021).
Multiple (2010-2016)	2010-2016	James Rampton, Neil McDonald, and Neringa Mozuraityte, Interim Evaluation of Selection and Monitoring Procedures of European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) 2010-2016 (Brussels: Ecorys, 2011).
Bid books		
Data retrieved	• General information on the city (size, inhabitants, cultural venues, economic, social challenges, etc.). • Long-term vision (existing municipal/regional strategies, governance models supporting local cultural policy). • Key stakeholders involved in the ECoC development. General information on the city (size, inhabitants, cultural venues, economic, social challenges, etc.). • Long-term vision (existing municipal/regional strategies, governance models supporting local cultural policy). • Key stakeholders involved in the ECoC development.	• Strategies to engage local communities in ECoC activities, the participatory process behind ECoC application, public consultation processes, etc. • Volunteer programmes and civic engagement envisioned mechanisms. • Legal structure of the managing entity (e.g., public-private partnership, foundation, municipality-led). • Plans for sustaining cultural initiatives beyond the ECoC year. • Data collection methods (surveys, visitor statistics, economic impact reports) for ex-post evaluation. • Branding strategy envisioned for the ECoC year (merch, digital presence, etc). • Risk matrix, contingency plans, and security measures. General information on the city.

	• International partners and transnational cooperation strategies. • Preliminary overview of cultural/artistic programme (flagship projects, thematic cluster). • Diversity and inclusion measures (e.g., engagement with minorities, accessibility measures). • Participation in existing EU cultural projects and networks, EU added value goals.	• Formal financial and political endorsement by local, regional and national governments, often with a culture budget for the city's last 5 years • Financial statements, operating budget allocation, and human resources needs.
City	ECoC Year	Full Reference
Riga	2014	Riga 2014 Foundation, The Application of Riga for the Title of the European Capital of Culture 2014 (Riga: Riga 2014 Foundation, 2014).
Mons	2015	Mons 2015 Foundation, Capitale Européenne de la Culture – bidbook (Mons: Mons 2015 Foundation, 2015).
Pilsen	2015	Pilsen 2015, Pre-Selection Bid Book for European Capital of Culture 2015 (Pilsen: Pilsen 2015, 2010).
San Sebastián	2016	DSS2016EU, Pre-Selection Bid Book for European Capital of Culture 2016 (San Sebastián: DSS2016EU, 2010).
Paphos	2017	Paphos 2017, Pre-Selection Bid Book for European Capital of Culture 2017 (Paphos: Paphos 2017, 2012).
Leeuwarden	2018	Leeuwarden 2018, Pre-Selection Bid Book for European Capital of Culture 2018 (Leeuwarden: Leeuwarden 2018, 2013).
Valletta	2018	Valletta 2018 Foundation, Valletta Candidate City European Capital of Culture 2018 (Valletta: Valletta 2018 Foundation, 2011).
Matera	2019	Matera 2019, Pre-Selection Bid Book for European Capital of Culture 2019 (Matera: Matera 2019, 2014).
Plovdiv	2019	Plovdiv 2019, Pre-Selection Bid Book for European Capital of Culture 2019 (Plovdiv: Plovdiv 2019, 2014).
Novi Sad	2020	Novi Sad 2021 Foundation, Pre-Selection Bid Book for European Capital of Culture 2020 (Novi Sad: Novi Sad 2021 Foundation, 2016).

Rijeka	2020	<u>Rijeka 2020, Pre-Selection Bid Book for European Capital of Culture 2020 (Rijeka: Rijeka 2020, 2015).</u>
Novi Sad	2020	<u>Novi Sad 2021 Foundation, Pre-Selection Bid Book for European Capital of Culture 2020 (Novi Sad: Novi Sad 2021 Foundation, 2016).</u>
Rijeka	2020	<u>Rijeka 2020, Pre-Selection Bid Book for European Capital of Culture 2020 (Rijeka: Rijeka 2020, 2015).</u>
Galway	2020	<u>Galway 2020, Making Waves - Application for European Capital of Culture 2020 (Galway: Galway 2020, 2016).</u>
Timișoara	2021	<u>Timișoara 2021, Shine Your Light - Light Up Your City! European Capital of Culture 2021 Bid Book (Timișoara: Timișoara 2021, 2016).</u>
Elefsina	2021	<u>Elefsina 2021, Transition to European Capital of Culture 2021 Bid Book (Elefsina: Elefsina 2021, 2016).</u>
Kaunas	2022	<u>Kaunas 2022, Pre-Selection Bid Book for European Capital of Culture 2022 (Kaunas: Kaunas 2022, 2016).</u>
Esch-sur-Alzette	2022	<u>Esch 2022, Pre-Selection Bid Book for European Capital of Culture (Esch-sur-Alzette: Esch 2022, 2016).</u>
Chemnitz	2025	<u>Chemnitz 2025, Pre-Selection Bid Book for European Capital of Culture 2025 (Chemnitz: Chemnitz 2025, 2020).</u>
Nova Gorica	2025	<u>Nova Gorica 2025, Pre-Selection Bid Book for European Capital of Culture 2025 (Nova Gorica: GO! 2025, 2020).</u>
Oulu	2026	<u>Oulu2026, Pre-Selection Bid Book for European Capital of Culture 2026 (Oulu: Oulu2026, 2020).</u>
Trenčín	2026	<u>Trenčín 2026, Pre-Selection Bid Book for European Capital of Culture 2026 (Trenčín: Trenčín 2026, 2020).</u>
Évora	2027	<u>Évora 2027, Pre-Selection Bid Book for European Capital of Culture 2027 (Évora: Évora 2027, 2022).</u>
Skopje	2028	<u>Skopje 2028, Pre-Selection Bid Book for European Capital of Culture 2028 (Skopje: Skopje 2028, 2023).</u>

Bourges	2028	Bourges 2028, Bid Book for European Capital of Culture 2028 (Bourges: Bourges 2028, 2023).
Budweis	2028	Budweis 2028, European Capital of Culture 2028 Bid Book (Budweis: Budweis 2028, 2023).
Cities' own evaluations and publications		
Data retrieved	Cultural and Artistic Impact • Number and types of cultural events organised • Audience attendance and participation rates • Impact on local and international artistic collaborations • Effects on cultural habits and engagement trends Economic Impact • Total budget and financial allocations • Breakdown of public and private funding sources • Economic return on investment (ROI) for the city • Job creation in the cultural and creative sectors Tourism and Branding • Increase in tourist numbers during and after the ECoC year • Changes in city branding and reputation • Visitor spending and economic contribution • Media coverage and international visibility	Social and Community Effects • Volunteer program participation rates • Impact on local community engagement • Inclusion of underrepresented groups • Effects on social cohesion and civic pride Governance and Management • Organisational structure and key stakeholders • Evaluation of governance efficiency • Collaboration with public and private sectors • Lessons learned from management challenges Urban and Infrastructure Development • New or renovated cultural infrastructure • Public space improvements and accessibility • Sustainability of infrastructure investments • Legacy planning for post-ECoC impact Policy and Long-Term Effects • Integration of culture into city planning • Changes in cultural policies at the municipal level • New partnerships and networks created • Long-term sustainability strategies
City	ECoC Year	Full Reference
Marseille	2013	Marseille-Provence 2013, Impact Assessment Report (Marseille: MP2013 Association, 2014).
Košice	2013	Košice 2013, Evaluation Report (Košice: Technical University of Košice, 2015).
Mons	2015	Mons 2015, Evaluation Report (Mons: Mons 2015 Foundation, 2016).

Plzeň	2015	Plzeň 2015, Open, Come Inside! Evaluation Report (Plzeň: Plzeň 2015, 2016).
San Sebastián	2016	Donostia-San Sebastián 2016, Final Evaluation Report (San Sebastián: DSS2016EU, 2017).
Aarhus	2017	Hans-Peter Degn, Louise Ejgod Hansen, et al., Aarhus 2017: Before - During - After. A Research-Based Evaluation of the Effects of the European Capital of Culture Project (Aarhus: rethinkIMPACTS 2017 at Aarhus University, 2018).
Valletta	2018	Valletta 2018, Final Research Report (Valletta: Valletta 2018 Foundation, 2019).
Valletta	2018	Valletta 2018 Foundation, Cultural & Territorial Vibrancy: Evaluation & Monitoring Research Findings 2018 (Valletta: Valletta 2018 Foundation, 2018).
Matera	2019	Fondazione Matera Basilicata 2019, Final Evaluation Report (Matera: Fondazione Matera Basilicata 2019, 2020).
Matera	2019	Fondazione Matera Basilicata 2019, Gli Spazi degli Eventi, Gli Eventi negli Spazi (Matera: Fondazione Matera Basilicata 2019, 2020).
Matera	2019	Fondazione Matera Basilicata 2019, Gli Effetti di Matera 2019 sul Sistema delle Competenze Locali (Matera: Fondazione Matera Basilicata 2019, 2021).
Matera	2019	Fondazione Matera Basilicata 2019, Project Leader e Matera 2019: Esperienza, Impatto sul Business Model e Innovazione Sociale (Matera: Fondazione Matera Basilicata 2019, 2021).
Matera	2019	Fondazione Matera Basilicata 2019, L'Impatto Economico di Matera Capitale Europea della Cultura 2019 (Matera: Fondazione Matera Basilicata 2019, 2021).
Matera	2019	Fondazione Matera Basilicata 2019, Indagine sul Pubblico: Uno Studio dell'Esperienza e dei Benefici Percepiti durante Matera 2019 (Matera: Fondazione Matera Basilicata 2019, 2021).
Matera	2019	Fondazione Matera Basilicata 2019, Passaporto per Matera 2019: Analisi del Comportamento d'Acquisto, di Fruizione e Profilazione dell'Utenza (Matera: Fondazione Matera Basilicata 2019, 2020).
Matera	2019	Fondazione Matera Basilicata 2019, Il Living Lab Open Design School: Catalizzatore dello Sviluppo di Impresa (Matera: Fondazione Matera Basilicata 2019, 2020).
Plovdiv	2019	Plovdiv 2019, Final Monitoring Report (Plovdiv: Plovdiv 2019 Foundation, 2020).

Matera	2019	<u>Fondazione Matera Basilicata 2019, Report sugli impatti dei progetti di co-creazione e partecipazione attiva di Matera Capitale Europea della Cultura 2019 (Matera: Fondazione Matera Basilicata 2019, 2020).</u>
Rijeka	2020	<u>Rijeka 2020, Evaluation Progress Report (Rijeka: Rijeka 2020, 2024).</u>
Rijeka	2020	<u>Rijeka 2020, Impact and Legacy - Full Evaluation Report (Rijeka: Rijeka 2020, 2024).</u>
Galway	2020	<u>Galway 2020, Monitoring and Evaluation Report (Galway: Galway 2020, 2021).</u>
Esch-sur-Alzette	2022	<u>Esch 2022, Évaluation et Rapport d'Impact (Esch-sur-Alzette: Esch 2022, 2024).</u>
Kaunas	2022	<u>Kaunas 2022, Body of Evidence (Kaunas: Kaunas 2022, 2023).</u>
Kaunas	2022	<u>Kaunas 2022, Community Programme Methodology (Kaunas: Kaunas 2022, 2023).</u>
Kaunas	2022	<u>Kaunas 2022, Volunteering Programme Methodology (Kaunas: Kaunas 2022, 2023).</u>
Kaunas	2022	<u>Kaunas 2022, Youth Programme Methodology (Kaunas: Kaunas 2022, 2023).</u>
Kaunas	2022	<u>Kaunas 2022, Investigation Report (Kaunas: Kaunas 2022, 2023).</u>
Novi Sad	2022	<u>Novi Sad 2022 Foundation, Evaluation Report - European Capital of Culture (Novi Sad: Novi Sad 2022 Foundation, 2024).</u>

City's cultural strategies

Data retrieved	• Budget & Financial Planning • Total allocated budget for cultural projects • Breakdown of funding sources (EU, national, local, private) • Financial sustainability measures post-ECOC • Governance & Management • Organisational structure (who manages the ECOC program?) • Key stakeholders and partnerships • Decision-making processes • Cultural Programming • Number and types of planned cultural events • Thematic areas (heritage, contemporary arts, digital innovation) • International collaborations and artist exchanges • Audience & Community Engagement • Target audience demographics (locals, tourists, youth, minorities)	• Public participation strategies (co-creation, volunteering) • Accessibility measures (language, mobility, pricing policies) • Infrastructure & Urban Development • New cultural venues or renovated spaces • Investments in public spaces and cultural districts • Use of temporary vs. permanent structures • Sustainability & Green Practices • Eco-friendly event management policies • Sustainable transport and energy use in cultural venues • Environmental awareness programs • Legacy & Long-term Impact • Post-ECOC cultural policy framework • Expected long-term effects on the local economy and tourism • Planned monitoring and evaluation indicators
City	ECOC Year	Full Reference
Elefsina	2021	Elefsina 2021, Cultural Strategy: Transition to Euphoria (Elefsina: Elefsina 2021, 2021).
Rijeka	2020	Rijeka 2020, Cultural Strategy (Rijeka: Rijeka 2020, 2013).
Kaunas	2022	Kaunas 2022, Cultural Strategy up to 2027 (Kaunas: Kaunas 2022, 2017).
Matera	2019	Matera 2019, Cultural Strategy (Matera: Matera 2019 Committee, 2017).
Galway	2020	Galway 2020, Cultural Strategy (Galway: Galway 2020, 2016).
Valletta	2018	Valletta 2018 Foundation, Cultural Programme (Valletta: Valletta 2018 Foundation, 2018).
Plovdiv	2019	Plovdiv 2019, Cultural Development Strategy Summary 2014-2024 (Plovdiv: Plovdiv 2019 Foundation, 2014).

Paphos	2017	Paphos 2017, Cultural Programme (Paphos: Paphos 2017 Organisation, 2017).
Bad Ischl	2024	Bad Ischl-Salzkammergut 2024, Cultural Strategy (Bad Ischl: Bad Ischl 2024 Foundation, 2019).
Marseille	2013	Marseille-Provence 2013, Programme Overview (Marseille: Marseille-Provence 2013, 2013).
Novi Sad	2022	Novi Sad 2022, Cultural and Financial Strategy (Novi Sad: Novi Sad 2022 Foundation, 2022).

2. EVALUATION MAIN FINDINGS

This section of the Final Report provides the main findings under the key evaluation criteria.

2.1. To what extent was the intervention successful and why?

2.1.1. Effectiveness

This section of the Final Report sets out the effectiveness of the ECoC action. The section assesses whether the action has been effective against its specific objectives set out in its current legal basis¹⁰. The four specific objectives help to operationalise the general objectives¹¹ of the overall action and therefore provide a foundation for understanding whether the ECoC action is effective in what it sets out to achieve. The strategic objectives of the ECoC are:

- contributing to an enhanced cultural offer in the cities holding the title (e.g. in terms of scope and scale) with a stronger European dimension;
- widening access to and participation in culture in the title-holding cities;
- strengthening the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors;
- raising the title-holding cities' international profile through culture.

2.1.1.1. *Contributing to an enhanced cultural offer in the cities holding the title (e.g. in terms of scope and scale) with stronger European Dimension*

The evaluation has found that the ECoC action has stimulated an increased number of cultural activities during the title year, particularly compared to years when the ECoC did not exist. Looking at the local evaluations undertaken by the ECoC held between 2013 and 2022, **a typical ECoC year consists of around 1,000-1,200 separate cultural activities**, with title years implementing anything between 160 activities in Paphos to 3,400 in Mons¹². Although a direct comparison between ECoC is not possible because activities are defined in different ways, findings from local evaluations generally show that an ECoC year greatly increases the volume of cultural works taking place in a city and its surrounding area and therefore significantly enhances the cultural offer in line with the specific objectives of the action. As an example, baseline data collected from local evaluations in three ECoCs supported between 2013 and 2022¹³ shows that **cultural activity increased by around 300-500% in the ECoC year compared with years before the ECoC took place**.

Beyond scale, the evaluation has found that the scope of the cultural offer in host cities has also been stimulated by the existence of the ECoC. This increase in scope seems to be most prevalent in terms of the ECoC **widening out the type of culture on offer in the host city**, particularly in terms of introducing new genres into the cultural calendar. Stakeholder interviews highlighted that the ECoC introduced a much more *colourful* set of cultural activities to their existing cultural programme with new genres stimulated by the action including comedy, youth theatre, community choirs, film making, poetry and literature

¹⁰ Article 2(2) of [Decision 445/2014/EU](#)

¹¹ Article 2(1) of [Decision 445/2014/EU](#): To safeguard and promote the diversity of cultures in Europe and to highlight the common features they share as well as to increase citizens' sense of belonging to a common cultural area; To foster the contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities in accordance with their respective strategies and priorities.

¹² An ECoC 'activity' was defined as either an event, a cultural work, or a single project supported by an ECoC that formed part of a cultural programme delivered over the host year. Definitions of an activity differ between ECoCs, meaning a direct comparison is not possible. It is nonetheless useful when assessing the general scale of the activity found in each cultural programme.

¹³ Plzeň, Leeuwarden, Aarhus

festivals to give but a few examples. Those responsible for the implementation of the ECoC often mentioned that the ECoC allowed the cultural offer to be 'less mainstream', providing opportunities for cities to deliver cultural programmes that were often described as being *specialist and alternative*, which went beyond the usual cultural offer people would expect in a given city. This additional cultural activity helped the ECoC to produce cultural work that appealed to a wider audience and, in turn, increased the number of people consuming culture (see below on audience expansion for more information).

It is also useful to note that all of the evaluations done of the ECoC between 2013 and 2022 highlighted that the ECoC has greatly widened the location of where cultural activity takes place in host cities, bringing culture outside of traditional cultural venues (i.e. theatres and galleries) into play as areas where audiences consume cultural activity. Formal evaluations of the ECoC and also discussions with stakeholders highlighted a wide array of more innovative venues to experience culture including in the streets of (often deprived) neighbourhoods (away from the city centre), in people's homes and gardens, in local shops, community centres, places of worship and schools as well as in parks, city squares and at heritage sites that acted as backdrops to theatrical productions, music ensembles and art installations. Broadening the places where cultural activity takes place in a city helped to broaden the audiences who experienced culture. For example, a stakeholder interviewed for the Leeuwarden (2018) ECoC highlighted that their cultural programme allowed the city to take culture 'to the people' rather than expecting them to visit culture venues. As a consequence, culture could be 'consumed in the streets as people walked to school, at the train station as people waited for their train or outside of their local bar as they enjoyed their Saturday night'.

Underpinning the increase in the scope and scale of the cultural offer brought about by the ECoC was a **significant increase in investments in cultural activities across host cities** stimulated by the year. Analysis of the budgets set out in local evaluations of ECoC taking place between 2013 and 2022 shows that **the action has collectively stimulated around €900 million in funding towards the cultural agenda across the EU**, taking into consideration all of the funding spent from EU, national, regional, local and private sources. Data also shows that **a typical ECoC has a budget of around €50 million** in the preparation and implementation of its cultural year, with the biggest budgets coming from Marseille, Košice and Leeuwarden (each spending around €100 million) whilst the smallest budget was from Paphos (with a budget of €8.2 million). Although baseline figures do not exist across the ECoC to show how much was spent on cultural activity outside of ECoC years, stakeholders highlighted that the **cultural budgets of host city administrations were often around five times larger as a consequence of hosting their ECoC**. This level of increase was also supported by an analysis of the annual budgets for culture for city municipalities presented at pre-selection stages by ECoC over the 2020-2028 period¹⁴. This shows that future ECoC host cities spend on average €13 million on culture meaning an ECoC (with average budgets of €50 million) sees spend increase by around four-fold in comparison with a normal non-ECoC year. Further analysis on the budgets is found in the efficiency section of this report.

A summative assessment of whether the ECoC action has been successful in its overall objective of contributing to an enhanced cultural offer in the cities holding the title can be drawn from the contribution analysis undertaken as part of this work. This work draws on various evidence collected through the evaluation to understand whether a hypothesis is supported. A summary of this is found below with more findings set out in the annex.

¹⁴ Bid books from 2020 titles onwards presented (in the management section of each bid book) the annual expenditure of the city administration on culture in a non- ECoC year.

Box 1. Contribution analysis hypothesis: An ECoC increases the volume, diversity, and quality of cultural activities and events

The evidence supporting this hypothesis, which posits that title cities increase the volume, diversity, and quality of cultural activities and events using ECoC-related funding, is categorised as strong. This conclusion is based on data drawn from data from the local evaluation reports and interviews.

Most titleholders committed a significant budget to their ECoC cultural programme, which in turn directly led to an increase in the volume, diversity, and quality of cultural activities and events. An average ECoC has a budget of €50 million, with 13 out of the 18 titleholders under review spending more than 60% of their ECoC budget directly on funding cultural activities (the rest being allocated to the staff wages and overheads of the delivery structures, communication and marketing activities, evaluation etc.). Additionally, the number of events organised during the ECoC timeframe shows a substantial increase compared to a non-ECoC year (normally 50% higher in cities recording such data and an average of 1,000-1,200 separate cultural events taking place in a typical ECoC year), with cities like San Sebastián (2016), Kaunas (2022) and Wrocław (2016) hosting respectively over 3,000 events, over 4,500 and around 2,000 events adding to a great extent on their normal yearly cultural offering.

Public consultation results (N=60) from the evaluation also align with the hypothesis, with 77% of respondents agreeing that ECoC encouraged the implementation of a much larger cultural offer and with 65% believing that it increased access to and participation in culture.

Interviews with stakeholders highlight successful examples of increased cultural activities and events in title cities. Case studies also illustrate significant contributions, with cities like Kaunas, Matera (2019), Novi Sad, and Wrocław showing substantial increases in cultural activities and events because of their ECoC.

The work has identified little data on whether the ECoC raised the quality of culture on offer in a host city. There was no baseline for this (i.e. levels of quality before and during the ECoC year) and stakeholders tended to talk more about the quantity of culture on offer. Where quality was highlighted, this was mainly related to larger budgets allowing cities to attract higher profile national and international artists and works, which some stakeholders suggested represented 'higher quality' activities compared with more regional and local work. Overall, the evidence strongly supports the hypothesis that an ECoC increases the volume and diversity of cultural activities and events.

Enhancing the European Dimension

The evaluation has found a mix of results on the extent to which the ECoC action helps establish a European dimension in culture across the EU. Whilst the different ECoC over the study period understood the importance of the European dimension, they interpreted the concept in different ways and to different extents. Stakeholders often highlighted **a general difficulty in incorporating the European dimension into their cultural programmes** with those responsible for implementing the ECoC programme finding it hard to encourage local projects and local organisations (often with local target groups and local audiences) to 'think through the European lens', as phrased by a consultee. This is generally supported in literature, including evaluations and EU monitoring reports, which often show that making the ECoC year as 'European' as possible needed special attention and did not happen without a clear and extra effort. ECoC programme-level stakeholders often highlighted that it was easier to allow local organisations to focus on local (or national) rather than European values, topics and cultural partners when designing their cultural project, especially for small cultural operators who had little in the way of existing European partners or experience in their track record. Around half of those stakeholders interviewed highlighted how the European dimension sometimes added an extra hurdle to contend with, not only before and during their ECoC year –particularly when designing their cultural programme– but also during the application process when projects were applying for support from their local ECoC.

However, despite this additional effort being needed to ensure ECoC activity had a European dimension, the evaluation results show that the European dimension was present across the ECoC. Data from local evaluations¹⁵ show that around **40-65% of projects implemented as part of an ECoC over the study period had a notable European dimension**, with these projects either having partners from other European countries, having a strong European theme (e.g. migration, coexistence, equality) and/or having local partners working with organisations in other countries. Notable ECoCs that were identified (through various project-level surveys) as having high levels of a European dimension included Marseille (65% of projects reported having EU partners with a strong focus on Mediterranean countries, taking advantage of the city's geographical position as a harbour), Plzeň (53%), Rijeka (49%) and Riga (40%). ECoC also tended to adopt a central theme for their programme that helped promote a European dimension, which projects supported as part of their cultural programme had to align to. Topics that were adopted by the ECoC to help create a European dimension included tolerance, coexistence and peace, revisiting more troubled sides of Europe's recent history such as the plight of the Jewish community before and during WWII or oppression under the Soviet rule in Central and Eastern European countries, the importance of multilingualism, brain drain (especially of youth) in smaller cities, or, more recently, environmental sustainability, with these topics often being a central plank of the main ECoC programme found within each city's bid book and overall programme. This central theme, addressed through the lenses of culture and the arts, helped encourage local organisations applying for inclusion on their ECoC programme to align their project to this wider European theme and/ or value.

Data from the local evaluations also show the number of countries (outside of the country hosting the ECoC) that have been involved in cultural activities. This further helps understand how much local ECoC worked with cultural organisations from across the EU and beyond to work across international borders. The number of countries involved in the implementation of the ECoC year included 50 countries in the Plzeň ECoC, 35 countries in Aarhus (2017), 18 countries in the Umeå, 15 in Valetta, 12 in Paphos and 11 in Plovdiv. Stakeholders in most ECoCs highlighted that international partnerships, working within their local artistic communities, tended to be limited before the ECoC year took place. Projects interviewed as part of the evaluation were asked to highlight the added value of working with international rather than national/ local partners and often stated that international collaboration opened up routes to new audiences, distributors and promoters. These new international networks were often completely new for small and local organisations (particularly those in small host cities) who had never had contact with, for instance, a promoter working with audiences in another country.

It is also noticeable that the **ECoC has been successful in stimulating cross-border collaboration among EU cultural players with artists based outside of the EU**. Stakeholders highlighted this as a key piece of added value for their ECoC, which raised the profile of their local artists beyond the EU and helped attract partnership working between local artists and artists found in locations as far-reaching as Japan, China, the US, Botswana, Canada, South Africa or Palestine to give a few examples.

¹⁵ Most national and/ or EU evaluation of ECoC (except Kaunas) undertook a survey of projects supported through the action and generally explicitly asked the extent to which projects encompassed a European dimension.

2.1.1.2. *Widening access to and participation in culture in the title-holding cities.*

A second objective of the ECoC action relates to widening the access and participation in culture in order to ensure broader groups of stakeholders both consume and create culture across the EU.

An assessment of the number of people who participated in ECoC activity between 2013-2022 shows that the action encouraged an extremely large number of people to access culture. Official **attendance figures of the 2013-2022 ECoC set out in local evaluations show that around 38.5 million people participated in ECoC-supported cultural activity over this time period** either as an audience member, a curator or a project beneficiary¹⁶. Participation levels set out in local evaluations varied across different ECoC depending on budgets, size of host city and size of programme but the average participation of an ECoC was around 2 million people with the main influencing factor in participation being the size of the host city (i.e. larger cities such as Marseille had much higher participation compared to cities such as Paphos).

Analysis of attendance data for the ECoC from 2013-2022 also shows that a large proportion of the host city's residents attended ECoC supported activity in their city. Data from local evaluations of ECoC falling within the study period showed that around **6 out of every 10 residents of a host city attended at least one ECoC event or project during the host year**. This suggests that local residents generally supported and benefitted from their local ECoC and also enjoyed their city hosting a large cultural programme. For example, 93% of local residents in Matera attended at least one ECoC activity during their year, 91% in Mons, 84% in San Sebastián, 74% in Marseille, 71% in Umeå, 67% of Riga, 51% in Leeuwarden¹⁷, 50% in Paphos, 50% in Kaunas, 49% in Aarhus, 33% in Plzeň and 30% of residents in Galway¹⁸. Although most cities did not collect data showing the proportion of local residents who attended cultural activity before the ECoC year, data from Mons and San Sebastián set out in the local evaluations (see Section 1.5) indicate that participation rates in these cities tended to be 50% higher in their respective ECoC years compared to non ECoC years. This again highlights the extent to which an ECoC has helped increase the number of people accessing culture, particularly among the residents of host cities.

The evaluation results also show that the **ECoC widened the type of beneficiary who consumed culture and encouraged people to attend cultural activities who had not previously been active on the cultural front**. Stakeholder consultations highlighted this as a particularly strong area of impact. Local evaluations (see Section 1.5) in Matera, Leeuwarden, Riga and Mons highlighted that groups being targeted to increase their consumption of culture during the ECoC year included school children, people from disadvantaged backgrounds (including migrants and the unemployed) as well as people living in the outermost neighbourhoods surrounding the city centre. Reasons why the ECoC had helped widen participation in culture according to stakeholders interviewed included:

- location: particularly open-air events and venues (including in parks, streets, heritage sites and neighbourhoods) helped bring culture into locations of the city that

¹⁶ Source: National ECoC evaluations and national monitoring data of audience participation and project beneficiaries. Note: a participant includes individuals who attended a one off ECoC event (e.g. opening ceremony). Most ECoC also counted the same resident attending for example five cultural events as five rather than one attendee.

¹⁷ The survey of ECoC participants asked if respondents were from the surrounding Friesland area rather than Leeuwarden specifically.

¹⁸ Note that Galway took place during the Covid pandemic and restrictions on movement were in force.

the general public could easily experience and enjoy. There was less dependency for people to only consume culture in the city centres and in 'traditional' cultural venues such as museums, galleries and theatres.

- variety: as stated earlier, because the ECoC greatly increases the scale and scope of cultural activity in the city, there was much more variety in the cultural programme of the host city. Increased scope and scale meant that people were more likely to find genres and types of culture that fit their interests and needs.
- cost: ECoC years also provided more opportunity for people to consume culture for free, whether that was in terms of the opening ceremony (which tended to be non-ticketed), open air events in public spaces, or events funded by public sources that did not require the audience to pay.

Evaluation findings also show that **there was a concerted effort by ECoC to engage with people who did not traditionally consume culture**. Stakeholders interviewed were keen to stress that their ECoC did not just focus on traditional audiences and went out of their way to broaden the appeal and reach of culture in their ECoC programmes. Desk research shows that all of the ECoCs in the study period developed projects that specifically targeted harder-to-reach and non-traditional audiences of culture and specifically invested in projects to expand the reach and appeal of culture in their cities. These projects included cultural activities purposely located in target communities (e.g. cultural projects in youth clubs, synagogues, prisons, support centres for migrants etc.), as well as capacity-building organisations that worked with target (non-traditional) groups to deliver a cultural related project (e.g. funding a youth migrant NGO to run a cultural activity over the summer break) as well as ensuring that non-traditional groups were also producers of culture to help them deliver a cultural project themselves (often in their neighbourhoods or social groups).

Local evaluations (see Section 1.5) from different ECoCs also indicates that the action has stimulated large numbers of volunteers to help implement various ECoC activities and in turn helped residents to engage and participate in their local cultural agenda. Many ECoCs successfully used volunteers to help deliver part of their cultural programme with monitoring data showing how residents directly helped produce rather than just consume culture attached to their ECoC. **In total, data from local evaluations (see Section 1.5) shows that 24,261 volunteers were involved in the ECoC delivered between 2013 and 2022, meaning on average an ECoC had around 1,300 volunteers each.** Marseille had 3,000 volunteers, Umeå had 300 volunteers, Mons had 7,500 volunteers, Plzeň had 515 volunteers, San Sebastián had 513 regular volunteers, Wrocław had 2,000 volunteers, Aarhus 4,535, Paphos 350, Leeuwarden 1,500, Matera 600, Esch-sur-Alzette 386 and Rijeka 462. Stakeholders highlighted how their volunteer programmes had firstly been instrumental in helping them deliver a successful ECoC programme but also how these programmes had helped instil a sense of ownership of the ECoC among active citizens of the host city. The box below provides some examples of successful initiatives implemented by ECoCs to gather the community around shared goals and foster its engagement.

Box 2. Examples of volunteering initiatives and their results

Aarhus 2017 embraced the theme 'Let's Rethink!' and placed a strong emphasis on citizen engagement and activism. One of the most tangible outcomes of Aarhus 2017 was the volunteer programme, known as the 'ReThinkers'¹⁹. This programme successfully mobilized 4,535 volunteers, who played a crucial role in the ECoC events and activities. The volunteer programme not only strengthened citizens' engagement throughout the year but also left a lasting legacy. The satisfaction rate among volunteers was very high, at around 95%, and the programme continues

¹⁹ <https://www.visitaarhus.com/corporate/volunteer-aarhus/about-rethinkers-and-volunteer-organisation>

to thrive with 2,000 active members in 2024. The experience was considered so successful that it inspired other ECoCs to develop similar processes.

Kaunas 2022 also demonstrated successful approaches to volunteering through its 'Culturists' programme, which saw the engagement of over 1,500 volunteers, including 107 trained team leaders. The culturists remain still active today through a self-sustained association. Moreover, the body of knowledge that emerged from their experience is conserved in the form of a handbook²⁰ that future ECoCs can use as a benchmark when preparing their volunteering programmes.

Following the end of **Galway 2020**, volunteers, also known as 'Wave Makers', stated in a local survey undertaken at the end of the year and presented in their local evaluation (see Section 1.5) that their expectations were largely met and that they were able to help in the success of the programme whilst also learning about their connection to Europe with 97% agreeing that 'I felt I was able to do something for the Galway community' and 85% agreeing that 'I learnt more about Europe and Galway's European cultural connections'. Many volunteers pledged to continue to volunteer either as a Wave Maker or within a cultural or community organisation, showcasing the community and cultural impact of the programme on not only attendees but also the staff. Today, the Wave Maker programme²¹ is still active in assisting cultural projects and organisations in Galway as well as facilitating collaborative projects and volunteer exchanges with other European Capitals of Culture to maintain a strong European network²².

Supporting participation through stronger cultural infrastructure

This short sub-section highlights the extent to which participation in culture has been helped by ECoCs investing in new cultural buildings and infrastructure, such as a new theatre or cultural venue.

The ECoC also helped widen participation in culture by investing in new cultural venues and sites, which in turn helped increase the number of people wanting and able to access culture. Evaluation results have highlighted a range of new infrastructure projects that have given host cities new or improved cultural offers and, in turn, helped attract newer types of participants. Budget data from eight ECoC set out in the local evaluations (see Section 1.5), who collected relevant data, shows that **between 2013 and 2022 a total of €1.3 billion new infrastructure projects were developed before or during the ECoC year**. An example of a new venue developed for an ECoC year includes Marseille with the Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée (MUCEM), which was part of a €600 million investment by public and private authorities in the city of Marseille and was the first national museum opened in France outside the Paris region. MUCEM was mentioned in the Marseille application as a key cultural infrastructure project in line with the ECoC's focus on the Mediterranean area. Another example was in Košice, where the city authority invested in the Kasárne Kulturpark and the Kunsthalle/Hall of Art. Stakeholders, who were linked to ECoCs that contained a large infrastructure project, often highlighted how a new building gave a focal point or 'centre piece' for their ECoC and acted as a tangible project they could highlight, when discussing issues including impact and legacy. In return, the ECoC often helped raise awareness of the new venues opening just before or during the title year. For example, the ECoC 2016 in Wrocław contributed to the considerable success of New Forum for Music (NFM) concert hall (opened in September 2015) in attracting audiences in its first full year of operation. During 2016, the NFM held 2,000 events, more than twice the number than in previous years in the old venue, many of which were formally part of the ECoC programme and co-financed by the ECoC delivery organisation. These events at the NFM attracted audiences of over 500,000 in 2016 – substantially higher than at the old venue.

²⁰ <https://kaunas2022.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Body-of-Evidence.pdf>

²¹ <https://galway2020.ie/en/volunteering/>

²² The number of volunteers currently involved in the programme is not available.

The contribution analysis highlights further analysis on whether the ECoC tends to lead to a greater investment in cultural infrastructure. A summary of this is found below and explained further in the analysis.

Box 3. Contribution analysis hypothesis: Implementation of activities to raise funds and invest in cultural infrastructure

The evidence supporting this hypothesis, which states that title cities implement activities to raise funds and invest in the city's cultural and tourism infrastructure in preparation for and during their tenure as an ECoC, is categorised as moderate to strong. This conclusion is derived from various sources of data and evaluation tasks.

Data from local evaluations (see Section 1.5) show that of the ECoC delivered over the 2013-2022 period around 40% had a major cultural infrastructure project included in their cultural programme. This included new or significantly improved theatres, museums, music venues, galleries as well as more flexible cultural spaces for host cities. Almost all ECoC within the study period had some infrastructure works mentioned in their local evaluations, although this was often linked to associated policy themes such as improvements to transport, public space or green space. Stakeholders tended to highlight that although the associated improvements to non-culture related infrastructure were considered part of the overall improvement to the ECoC city, they were not inherently reliant on the city achieving ECoC status and would have progressed in its absence.

Consultation activities and case studies highlight numerous examples of successful investments in cultural infrastructure linked to ECoC. For instance, cities like Kaunas, Rijeka, Matera, Novi Sad, Marseille and Wrocław made significant cultural infrastructure investments, which were directly associated with ECoC preparations. Stakeholders did, however, often talk about issues of delays and increases in projected costs associated to these new cultural infrastructure projects and that these projects tended to take a disproportionate amount of time and create a large amount of press interest compared to other (often larger) parts of the ECoC cultural programme.

The trend for investing in new or improved cultural infrastructure as part of the ECoC programme does seem to be diminishing for more recent ECoC studied as part of this work. ECoC such as Marseille in 2013 and Wrocław in 2016 saw large infrastructure projects taking place whilst more recent ECoC (e.g. Matera in 2019 and Novi Sad in 2022) also included new cultural buildings but they were much smaller in budget and ambition.

2.1.1.3. Strengthening the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors

This objective of the ECoC action aims to ensure that the cultural and creative sectors (CCS) within host cities and surrounding areas are stronger and more robust, and that the capacity and skills of the latter are built as a consequence of the ECoC action.

Desk research of local evaluation reports shows that about half of the ECoCs between 2013 and 2022 made a **concerted effort to invest in capacity-building projects to develop their local CCS**. Activities identified to strengthen the CCS included various grant and loan projects to finance the sectors (Esch-sur-Alzette, Kaunas, Leeuwarden, Marseille, Plzeň and Riga), training schemes on issues such as business planning, marketing, commercialisation and digitisation (Marseille, Košice, Riga, Mons, San Sebastián, Wrocław, Paphos and Galway) as well as projects to encourage local CCS organisations to bid for and deliver contracts linked to the delivery of the ECoC year (Paphos, Leeuwarden, Valetta, Matera, Plovdiv, Kaunas and Esch-sur-Alzette). Limited data was collected by ECoCs to understand the impact of this support. However, illustrative examples²³ of where this capacity-building activity helped strengthen the local CCS were noted. For instance, local evaluations show (see Section 1.5) that 40% of Wrocław's CCS saw increases in their

²³ Local evaluations did not have a common or similar measurement to demonstrate an average or overall scale or impact of capacity building support provided by ECoC in a collective way.

turnover during the celebrations, 62% of Košice's CCS saw increases in the skills levels of staff during the ECoC year, 58% of Umeå's CCS felt that their skills and capacity were stronger after the ECoC year and 38% of Umeå's CCS secured a contract linked to the delivery of the ECoC cultural programme.

Box 4. Capacity-building and knowledge transfer in Elefsina (Eleusis2023)

Beyond the temporary spikes in tourism and hospitality sector revenues, the most notable achievements of Eleusis2023's audience development department lay in the processes implemented to foster citizen engagement and a sense of local 'ownership' of the ECoC. According to the interviews conducted in the framework of the evaluation, the delivery team was primarily composed of professionals from Athens and beyond, making it crucial to gradually transfer the ownership of the ECoC initiative to local civic groups, such as CulTerra, which emerged from the main programme. Therefore, the team placed the right emphasis on equipping local associations with the skills and tools needed to recognise and sustain the cultural value within Elefsina. Notably, according to the local evaluation (see Section 1.5), 32% of the programme was dedicated to training and networking activities for artists, cultural professionals, and the general public, with an estimated 5,355 beneficiaries between 2017 and 2023. These initiatives aimed to ensure the programme's long-term impact by aligning it with the needs of the local community through active listening and mapping. Stimulating these bottom-up processes is regarded by interviewees as one of Elefsina's greatest successes, laying the groundwork for a sustainable cultural legacy.

It is worth noting that around half of the ECoC studied did not have a **specific support programme in place to help develop the capacity of the local CCS**. Stakeholders highlighted that they tended to rely on local CCS organisations receiving funding to deliver ECoC-related activity, which in turn helped develop their capacity rather than explicitly implementing an intervention to support the sector to strengthen their skills. The very fact that a multi-million-euro cultural programme was taking place in the city meant that the local CCS would see benefits flowing from it. However, evidence from the local evaluations (see Section 1.5) of some of the smaller ECoCs including Paphos, Plovdiv and Plzeň suggested that this natural trickle-down of benefits did not always automatically take place and that some of the local CCS did not either receive funding to deliver a cultural activity or did not receive contracts linked to its delivery (e.g. the supply of lighting for a large event). Evaluations in smaller ECoC of Paphos and Plzeň (see Section 1.5) highlighted that larger companies in the CCS from outside of the host city were more successful than local firms in gaining contracts as local firms lacked the resources and skills to compete in various tendering processes.

On a more positive note, findings also highlight that the **ECoC project helps generate stronger networking within the local CCS as a consequence of being involved in an ECoC year**. Local CCS organisations often highlighted that **ECoC helped establish either a formal or informal cultural ecosystem in their city and encouraged them to work together to design and deliver cultural content**. Activities designed by ECoC to specifically stimulate collaborations among the CCS included establishing cultural networks in host cities, setting out a specific selection criterion in various ECoC calls for funding to make CCS organisations work in collaboration with one another and also establishing various opportunities for CCS organisations to meet and establish business connections. Stakeholders interviewed, therefore, felt that the ECoC was a good vehicle to help establish a stronger space within the ECoC city, with members of this network all working together for one common goal linked to the successful delivery of the ECoC.

Box 5. Capacity-building and internationalisation in Novi Sad

Novi Sad had a clear ambition to strengthen the capacity of local cultural institutions. Project 33²⁴ was an ambitious project that provided a 12-month-long capacity-building programme to equip all cultural institutions and organisations in Novi Sad with five-year-long strategic plans. The project was run by the City Administration for Culture and the UNESCO Department at the University of Arts in Belgrade. European and international cooperation also strengthened the international outreach of local cultural operators, working with nearly 300 foreign partners and around 1,700 foreign artists across 45 countries. This was supported by over 40 open calls for artist exchanges, inviting foreign artists to visit Novi Sad and offering local artists opportunities to travel abroad through Artist in Residence programmes.

Results also show that delivering an ECoC greatly helped to **strengthen local talent within the local CCS** through the implementation of often hundreds of cultural projects at a different scale than previously experienced. Local ECoC evaluations often highlighted how the ECoC gave the local CCS an opportunity to showcase their work to bigger audiences, with bigger budgets and higher quality productions or works. For example, evaluations in Wrocław, Aarhus, Košice, Kaunas and Galway all highlighted how the local CCS saw a jump in their skills and track record attached to putting on bigger and more sophisticated productions, fuelled by the much larger budgets that hosting an ECoC allowed. Skills identified as being developed in the local CCS included ticketing and commercialisation, marketing to international audiences and digitisation as well as more technical skills such as video production, lighting and sound engineering.

Finally, the **local CCS in host cities were also strengthened financially as a consequence of being involved in their ECoC**. As stated earlier, data shows that a typical ECoC spends an average of around €50 million in the preparation and implementation of its cultural year and although not all of this finance trickles down to the local CCS, stakeholders stated that hosting an ECoC greatly boosted the financial position of local CCS. This financial boost came in the form of three main areas. Firstly, though the CCS receiving grant funding to design and implement a cultural activity as part of the cultural programme, secondly through the local CCS receiving contracts linked to the supply of goods and services and finally through cultural organisations such as museums and galleries seeing higher levels of visitors and tourists who were in the city because of the ECoC. As noted earlier and as way of an illustration, 40% of Wrocław's CCS saw increases in their turnover during the ECoC year, cultural venues in Aarhus saw a 17% increase in visitors during their ECoC year compared to the previous year, 38% of Umeå's CCS secured a contract linked to the delivery of the ECoC cultural programme and 47% of the CCS in Mons stated they were more financially secure during the ECoC year.

Growth in employment

This short sub-section looks at the link between the ECoC and growth in employment in the host city. Although a generally important factor when considering impact, most host cities did not collect data on how many jobs were created by the ECoC. This was mainly because they did not ask projects to state if and how many jobs their funding created and also, perhaps interestingly, did not necessarily see employment creation being a key objective of the programme. Nevertheless, the contribution analysis done as part of this evaluation captured the extent to which increased investment in the city's cultural and tourist infrastructure, activities and events led to employment opportunities in title cities (see Annex 9 for more details).

²⁴ <https://novisad2022.rs/en/project-33/>

Box 6. Contribution analysis hypothesis: Through increased investment in the city's cultural and tourist infrastructure, activities and events, employment opportunities in areas related to culture and tourism improve in title cities

The evidence supporting this hypothesis according to which increased investment in cultural and tourist infrastructure, activities, and events leads to improved employment opportunities in areas related to culture and tourism, is relative moderate. This suggests that although jobs are created, there is less evidence that the number of new jobs is more than modest in scale.

Whilst funding was sometimes directed towards infrastructure projects (which often create jobs), most funding was spent on delivering cultural activity. This activity tended to be exclusively delivered by existing organisations with existing staff, with less 'new' employment being created. If local organisations needed extra resources to deliver their ECoC project, they tended to source this from the surrounding region or nearby cities rather than employing additional people. Their ECoC projects were also temporary and took place during the ECoC year only, sometimes as one-offs (i.e. one exhibition), which again did not require them to employ additional staff. The ECoC did create extra demand in the tourism sector as visitor numbers swelled during the ECoC year, but this was again seen as a temporary rather than permanent spike in demand, meaning local tourism-related businesses did not employ additional staff. As stated above, most local evaluations did not measure impacts in terms of jobs created although a small number did. For instance, Košice saw an estimated €35.8 million in visitor expenditures and the creation of 1,449 full-time equivalent jobs. The ECoC helped create 1,965 full-time jobs in the Central Denmark Region. These very positive but isolated results indicate that a lack of data to support this hypothesis could be a factor explaining why the evidence to support the hypothesis is relatively moderate.

There is evidence in the literature that supports a moderate rise in employment caused by the need to establish a team to implement the ECoC in each host city. Examples include Riga's increase from two to 33 staff members in their cultural policy team in the city administration during the ECoC year, Valletta's increase from two to 40 staff members in their city administration, and Kaunas employing 143 staff members during the title year to implement their ECoC. However, these figures were relatively small in proportion to the overall size of the local cultural and creative sectors.

Finally, there is evidence that around half of the ECoCs covered supported capacity-building activity to support the growth of the CCS, which in turn may increase jobs. Although some ECoCs supported capacity-building programmes to help the local CCS to grow, the outcomes for these were generally seen in terms of increasing skills rather than increases in the number of employees working in supported organisations.

Drawing on limited data but also the nature of the ECoC (temporary in nature, less focussed on infrastructure activity, projects tended to be delivered by existing organisations and staff) the evidence to support a hypothesis that ECoCs create employment numbers in host cities is relatively moderate.

2.1.1.4. Raising the title-holding cities' international profile through culture

The final strategic objective of the ECoC action relates to raising the international profile of the host cities through the delivery of a strong cultural programme that puts host cities and their cultural programme on the international map.

Analysis from those ECoCs which collected relevant data shows that **an ECoC year can increase visitor numbers in a host city by around 30-40%** and most of the ECoC cities assessed as part of this study²⁵ often noted that their ECoC year had helped stimulate their **highest number of tourists ever recorded** (for example, Marseille attracted a record number of 11 million visits during their 2013 ECoC year and San Sebastián also saw an extra 1 million visitors during their host year). Perhaps unsurprisingly, smaller and/or less

²⁵ Except for Galway and Kaunas (taking place in the COVID pandemic), Kosice and Umeå.

touristic ECoC cities saw a more noticeable increase in their visitor numbers because of their ECoC: with Matera, Leeuwarden, Paphos and Mons all seeing increases of up to 50% in their visitor figures (e.g. local evaluations, see Section 1.5). Mons saw an extra 100,000 visitors to the city during their ECoC year, which was a 40% increase from the previous year whilst Marseille and Riga saw visitor figures increase by around 5% during their ECoC year.

Analysis of data presented in local evaluations (see Section 1.5) seems to also show that between **25-35% of visitors of ECoC host cities come from abroad**. As noted above, it is interesting to note that the largest increases in international visitors came from cities that saw themselves as being more *off the beaten track* when it came to international tourism. Cities like Leeuwarden and Plzeň both highlighted that their ECoC gave them a 'hook' for promoting themselves on the international tourism market and a reason why international tourists were more likely to visit their cities during the ECoC year. The analysis also shows that the ECoC greatly increased the coverage of title cities in the international press and travel journals. Small but useful examples of this were identified in Umeå and Wrocław, where local evaluations (see Section 1.5) reported that the number of mentions the cities had in international press travel journals increased by 120-150% before or during their ECoC year. These two cities highlighted that they were often overlooked as a destination for international tourists, who tended not to consider them, especially when looking for visits that had a culturally rich focus. Each ECoC often targeted international tourists through specific initiatives such as attending international travel shows, developing partnerships with international travel companies (e.g. Cruise Ship Operators) and hosting foreign travel journalists to promote their city and further boost their profile on an international scale.

Data on the amount of international media coverage generated by ECoC shows that the title year tends to stimulate a large volume of additional media coverage before and during the ECoC year. Data from the local evaluations (see Section 1.5) shows that **a typical ECoC year generates anything between 10,000 and 58,000 extra mentions or articles about the host city** as a direct consequence of the city hosting an ECoC. Examples picked up in local evaluations include:

- The Marseille ECoC saw a total of 10,757 mentions in travel media before and during their ECoC year that was valued at €37million in media coverage (if this media coverage was paid for);
- San Sebastián saw 18,605 mentions in national and international media in its ECoC year alone;
- Aarhus saw 27,723 media mentions in its ECoC year;
- Matera had 58,000 articles produced on its ECoC in national and international newspapers and journals before and during its ECoC year;
- Rijeka had 59,853 media reports from national and international media before or during its ECoC year.

Although most ECoC did not collate monitoring data on the types of media outlets that published articles on their ECoC programme, those that did (Riga, Leeuwarden Aarhus, Košice, Kaunas) highlighted how the outlets had high levels of global reach including the National Geographic, the New York Times, The Times (London), Rough Guides and Condé Nast Traveller.

A higher international profile of host cities also came from the **stronger international collaboration** that took place between stakeholders found in the host city and those found in other countries. Again, stakeholders, particularly in the smaller host cities such as Umeå and Paphos, highlighted that the international profile of their local artistic communities tended to be limited before the ECoC year took place and that the presence of the ECoC gave them the hook to encourage partners from other countries to work with local cultural players. International artistic exchanges, foreign visits and the swapping of works (e.g. local

sculptures and paintings) were commonplace within various cultural programmes of the ECoC studied although ECoC did not tend to collect data on this issue.

Therefore, stakeholders tended to highlight how their ECoC status raised the profile of their cultural scene and increased the attention international stakeholders gave to their city and its cultural players. The ECoC gave host cities visibility on a European and sometimes global scale and made them a much larger destination for culture from international audiences seeking a cultural experience.

2.1.1.5. External factors, issues and challenges

This part of the effectiveness section highlights a number of issues and challenges that influence the effectiveness of the ECoC, particularly looking at internal and external factors that affect the success and progress of the ECoC during its planning and implementation stages.

Economic and financial constraints

Interviews with city-level stakeholders consistently highlighted the **financial strain** as one of the most significant challenges of bidding for and implementing the ECoC title. As noted earlier, ECoC delivered over the 2013-2022 period had average budgets of around €50 million, although budgets did range from around €8 million to €100 million, showing that ECoC programmes can be delivered with very different levels of funding. Even though city-level stakeholders recognised the benefits of hosting an ECoC year, they often said that culture was competing with other issues within the city's policy agenda, including poverty, transport and health, which also required investment as well as political attention. Limited direct financial support from the European Union and national Governments was also highlighted as a financial issue recognising that national policymakers also had competing issues to address and support. Financial constraints and pressures were seen to dilute the overall impact of the ECoC year, as cities were unable to deliver the full range of proposed projects, affecting the quality and scope of the events. This was partially evidenced in the difference between the (aspirational) budgets laid out in the bid book and the actual final budgets with analysis showing that the **average ECoC budget was around 15% lower than levels anticipated in their bid books** as they struggled to secure funding from a variety of sources.

Capacity

As stated earlier, analysis shows that an ECoC cultural programme typically had 1,000-1,200 separate activities during the year, which was often 300-400% higher than a non-ECoC year. A typical budget for an ECoC was also in the region of €50 million. Planning and implementing this scale of extra-cultural activity was seen as a significant challenge both in terms of logistics and human resources. Stakeholders highlighted that, even in the larger host cities, they often did not have the capacity to deliver an ECoC programme with existing human resources and capacity and that teams had to be established by recruiting a new set of staff specifically to run the ECoC year. No common data exists on the number of staff that were needed to develop and run a typical ECoC, but those who did have these records tended to need anything between 15-35 additional people just in the core ECoC delivery team alone. Stakeholders also highlighted the need for human resources and capacity in local partners and civic leaders who had to support various ECoC-related structures (e.g. committees and steering groups) over the years preceding the ECoC year and the host year itself. The meetings covered issues ranging from infrastructure development, funding allocations, equality, auditing and finance and legacy planning, meaning capacity from other partners and departments outside of the ECoC delivery team was often consumed with the work of the ECoC year.

Stakeholders and local evaluations often highlighted that recruiting the core ECoC delivery team was a major challenge and the vast majority of ECoCs seemed to have been late in recruiting the ECoC lead (e.g. Chief Executive, Managing Director). It is also interesting to note that stakeholders highlighted that although their core teams tended to have a strong cultural experience, there was a general lack of experience and roles put forward to cover the other dimensions needed for the successful delivery of the ECoC including finance, infrastructure development, evaluation and research and community development.

Political influences and governance challenges

Interviews with EU and national-level stakeholders have emphasised that political influence is often a major external factor affecting the ECoC initiative, both in positive and negative ways. Stakeholders from various cities often highlighted the difficulty of aligning political goals and messages with the objectives of local ECoC and also the values and themes of the EU. Navigating national and local politics was seen as being crucial for the successful execution of ECoC programmes, and there were a number of examples where local political or civic leaders' agendas did not always align with the broader European values central to the action. Examples of where local politics 'interfered' with ECoC activities included local political figures wanting certain local organisations to receive support through the ECoC budget, local civic leaders sometimes wanting to be on key decision-making bodies and local politicians also commenting on key themes or projects of the ECoC programme (e.g. co-existence and unity) in a public way (e.g. via local or social media). Two more recent ECoCs also noted that the rise in power of politicians linked to the far right at national level was also affecting the level of interest they received towards culture in general.

Box 7. Kaunas and limited political support

One lingering challenge for Kaunas2022 was the scepticism diffused among public authorities. Due to the lack of strong support from Kaunas municipality, the ECoC operated with one of the smallest budgets for a title-holding city since 2013, forcing the team to highly engage the local business community to raise additional funds. Despite the challenges, they managed to secure €2,242,262—nearly 7% of the overall budget—from the private sector, outperforming several previous ECoCs in the percentage of private fundraising. Nevertheless, the overall small budget reflected the limited political interest, its disenchant and the lack of trust in the cultural sector. The municipality's disengagement was further symbolised by the failure to renovate a single piece of cultural infrastructure in time for the title year.

However, political involvement was equally seen in a positive light by many ECoC programmes. Political figures were often instrumental in getting behind their local ECoC and embraced the opportunity and spotlight the ECoC year gave to their city or municipality. Many local politicians helped to steer additional (city and regional level) funding to support their ECoC, some became ambassadors at the national and international level for their ECoC, while others even became volunteers to help deliver various projects on the ground. Nearly all stakeholders interviewed felt that without the right political backing, an ECoC would find it hard to deliver a successful programme overall, and even more to ensure some kind of legacy.

Box 8. Aarhus' multi-level approach to ECoC governance

The governance model of Aarhus2017 involved a multi-level cooperation mechanism, as well as a decentralised production agency. This governance model sought to involve the Central Denmark Region (one of five regions created in 2007 by a wider programme of reform at national level, and still missing internal cohesion at the time of the ECoC) and the various municipalities across the region beyond the municipality of Aarhus itself. That cooperation mechanism was largely built on detached staff from all local/regional authorities involved, which generated important impacts in

terms of skills development, and ensured most of the ECoC staff remained actively involved in designing and delivering the legacy of Aarhus2017.

Volunteering was also an integral part of the management model of Aarhus2017, with 4,535 volunteers – called ReThinkers – involved throughout participatory processes leading to the ECoC year. Beyond the number of volunteers, these participatory processes resulted in a high level of commitment throughout the ECoC year and beyond: the ReThinkers volunteer programme is still active and running, with still 2,000 active members in 2024.

Stakeholder engagement and community involvement

Discussions with stakeholders stressed the importance of involving a wide range of actors, including cultural organisations, political authorities and the general public, to build broad-based support for ECoC activities. The experience of Veszprém, Hungary, provides a clear illustration of these dynamics, including at the bidding stage, where the city's first attempt to bid for ECoC status in 2004 failed due to insufficient collaboration with key city stakeholders, including strategic developers, local artists, associations and universities²⁶. Learning from this experience, Veszprém (2023) restructured its approach, drawing inspiration from successful examples, like Marseille, by engaging with a broader network of stakeholders—including those from neighbouring counties and provinces.

Although it emerges from this example and others that ECoCs have generally been successful in engaging with a broad range of stakeholders, this again shows the large resources that are required to ensure this success factor comes to fruition.

City size

Evaluation findings show that the size of the city plays a critical role in its ability to fully exploit the potential of the ECoC. The above sections have so far mentioned that the size of the city influences a wide variety of issues linked to budgets, size of the cultural programmes, audience figures, and capacity.

Analysis shows that host cities of ECoC have generally got smaller over time. This is, however, partly explained by Member States recently joining the EU simply having smaller cities compared to countries such as Germany, France, Italy and Spain, meaning this trend links more to the population of the country (and therefore the existence or non-existence of bigger cities in the country) rather than a specific decision by countries to choose smaller cities as hosts for their ECoC. However, it is rare for ECoC to be either a capital city or the largest city in the Member State with the table below showing that only two out of the 20 ECoC between 2013 and 2022 were the largest city in the country. In smaller countries, the titleholder typically ranks as the 2nd, 3rd or 4th largest city by population. Conversely, in more populated countries such as Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands, ECoC titleholders often fall outside the top ten cities in terms of population, with the exception of France (Marseille) and Poland (Wrocław) (see Table 4 below). It is interesting to note that when national stakeholders were asked about why this is the case, they, perhaps unsurprisingly, highlighted that it was simply the strength of the winning bid that was the main factor in awarding a city ECoC status. Many highlighted that they did not specifically target smaller cities for their ECoC and that their national selection process did not have a bias towards or against the size of city.

²⁶ Gyula Porga, How Veszprém and the Region Became European Capital of Culture, 2023 <https://veszprembalaton2023.hu/blob/pogra-gyula-how-veszprem-and-the-region-became-european-capital-of-culture.pdf>

Table 4. ECoC host and rank of city by population

City	Country	Ranking in country
Marseille	France	2nd largest
Košice	Slovakia	2nd largest
Riga	Latvia	1st largest and capital city
Umeå	Sweden	13th largest
Mons	Belgium	12th largest
Plzeň	Czech Republic	4th largest
San Sebastián	Spain	34th largest
Wrocław	Poland	3rd largest
Aarhus	Denmark	2nd largest
Paphos	Cyprus	4th largest
Leeuwarden	Netherlands	20th largest
Valletta	Malta	1st largest and capital city
Matera	Italy	61st largest
Plovdiv	Bulgaria	2nd largest
Rijeka	Croatia	3rd largest
Galway	Ireland	4th largest
Kaunas	Lithuania	2nd largest
Esch-sur-Alzette	Luxembourg	2nd largest
Novi Sad	Serbia	2nd largest

Source: Ecorys analysis of population data, 2024

Despite most stakeholders stating that it was a challenge to design and implement an ECoC, regardless of whether they were linked to a large or small city (see capacity section above), interviews with stakeholders from larger cities, did recognise the advantages their cities had to implement their ECoC project due to their established infrastructure, broader networks, and greater resources both financially and in terms of human resources. These factors enabled larger cities to better manage the additional activities linked to hosting an ECoC and the scale of these cities and their existing cultural offer allowed them to deliver higher-profile activities compared to their smaller counterparts. Conversely, stakeholders from smaller cities, such as Paphos and Plzeň highlighted the unique challenges they faced in implementing the ECoC programme. Smaller cities often struggled with more limited

financial and human resources, had less capacity within their cultural sector to deliver larger and higher profile projects and also had less existing attention from both the culture and tourism sectors from outside of their country, which made it more difficult to attract their attention.

Views from national and EU focus groups also emphasised the importance of considering city size in safeguarding the ECoC brand and ECoC quality. Participants highlighted that the increasing selection of smaller cities could pose a threat to the ECoC brand, especially if large cities are not chosen for several consecutive years. This trend might create the perception that the ECoC action favours smaller cities, even though these cities may not always have the capacity to deliver the comprehensive and impactful cultural programming expected of the title.

However, there is no quality benchmark to compare the different ECoC programmes that have been delivered in recent times, and it is only a perception that small host cities put on lower profile ECoC programmes that could be considered lower in quality. Examples like Matera and San Sebastián show that small to medium-sized cities can still make a substantial impact despite their size. Analysis of ECoC budgets shows that Matera spent €913 per citizen and San Sebastián €474 per citizen on their programme and reflects how smaller cities can still allocate significant resources to cultural activities. These cities often achieved strong results in key indicators in terms of audience figures and their evaluations were generally positive. For instance, Matera, with 60,000 residents, hosted 1,300 events, translating to 21.7 events per 1,000 citizens. San Sebastián, with 188,000 residents, organised 3,475 events, or 18.5 per 1,000 citizens. In contrast, larger cities like Riga and Wrocław hosted only 0.79 and 0.63 events per 1,000 citizens, respectively, meaning although their budgets were higher, the depth of reach of the ECoC was less than their smaller counterparts.

Table 5. Analysis of city size against key indicators

City	Population (2023)	Total Events	Events ²⁷ per 1,000 Citizens	Total Participants	Participants per Citizen	Final Budget (EUR)	Budget per Citizen (EUR)
Riga	621,000	488	0.79	1.6M	2.6	€27.3M	€44
Wrocław	674,000	424	0.63	5.2M	7.7	€86.4M	€128
Kaunas	289,000	4,514	15.6	1.7M	5.9	€32.88M	€114
Leeuwarden	127,107	800	6.5	5.4M	43.9	€104.6M	€850
San Sebastián	188,000	3,475	18.5	1.08M	5.7	€89M	€474
Matera	60,000	1,300	21.7	500,000	8.3	€54.8M	€913

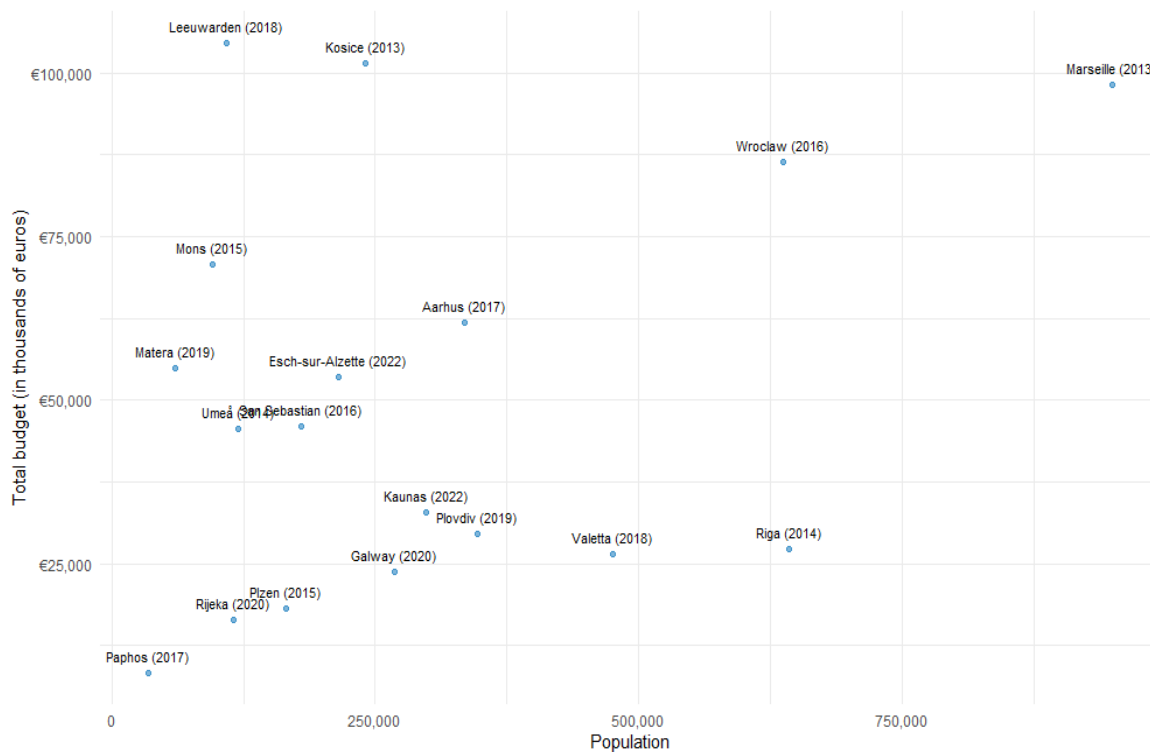
Source: Ecorys analysis, 2024

It is also interesting to note that a smaller host city does not always mean a small overall budget for their ECoC programme. The graph below plots the population of the host city and the overall budget that was spent on their ECoC. It shows that there is no strong correlation between the two axes with a larger host city not necessarily having a larger budget (with most of the host cities being clustered around 250,000 inhabitants and less

²⁷ Please note that an 'event' was defined differently for different ECoC meaning this analysis is for general reflections only.

than €75 million for a budget, with a strong proportion of an ECoC budget coming anyway from the national or regional public purses). This again shows that a small city does not equate to smaller audiences, smaller budgets and to a partial extent, smaller impacts and benefits.

Figure 2. Total budget vs population size



Source: Ecorys analysis, 2024

Legacy planning and sustainability

This sub-section highlights effectiveness findings in relation to the legacy and sustainability of hosting an ECoC. It, therefore, looks at the extent to which any benefits are felt beyond the ECoC year itself in the medium to longer term. The section largely draws on the qualitative views of stakeholders rather than drawing on (the unfortunately limited) data that is collected by host cities on the longer-term impacts of the ECoC and their issues, such as cultural sector growth, employment in the sector and sustained growth in tourism numbers. It is worth highlighting that most ECoCs did not continue to research and evaluate the effects of the activity beyond the host year. This, therefore, means data for evaluations such as this have less quantitative data to draw on and suggests that city administrations either do not have the resources or are not inclined to understand how the ECoC has a wider effect beyond the year itself. This sub-section, therefore, has an evidence gap in data to quantify the longer-term impact of the action, which is a finding to consider in its own right.

In overall terms, a lack of legacy and longer-term impacts is generally a key issue that most stakeholders highlighted as a weak aspect of the ECoC action. Firstly, there was a general lack of legacy planning to help organise and maximise the impacts of the ECoC year. Even in ECoCs that had large resources and budgets and were considered (by local evaluations) as being particularly impactful, there was a general lack of legacy planning taking place with most of those responsible for delivering the ECoC being generally focussed on implementing a large and complex cultural programme during their ECoC year. Although all stakeholders interviewed as part of the evaluation recognised the importance of the legacy,

most had to prioritise the actual delivery of the year itself recognising its significant scale and breadth.

The evaluation has also found that nearly all of the ECoC teams responsible for delivering their programme were not usually in post beyond 1-3 months after their ECoC year. Employment contracts of most (not all) staff members usually ran until Quarter 1 of the following year, meaning their roles tended to come to an end by the month of March of the year post their ECoC programme. Although this was largely driven by their role and post being associated with a specific period of time (i.e. the ECoC year), some suggested that this discouraged a longer-term perspective linked to legacy as most staff members knew they would no longer have a role beyond the host year nor would have responsibility to ensure its longer-term impacts.

Desk research as part of the evaluation also found it difficult to locate clear legacy or sustainability strategies attached to each ECoC. Although some of these strategies were located during interviews, around half of all ECoCs across the 2013-2022 period did not have an official and published legacy strategy. While this does not necessarily mean that these ECoCs were uninterested in sustainability issues, it does mean that the ECoCs were not always establishing formal longer-term plans to help encourage cultural activity beyond their host year. It is also worth noting that some stakeholders highlighted that a specific legacy plan for their ECoC was less necessary, as it was generally incorporated in the wider cultural strategic plans of the city, which tended to highlight priorities and activities associated with culture for the period beyond the ECoC year.

Box 9. Kaunas and the transfer of the legacy

The CEO of Kaunas2022 explains in the Body of Evidence²⁸ that Kaunas 2022 decided not to retain its delivery body because 'there were already over 60 active cultural organisations and festivals operating in Kaunas and Kaunas District, so there was no need to add another institution to the list'. Instead, the continuation of many festivals and activities created in the context of the ECoC project was handed over to Kaunas2022's cultural partners. For example, the CityTelling Festival is now managed by the Kaunas City Museum, while Fluxus Labs, the Courtyard Festival, and the Fluxus Festival were transferred to the Kaunas Artists' House. The CulturEUkraine centre has been entrusted to Kaunas Biennial, and the Contemporary Neighbourhoods programme has been distributed among Kaunas District's cultural centres. The innovative Nemuno7, a dredger turned into a cultural garden, is now managed by the Kaunas District Tourism and Business Information Centre.

Stakeholders also mentioned that legacy plans were also impacted greatly by a loss of momentum once the ECoC year had finished. Maintaining interest in the ECoC (and culture) from politicians, those responsible for city-wide strategies, those linked to other city policy areas (e.g. infrastructure, employment) and national press was more difficult when the 'buzz' and stimuli of the ECoC year was over. Although interest in cultural policy certainly grew because of the ECoC being hosted in a city, as the central stimuli and focal point of the ECoC passed, it became harder to maintain interest in the medium to long-term. For example, stakeholders from Marseille mentioned the difficulties they encountered in sustaining stakeholder cooperation without the 'focus' that the ECoC year presented and even though much cultural activity took place after the host year, it had less profile because it was not associated with a wider collective focus of the ECoC.

It is useful to note that stakeholders highlighted that the ECoC 'year' was indeed a year (preceded by four years of preparation) and not a long-term programme that cities were

²⁸ Kaunas 2022 (2023) Body of Evidence p. 295, retrieved from: <https://kaunas2022.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Body-of-Evidence.pdf>

expected to deliver despite the obligation at bidding stage to include it in the local longer development strategy. The ECoC action is designed to give two host cities a year (three in some years) in which to deliver a cultural programme that helps, for instance, widen participation and encourage a European focus and international dimension in their cultural programme. As a consequence, the cities responded to this by developing a year-long programme that may have ambitions for generating longer-term effects but was primarily focussed on a twelve-month set of cultural activities. It was, therefore, sometimes seen as unfair to measure success against any wider long-term impact when this was not the original intention of the ECoC action. Stakeholders also tended to highlight that because the ECoC year was so large (supporting an average of 1,200 activities), it was never going to be possible to maintain anywhere the scale of cultural activity seen during the year.

Stakeholders that had developed strong infrastructure projects linked to their ECoC found it easier to highlight clear longer-term impacts compared to those whose ECoC tended to have little or no investment in infrastructure. These infrastructure projects acted as a lasting part of host cities' cultural offer and it is interesting to note that all the developments supported by ECoCs delivered between 2013 and 2022, seem to be still open and are still delivering cultural activity in one form or another. An example of this is the MUCEM in Marseille that opened in June 2013 and is now one of the most visited museums in Marseille with 2 million visitors each year²⁹.

However, although the above reflections highlight some issues linked to legacy and although there is very little data available to measure longer-term impacts, the evaluation has found evidence of some cities setting up legacy bodies to carry on the work started by their ECoC. These independent bodies are found in Lille 3000, Arcadia in Leeuwarden and Mons2035, and are all examples of organisations or programmes established to run various cultural festivals or programmes post the ECoC. All these examples had their direct roots in the original ECoC programmes of these cities and were established as a result of the general success of the ECoC programme. Although these examples all differed, a typical example to demonstrate the legacy work of an ECoC is Arcadia in Leeuwarden, which was set up soon after their ECoC year in 2018. Arcadia is focussed on organising and implementing a 100-day cultural programme every three years post the ECoC (2022, 2025 and 2028), with each cultural programme having a budget of around €5-10 million (coming from public and private sources). The 2022 cultural programme consisted of a mix of international and national cultural operators, and many had their origins in cultural activity that took place in their 2018 ECoC year. Part of Arcadia's focus is on supporting grassroots development in culture, which again was a key area promoted in the original ECoC year that had a strong foundation on assisting local people to be both the consumers and producers of cultural activity linked to their ECoC. Another aspect worth mentioning is that Leeuwarden is participating in the Culture Next network, currently funded through Creative Europe, showcasing the legacy arrangements beyond the ECoC year.

Stakeholders also highlighted that the ECoC has had a positive impact on highlighting how culture is an important aspect of their city's development. Some host cities, in particular the largest host cities such as Riga and Marseille, already had a strong cultural offering and city strategies that encompassed a cultural dimension, but many did not, according to local stakeholders. Stakeholders, therefore, highlighted how their ECoC had been able to showcase to civic leaders, funders and local and national policymakers how culture could transform their city and how a cultural component within a broader city strategy was as important as issues such as employment, education and infrastructure. This point was

²⁹ From Museums website see [here](#).

difficult to measure and prove but was nonetheless highlighted by most of the stakeholders interviewed, who were responsible for the delivery of the ECoC.

2.1.1.6. *ECoC selection procedures*

Evidence collected shows that the current **ECoC selection criteria and process are overall welcomed by EU-level and national-level public bodies** working on the ECoC action. The following paragraphs explore specific aspects of the selection procedure, offering insights into its strengths and areas for improvement.

Selection criteria

The majority of interviewees from national-level public authorities indicate that the criteria are seen as well-designed, proportionate, fair and in line with the cultural policy at the national level. It is useful to note that even cities that were not selected³⁰ as an ECoC also felt the criteria were clear and explicit and, therefore, transparent in how cities were selected and not selected. ECoC and pre-selected city representatives also highlighted that the criteria are not too rigid and gave candidate cities enough freedom to be innovative within the broad confines of the selection process.

However, several **areas for improvement emerged** from the consultations conducted.

Some city-level stakeholders and representatives of national authorities noted that the selection criteria should better reflect the needs of smaller cities. In particular, existing criteria linked to expectations around infrastructure, or the European dimension were in particular seen to be **quite challenging for smaller cities** to deal with.

Interviewed stakeholders and focus groups suggested that the **selection criteria should place greater emphasis on legacy**. Although already considered in the current selection process, legacy seems to be a key sticking point that cities often struggle to deliver. Paying special attention to the sustainability of proposed projects and the community engagement plans at the selection stage could ensure a stronger legacy after the title year. However, giving more weight to the legacy plans should be balanced by realistic expectations in terms of budget and volume of cultural activities post-ECoC year. Furthermore, providing a better definition of the concept of legacy and clarifications around the related expectations would help cities in the preparation of their bids.

Another recurring issue highlighted by stakeholders was around the selection criterion linked to the **'European dimension'** of the ECoC. As noted earlier in this section, although there is evidence that existing ECoC programmes generally had good levels of a European dimension, bidding cities face some difficulties in grasping the meaning of this criterion and reflecting this dimension in their bid books. Consulted stakeholders stressed that while this criterion is strongly emphasised, it is not clearly presented, particularly in terms of what is meant in practice (i.e. what projects actually needed to do to have 'high levels of a European dimension'). Evaluations of past ECoCs also confirmed that, on several occasions, the European dimension was not fully understood and, therefore, remained too limited or at least insufficiently visible in their programmes. Furthermore, several EU and national stakeholders also raised the question of whether the very notion of 'European dimension' should be rethought and become a horizontal dimension, streamlined across all other selection criteria.

City-level stakeholders as well as panels' experts consulted also tended to highlight that the competition might wish to be much more open to the target area of an ECoC being

³⁰ Seven pre-selected cities were consulted out of forty.

something other than a city. This could include sub-regions, groups of towns or cities, or entire regions. Evidence from the **Wrocław ECoC 2016** case study illustrates the value of such an approach, as it **successfully included the Lower Silesia region in its initiatives**, extending the cultural impact beyond Wrocław itself, fostering a stronger and more sustainable legacy.

Although regions can be involved in an ECoC project under the current legal basis as a surrounding area, there is the need that the bid be driven by a specific candidate city. In this sense, a notion of 'cross-city', 'cross-region' or 'cross-border' cooperation could be worth considering in the future legal basis.

Finally, national-level stakeholders selected under the previous legal basis also felt that the **bid book requirements could be reduced in the application phase**. Bidding cities were often expected to provide very concrete details, which may not be entirely feasible six years in advance of the title year (even a year before the ECoC year, the programmes were still seen as being in the development phase by many stakeholders). While the importance of bidding cities demonstrating the existence of a cultural strategy and its connection to the ECoC project is a key criterion, the expectation of a detailed programme with specific artists can be challenging for bidding cities to meet. Even established cultural venues such as theatres tend not to plan that far ahead let alone other less traditional cultural providers such as community venues and more amateur productions. However, the absence of a programme at selection means that the panel must decide without knowing the cultural and artistic content of bidders. Additionally, a less defined programme in the bid book increases the risk that external pressures, including political ones, could alter the original vision, as it would not have been formally endorsed by the panel during the selection phase.

Selection process

The **selection procedure** prescribed by the 2014 Decision has generally been **viewed positively by stakeholders**, who recognised how the structured two-phase approach helps cities design bids and programmes that better match the action's objectives, such as promoting cultural diversity in Europe, showcasing the cultural features we share as Europeans and enhancing culture's role in local development. Among those who expressed an opinion (36 respondents) in the Public Consultation, the vast majority (67%) stated that the selection procedure worked very well (2 out of 36) or quite well (22 out of 36). In contrast, 31% (11 out of 36) felt it did not work that well, and one respondent considered that it did not work at all.

At the same time, however, the tight timeframe for submitting the first bid book (a minimum of ten months from the publication of the call for submission of applications) and, if pre-selected, the revised proposal (between seven to eight months) can be challenging for cities that lack resources and specific expertise. While many bidding cities make use of external experts to prepare their bids, this might risk skewing the competition depending on the expertise cities manage to acquire. Indeed, stakeholders consulted highlighted a trend towards the 'professionalisation' and possible 'standardisation' of the bid books, with the role of (international) experts and consultants becoming more prominent and a key factor in ensuring the bids' success. There is anecdotal evidence of cities failing their bid the first time but being successful the second time around supposedly thanks to the involvement of an international consultant with previous ECoC-related experience. However, this is not a confirmed causal link, as success may also result from other factors, such as the maturity and experience gained from the first application, and many bidding cities making use of international consultants' expertise are not successful in their attempt to secure the title. While knowledgeable experts can represent a real added value to cities' bids and help cities get an external (and often very beneficial) outlook on their strengths and weaknesses, this raises concern among some stakeholders that the ECoC competition is becoming a 'competition of experts'.

During the selection process, a minimum of two panel members, as well as representatives from the national authority managing the competition and from the Commission have the opportunity to visit the pre-selected cities before the selection committee comes together. These visits are expected to allow gathering additional information on the cities, understanding the infrastructure availabilities and getting to know the team behind the bid. Cities representatives and panel members have not raised concerns or issues in relation to these visits, suggesting that, overall, these are found useful and worth the time and financial investment.

Stakeholders also highlighted how the extended length of the selection process increased the risk of external factors affecting the competition. For instance, changes in political leadership at local level before the submission of the second bid book could, in theory, lead to a complete overhaul of the initial bid over which the city was pre-selected. Limiting the changes to the initial bid book could perhaps help mitigate this risk.

Finally, when it comes to the collaboration with and involvement of national ministries in the selection phase, in particular in terms of national funding allocation, stakeholders suggested that a formal agreement between designated cities, the European Commission and national Ministries could, in principle, enable some form of control by the panel and the European Commission on the respect and timing of the allocation of the foreseen national resources.

While some of these challenges might require modifying the selection process and criteria, softer measures such as, for instance, revising and expanding the guidance material available, could be enough to address some of the mentioned shortcomings.

Panel composition

The new composition of the selection panel³¹ has been viewed positively by consulted stakeholders, who noted that the shift to a more expert-driven approach contributed to reducing political influences and increasing objectivity during the selection process, resulting in improved governance and organisational effectiveness.

Stakeholders at the EU level highlighted the **panel's diversity as an advantage, enabling the inclusion of multiple viewpoints and expertise**. In this regard, and as further highlighted in section 2.1.2.4, stakeholders stressed the importance of ensuring the diversity of the panel composition in terms of the representation of minority groups, geographical diversity, and gender balance, as well as in terms of skills and competencies. The inclusion of representatives from the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), for instance, has been mentioned as a step in this direction as it broadens the panel's perspective by bringing the views of local and regional authorities and contributes to the assessment of candidate cities' capacity to manage events of the scope of ECoC. However, as the timing of the selection of experts is stacked across the different EU institutions, it is challenging to ensure coordination and that the required diversity is maintained.

Quality of key outputs

Overall, stakeholders agree that the panel has delivered quality outputs during the selection and monitoring procedure, effectively evaluating bids against the ECoC objectives and criteria. Stakeholders at the national level found the **panel supportive and knowledgeable**, highlighting its ability to monitor cities' progress and identify potential challenges. The involvement of a diverse group of experts allowed for a comprehensive evaluation process, with panel members offering constructive feedback to cities throughout the procedure. The quality of pre-selection and selection reports was generally praised for being straightforward, precise, and actionable, providing useful assessments and

³¹ See section 1.3 for details on the composition of the panel.

recommendations. However, EU-panel members raised concerns about the limited time available for the panel to assess bid books, potentially affecting the fairness of evaluations. Furthermore, the strict timeline and the, often large, number of bidding cities also make it challenging for the panel of experts to provide adequate feedback to unsuccessful cities. This is felt as a missed opportunity, whereas it could be used as a stimulus for cities to keep investing in their cultural development.

Recognising the value of the panel's support, stakeholders suggested establishing **a more continuous dialogue between the panel and the cities** during the selection process to ensure recommendations are more effectively reflected in the revised bid books.

2.1.1.7. Monitoring procedures

Overall, the monitoring process is considered effective in supporting cities in implementing ECoC and allowing the panel and the European Commission to identify and address issues promptly. Results from those who expressed an opinion (27 respondents) in the Public Consultation, shows that a vast majority (70%) stated that the monitoring procedure worked very well (11%, 3 out of 27) or quite well (59%, 16 out of 27). In contrast, 26% (7 out of 27) felt it did not work that well while one participant considered that it did not work well at all.

Feedback collected focuses on three main areas: type of support, timing of the monitoring, and format of the meetings.

In terms of **type of support**, while the recommendations of the expert panel and the monitoring reports are considered to provide valuable support to cities and national authorities, stakeholders consulted highlighted the existence of a gap between recommendations and their practical implementation on the ground. There is an understanding that the main role of the panel is to check on the progress in the preparation of the event and, hence, a key focus is on milestones and 'showing accomplishments'. However, cities would welcome additional guidance and a shift towards a supervising process where experts advise cities post-award. This additional guidance and support from the experts throughout the implementation phase would help bridge the perceived gap and help cities address challenges as they emerge. Furthermore, this expanded role of the experts could help panel members avoid potential conflicts of interest where cities would like to hire them to assist with the event implementation.

While stakeholders consulted expressed different views as regards the ideal **frequency of the monitoring meetings**, there seems to be a convergence toward the possibility of anticipating the first and last monitoring meeting. The initial twelve-month lag between the selection and the first meeting could delay spotting some critical issues at the very initial stages of the process. Similarly, the last monitoring meeting held only two months before the ECoC year was reported as particularly unproductive as taking place too late to possibly implement any change. Instead, stakeholders, and expert panel members in particular, supported the idea of scheduling this meeting at least six months prior to the ECoC year, allowing sufficient time for actionable recommendations and adjustments if required. However, it is worth noting that a main objective of the final monitoring meeting is for the panel to check whether the conditions are met for the payment of the Melina Mercouri Prize. Against this backdrop, when the last monitoring meeting took place earlier under the previous legal basis, panel members suggested that it should be postponed, precisely because so early in the last preparatory year, the panel did not get a full picture of the whole preparatory work and was therefore not in a position to make a sound recommendation regarding the payment of the prize. This is the reason why it was decided to move the last monitoring meeting to the end of the final ramp-up year under the current legal basis.

Regarding the **format of meetings**, during the Covid-19 pandemic, in-person meetings in Brussels were replaced with online meetings. Once the crisis was finally over, financial, environmental and practical reasons led to keeping this format instead of returning to in-person meetings. Stakeholders consulted felt, however, that eliminating completely the in-person meetings reduced the effectiveness of the experts' work, affecting their ability to make an objective and realistic assessment of the progress as well as to provide guidance and support. While in-person meetings in the cities are still possible if the panel deems them necessary, it may be difficult in practice for the experts to have all the elements to identify the need for an in-person meeting. Hence, having a mix of online and in-person meetings could be a reasonable compromise between the different needs and considerations.

2.1.1.8. *Management of the action*

The European Commission plays a central role in the overall management of the action and is involved in all ECoC activities and stages, supporting Member States, the panel experts, and the cities.

The selection process, overseen by the Member State scheduled to host the title six years from the process taking place, is widely regarded as both complex and resource-intensive due to the number of stakeholders involved, the fast-paced schedule and the required administrative, promotional and financial efforts. The guidance material provided by the European Commission to guide both Member States and bidding cities through the process was reported as particularly useful. These resources include guidelines for ministries and candidate cities, a template for the call for submission of applications, evaluation guidelines, progress meetings with the panel after designation, information days, and opportunities for cities to engage directly with DG EAC of the European Commission to discuss issues and receive tailored support. Bidding cities contacted have highlighted the Commission's workshops, led by experts from previous ECoCs, as especially useful for understanding the selection process, objectives, and criteria, while providing practical insights to help align their proposals with the action's goals.

In terms of content, there is a general agreement that some of the evaluation criteria are more difficult than others to fully understand and be reflected in the bid books by bidding cities, the European dimension and the legacy criteria being the most challenging ones. Stakeholders consulted suggested that guidance documents could further explain the criteria and include detailed case studies and examples of successful approaches helping cities better incorporate these elements into their programmes.

Notably, the guidance material is available only in English. While this is in line with the overall process being English based, some stakeholders, in particular at the sub-national level, would welcome the resources to be translated into local languages to facilitate their dissemination and wider use.

Due to the rotational schedule of ECoC host countries, each country typically implements the selection process every ten to fifteen years. While this time gap eases the pressure on Member States, at the same time, it does not allow the consolidation of standard practices and, often, implies the loss of knowledge due to public officers leaving their posts. Addressing this issue, the European Commission facilitated, on specific occasions, the informal exchange of good practices between Managing Authorities from different Member States, allowing Member States to learn from each other and build on previous experience. While this is not consolidated into a formal network, Member States would welcome being able to have such a resource to tap into.

While there is an existing informal network of title cities - the ECoC family network – its management is not centralised, but it is held each year by the title cities. While this system

should allow cities to own the network and its activities, ensuring it matches ECoCs' needs, in reality, it does not ensure a continued network implementation and, overall, it is perceived as a missed opportunity to foster knowledge sharing and exchange of good practices between former and current ECoCs.

Similarly, ECoCs would welcome additional capacity-building activities. Between 2019 and 2022, the European Commission implemented a short-term capacity-building project (further described in section 2.1.2.4), while this project was not repeated due to the lack of resources, it was an example of concrete actions that can support ECoCs in implementing their event.

Commenting on the website, stakeholders consulted acknowledged that it serves as a key resource for cities during both the selection and implementation phases, playing an important role in disseminating updates, information, and best practices regarding the ECoC initiative. While appreciating the usefulness of the website, several stakeholders would welcome a dedicated platform acting as a one-point shop, where to find all relevant guidance material, resources and examples of good practices as well as allowing exchanges between peers.

2.1.1.9. Brand visibility

The ECoC brand holds significant value, and evidence shows that securing the title contributed to elevating a host city's status, not only through year-long celebrations but also by creating a lasting association with the ECoC identity. Indeed, being named 'European Capital of Culture' enhances the cities' cultural profile and positions them within this 'prestigious' European initiative³². This view is reinforced by findings from the Public Consultation (N=60) conducted as part of this evaluation, which found that a majority of respondents (60%) found that the ECoC brand was recognised as a seal of quality for title-holding cities³³.

This section explores the extent and ways the ECoC brand is used and whether citizens are aware of ECoC being an EU initiative.

Cities consulted widely agree that ECoC has a strong brand value, and effectively showcasing the brand was recognised as a crucial factor in capturing the attention of national, European, and international audiences. To achieve this, ECoCs employed a variety of promotional tools including media outreach, social media campaigns, and city outdoor branding.

Social media and online channels have been crucial tools for ECoCs to reach their audiences over the years. To give a few examples, Aarhus focused on creating and sharing digital content instead of relying on traditional advertising. This approach helped build a strong visual identity around the ECoC brand, highlighted by the slogan 'Let's Rethink'. In Malta, the social media campaign for Valletta 2018 achieved a notable reach, with 40,553 Facebook followers, 397,747 website users, and 2,020,364 website page views³⁴, so much so that 47% of respondents to an ECoC evaluation survey reported having discovered

³² Rudolf, W., Cheraghi, E., & Olasik, M. (2023). THE EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE AS A MARKETING MEGA-EVENT: THE CHALLENGE OF GETTING NOMINATED. Scientific Papers of Silesian University of Technology. Organization & Management/Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Slaskiej. Seria Organizacji i Zarzadzanie, (174).

³³ Among those surveyed about whether they recognised ECoC as a seal of quality for title-holding cities, 23.3% said they recognized it to a large extent, 36.6% to some extent, 20% to a limited extent, and 15% responded 'I don't know'.

³⁴ European Commission. (2019). Ex-post evaluation of the 2018 European Capitals of Culture: Final report (EFECTIV Consortium). Evaluation consortium for Education, Culture, Training and Innovation. August 2019.

planned events via Facebook or other social media, making social media the most common source of information.

Box 10. Media partnerships in Matera's communication strategy

Matera effectively used news media to enhance its visibility and reach. Indeed, a partnership with Euronews boosted global awareness of 'Matera 2019' and the ECoC brand, with ten episodes aired as part of the GoMatera programme, showcasing the cultural programme's co-creation element and promoting Matera's cultural heritage³⁵. This partnership also increased ECoC visibility on Euronews' social media, particularly during key events like the opening and closing ceremonies³⁶. Similarly, in Wrocław, media relations played a crucial role, with ongoing reporting and press tours engaging both Polish and international media. This approach proved particularly successful during the Opening Weekend, when over 300 journalists from various countries attended the event.

Beyond these conventional outreach methods generally used by all the ECoCs to at least some degree, cities also found additional – and creative – ways to enhance brand visibility and engage key audiences. Košice strategically used popular radio channels to effectively connect with and engage local audiences, ensuring that their messages resonated with the community. Likewise, Mons focused on local engagement when they transformed the tourist office on Grand Place (the city's main square) into the official Mons2015 store³⁷. To reach European and international audiences, Umeå, located in Northern Sweden, partnered with a truck manufacturer to send an ECoC-branded truck on a tour across cities such as Barcelona, Amsterdam, and Warsaw, showcasing its cultural highlights. The city also boosted visibility by inviting international influencers, artists, and media, significantly enhancing media attention and global recognition of the ECoC title.

National and local authorities also normally supported ECoCs through dedicated promotional activities. National Ministries appointed specific contact points or front desks to oversee visibility efforts, promoting ECoC through targeted campaigns, events, and workshops, and providing information to those interested in understanding and communicating the initiative's benefits. In Norway, national and local authorities actively collaborated to promote Bodø2024, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs showcasing it across key online channels, including the VisitNorway website, which attracts over 15 million visitors annually as the country's main tourism platform³⁸.

Unfortunately, data on the reach of these communication activities conducted is available only for ten ECoCs over the evaluation period considered. Although partial, this data shows that ECoC content was shown or accessed about 2.5 billion times³⁹.

In their communication activities, ECoCs typically displayed the EU flag and ECoC logo on digital platforms, posters, event banners, and other promotional materials. These visual elements reinforced the action's connection to the EU, ensuring widespread recognition of its official status as part of the EU's cultural programme. However, the results of the Public Consultation (N=60) suggest there is a shared perception that citizens might ignore the European nature of the initiative, with almost 47% of the respondents indicating that

³⁵ The episodes on Matera 'Go Matera' can be accessed here: <https://it.euronews.com/special/go-matera>

³⁶ European Commission (2020). Ex-post evaluation of the 2019 European capitals of culture. Available [here](#).

³⁷ European Commission. (2015). Ex-post evaluation of the 2015 European Capitals of Culture. European Commission.

³⁸ [Increasing conversion rate for multilanguage website | NoA Ignite](#)

³⁹ While this number does not indicate the number of actual people reached, it is still an indication of the strength of the ECoC brand and the capacity of ECoCs to promote and raise awareness about the action.

according to them citizens are aware that ECoC is an EU initiative only to a limited extent or not at all.

Feedback from stakeholders consulted indicates that hosting an ECoC is seen as a great opportunity for cities, and it is perceived as a local accomplishment bringing pride to the local community. This - overall positive - sentiment can lead to the ECoC brand being presented as representing a national or local story rather than a European story (though, of course, the name of the action, includes 'European'). In this sense, there are some sparse examples of a disconnect between media terminology used by ECoC and official ECoC branding. For instance, during the 2022 ECoC in Luxembourg, the initiative was often referred to as 'Cultural Year' leading to confusion and a weakened understanding of the EU's role and the initiative's significance.

Stakeholders suggested that the European Commission could play a more central role in the promotion of the action. The absence of a coordinated, pan-European communications strategy could contribute to citizens not fully recognising ECoC as an EU-backed initiative. EU-level campaigns could help reinforce the initiative's association with the EU and strengthen public awareness of its broader significance. Furthermore, stakeholders indicated that while ECoC strongly contributed to the international presence of the cities hosting the title, additional support from the EU in the form of a larger-scale campaign could have further amplified its effects, enhancing their international reach.

Developing EU communication around ECoC could be the base for further **collaboration between national and European levels** through, for instance, the development of joint communication strategies with input from Member States and the appointment of political ambassadors, such as Commissioners, to champion the ECoC initiative. This would help maintain visibility and raise awareness of the action's European dimension, ensuring its objectives are effectively communicated across Europe.

2.1.2. Efficiency

This section analyses the information collected through the stakeholder consultation and the budget data to assess the efficiency of the ECoC action. It starts with an overview of the key financial figures concerning the implementation of the ECoC and then discusses some of the key issues connected to efficiency.

Figures in this section draw from the sources outlined in Section 1.5.

2.1.2.1. Efficiency of the intervention

Table 6 compares the planned and actual budget of the cities that hosted the title between 2013 and 2022 and shows that the ECoCs generally do not totally deliver against their original budget set out in their original bid book. Overall, only about a third of the ECoCs managed to deliver their year in line with their original planned budget (+/- 5%), namely Marseille, Riga, Umeå, Matera, Kaunas and Novi Sad. Three ECoC had higher than anticipated budgets compared to their bid book (Košice by 32%, Wrocław by 10%, and Leeuwarden by 41%). However, the majority of ECoCs over the period saw actual budgets being 10% or more lower than those set out in their bid books. The reasons behind these differences in planned and actual budgets tended to fall into three categories. Firstly, shortfalls in funding were partly down to one-off and sometimes unique circumstances specific to the ECoC. These included the abandonment of specific (and often large scale) infrastructural projects (e.g. San Sebastián), changes to local politicians between bid book and the ECoC year with possible negative consequences on the implementation of the

programme and the level of local funding being channelled into the ECoC programme⁴⁰, and finally COVID-19, which forced a much scaled-back programme and budget in Rijeka and Galway. Secondly, shortfalls in budgets were sometimes due to less funding being received from national public sector sources and, to a lesser extent, private sources. For national public funding, national Governments tended to reduce their financial commitments over the period between when the bid book was written and the start of the ECoC (which was often 5-6 years prior). The lack of firm commitments at the bidding stage, budget cuts and financial constraints at the national level were the main reported reasons for this, although it also has to be noted that there have been instances of bidding cities sporting in the bid books figures well above the indicative amounts provided by their Governments. For private sector sources, those developing the original bid book budgets said they tended to be over-optimistic at the bid book stage in how much they expected from the private sector in sponsorship. They also found it very difficult to secure private finance on something that was so far in advance and hypothetical in nature, meaning they tended to have to estimate what private funding might come in rather than basing it on a firm set of agreements. Thirdly, original ECoC budgets in bid books often overestimated how much income would be generated by ticket sales and the extent to which people would 'pay for their culture'. Although many cultural activities were ticketed, there was a limit to how much of their cultural programme could follow this model.

The table below shows the planned and actual budget of ECoC delivered between 2013 and 2022 and underlines the fact that the majority of ECoC tended to have lower-than-expected budgets compared to those set out in their bid book.

Table 6. ECoC Planned and actual budget

ECoC	Total planned budget (EUR)	Final Actual Budget (EUR)	Difference (EUR)	Difference (%)
Marseille (2013)	98,000,000	98,100,000	100,000	0.1%
Košice (2013)	76,900,000	101,500,000	24,600,000	32.0%
Riga (2014)	27,000,000	27,300,000	300,000	1.1%
Umeå (2014)	44,200,000	45,600,000	1,400,000	3.2%
Mons (2015)	78,014,827	70,631,681	-7,383,146	-9.5%
Plzeň (2015)	33,000,000	18,248,229	-14,751,771	-44.7%
San Sebastián (2016)	89,000,000	46,070,620	-42,929,380	-48.2%
Wrocław (2016)	78,600,000	86,400,000	7,800,000	9.9%
Aarhus (2017)	66,700,000	61,900,000	-4,800,000	-7.2%
Paphos (2017)	23,000,000	8,291,843	-14,708,157	-63.9%

⁴⁰ This was the case for Matera 2019, where the 2015 municipal elections in Matera brought political instability, delaying the ECoC 2019 preparations as the new city council proposed changes to the programme and the funding, leaving the Foundation team fully operational only by mid-2018.

ECOC	Total planned budget (EUR)	Final Actual Budget (EUR)	Difference (EUR)	Difference (%)
Leeuwarden (2018)	74,000,000	104,600,000	30,600,000	41.4%
Valetta (2018)	49,570,000	26,500,000	-23,070,000	-46.5%
Matera (2019)	52,300,000	54,800,000	2,500,000	4.8%
Plovdiv (2019)	38,200,000	29,500,000	-8,700,000	-22.8%
Rijeka (2020)	30,327,000	16,416,031	-13,910,968	-45.9%
Galway (2020)	45,800,000	23,700,000	-22,100,000	-48.3%
Kaunas (2022)	32,884,406	32,884,406	-	0.0%
Esch-sur-Alzette (2022)	70,608,500	53,615,156	-16,993,344	-24.1%
Novi Sad (2022)	33,138,159	33,138,159	-	0.0%

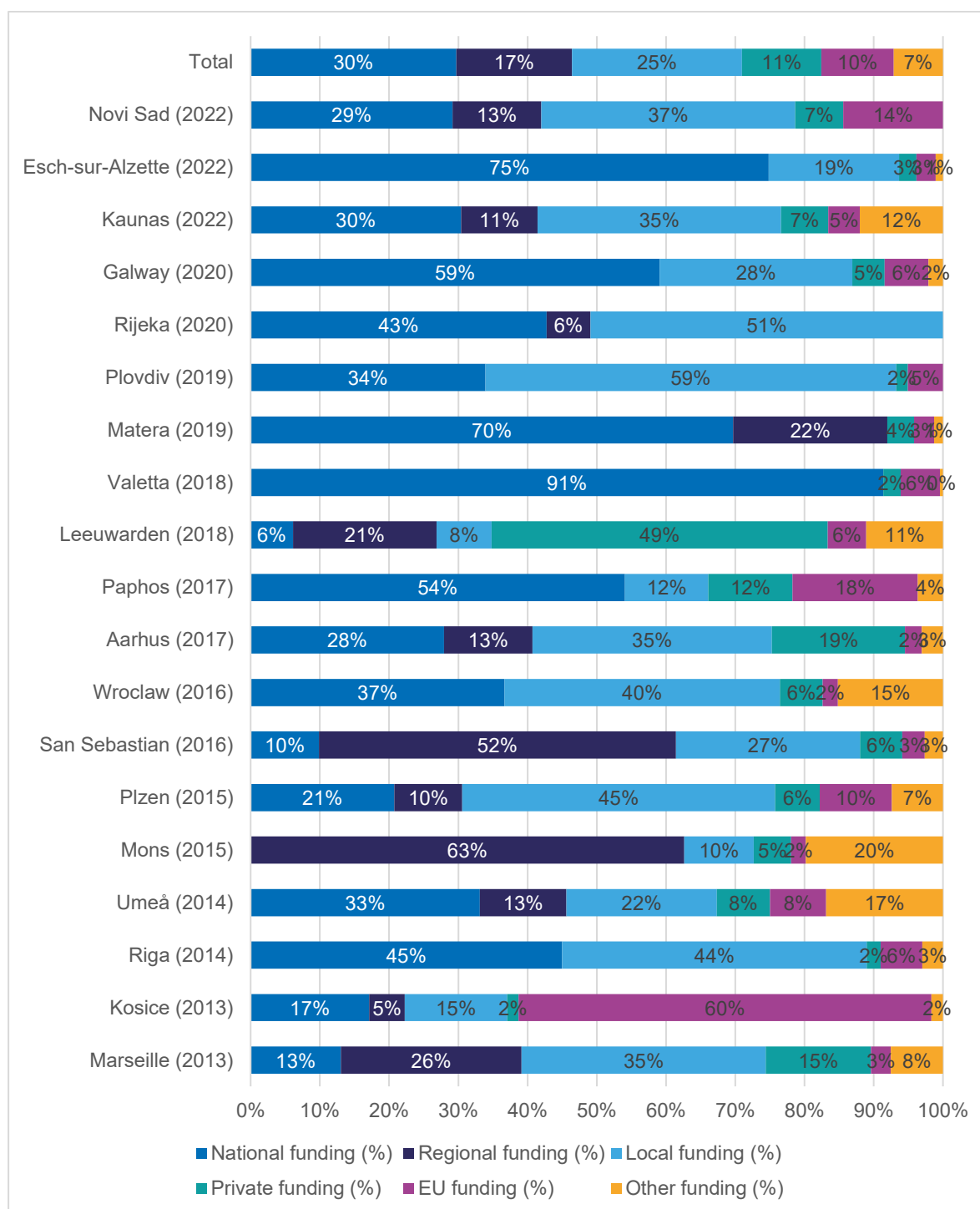
Source: Extractions from previous ECoC evaluations, Ecorys 2024, see section 1.5.

Figure 3 below provides an overview of the budget of the ECoC between 2013-2022 by type of funding stream⁴¹. Overall, the budgets for ECoC show that a significant portion of funding comes from public sources, totalling 71% of the overall budget. This includes about 30% from national funding, 25% from local funding and 17% from regional funding. Private funding accounts for about 11% of the total budget across the 2013-2022 timeframe. Notably, cities like Leeuwarden, Marseille, and Aarhus stand out for their higher levels of private funding, with Leeuwarden at 51% (much more than expected at bidding phase), Marseille at 15%, and Aarhus at 19%⁴². The remaining 17% encompasses EU funding (see section 2.1.2.3 for a deep dive into the use of EU funding by ECoCs) and other funding sources, including, for instance, ticket sales. Stakeholders representing title cities emphasised how ECoC enabled them access to funding streams, in some cases very substantial, they would not have had the opportunity otherwise, generating an unprecedented in-flow of capital for culture.

⁴¹ In the budget of Leeuwarden contributions in kind have been excluded to ensure consistency of data among cities as data on this type of funding stream was not available for the other cities.

⁴² In the next phase of the study, we will try to investigate the strategies and factors that led to a stronger private participation in these cities.

Figure 3. Budget by funding stream



Source: Ecorys elaboration based on data extractions from previous ECoC evaluations, 2024, see section 1.5.

The title of European Capital of Culture does not come with earmarked EU funding beyond the €1.5 million Melina Mercouri Prize, whose value represents only a fraction of the entire ECoC budget of title cities, normally ranging between 2% and 7% of the overall ECoC budget⁴³. Hence, by design, ECoC is a cost-effective action able to lever public and private

⁴³ Notable exceptions are Plzeň (2015), Paphos (2017) and Rijeka (2020), in which budget the prize accounted for 9%, 22% and 10% respectively. This aspect is further explored below.

funding at a relatively low cost for the Union. As noted earlier in the effectiveness section, between 2013-2022, the ECoC action stimulated a total of €940 million in funding towards the cultural agenda across the EU, taking into consideration all the funding spent from EU, national, regional, local and private sources⁴⁴. This comes with an investment of just €28.5 million when calculating the overall cost of the Melina Mercouri Prize over the same time period, meaning the amount of co-financing generated is significant, stimulating about an additional €30 of other funding from either national or private sources for each €1 spent on the prize⁴⁵. This figure does not consider any additional infrastructural investment that might have been done by cities linked to hosting their ECoC (which is not included in their overall ECoC budgets).

2.1.2.2. *Melina Mercouri prize and legacy of the action*

Staying with the Melina Mercouri Prize, the prize was established in 2010 in honour of the late Melina Mercouri and is intended to contribute to financing the legacy of the title year. Since then, the Prize, amounting to €1.5 million from the Creative Europe programme⁴⁶, is paid by the European Commission provided that the title city honoured the commitments made at the application stage. The requirements for the payment of the prize were strengthened under the current legal basis, and it is given under the condition that:

The budget supports a high-quality cultural programme, meeting the application and criteria.

- The artistic team's independence has been appropriately respected.
- The European dimension remains strong in the cultural programme.
- Marketing and communication materials highlight the European nature of the action.
- Monitoring and evaluation plans for the ECoC's impact on the city are in place.

Figure 4 shows the proportion of the overall budget that is made up of the prize (shown in blue) and the proportion of the overall EU funds of an ECoC made up by the prize (shown in purple). For example, for Marseille, the prize accounted for 2% of the overall budget for the ECoC and 54% of the overall EU financial contribution made to the ECoC. It is important to note that this figure and the related finding have some limitations as EU funding is often not fully reported by cities as either used for infrastructural projects outside the direct scope of ECoC or by cultural organisations for the implementation of ECoC activities, hence not internalised in the overall ECoC budget. Nevertheless, the figure shows that in most cases, the Melina Mercouri Prize accounts for the majority or the totality of the EU funds reported in ECoCs' budgets despite it being less than 10% of the overall budget for almost all ECoCs⁴⁷. This again shows that, as an EU action, it creates a significant amount of non-EU co-financing for a relatively small amount of EU investment.

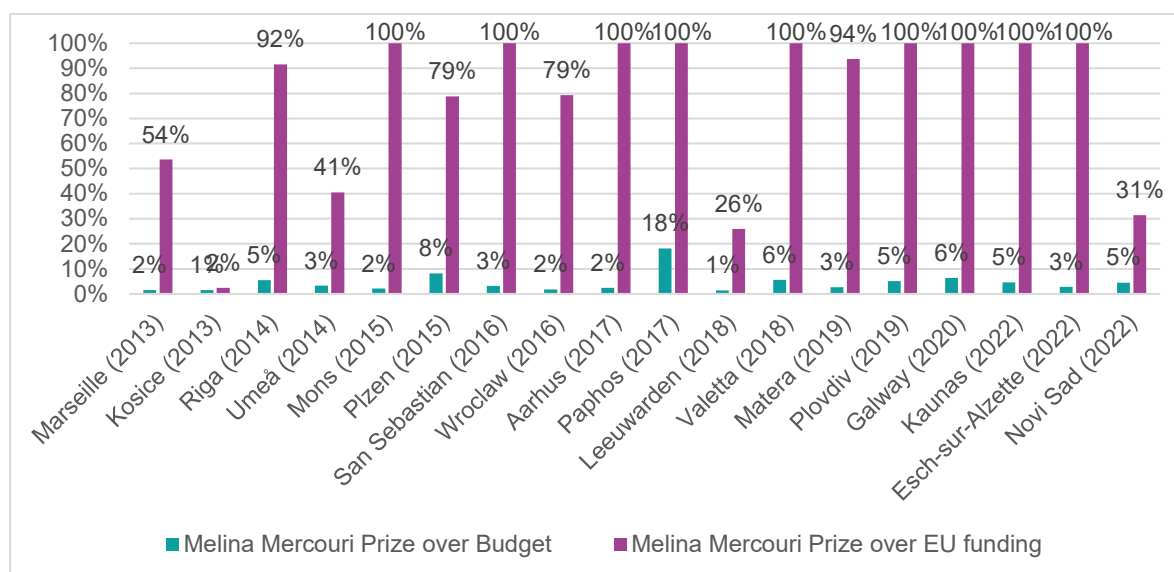
⁴⁴ About €800 million if only non-EU funding sources are considered.

⁴⁵ Although there are other costs associated with the implementation of the action (e.g. human and financial resources from the EC and the panel of experts), the Melina Mercouri prize represented the largest expense per title city.

⁴⁶ [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/818 establishing the creative Europe programme \(2021 to 2027\)](#)

⁴⁷ The only exception being Paphos, whose budget was € 8.2 million.

Figure 4. Melina Mercouri Prize compared to overall budget and contribution of EU funds



Source: Ecorys elaboration based on data extractions from ECoC evaluations (2013-2022), see section 1.5.

As mentioned above, the Melina Mercouri Prize is, under the current legal basis, the only EU financial contribution directly linked to the ECoC title. While this source of financing is still interesting for **smaller cities** or **smaller Member States** where it is ‘an important financial help for the implementation of the programme’ as phrased by a civil society organisation from Cyprus, it does not constitute a strong motivational factor for larger cities.

‘The additional funding is very highly valued and another reason for a small country to go for the ECoC. The funding is about 10% of the whole programme funding, however, it is mainly symbolic. It is paid at the beginning of the ECoC year, which does not really help in terms of supporting the legacy; rather, it is more of an award to the city’. ~ Representative of a ministry working on ECoC

‘... the size of the award should be commensurate to the local standards. While €1.5 million was sufficient to ensure the legacy in Bulgaria, this amount would have been too little for Austria or Italy, where the local investment in ECoC was also much larger’. ~ An ECoC foundation.

Consultations with stakeholders, therefore, highlighted that the Melina Mercouri Prize is generally symbolic and does not directly affect the scale or scope of the ECoC and its cultural programme. Furthermore, the value of the prize has not changed since its introduction in 2010, and consequently, due to the inflation in the EU area, it depreciated over time. If the prize was to be adjusted to account for inflation, the equivalent value in today's prices would be about €2 million.

The consultations shed light on two potential negative consequences of the relatively low pecuniary value of the prize:

- It reduces the leverage that the European Commission and the Monitoring panel have to steer the implementation of the ECoC and ensure legacy plans are in place;

- It could not represent a sufficiently attractive leverage for larger cities to apply for the title⁴⁸, hence possibly reinforcing the current trend of smaller cities applying for the title.

The consultations highlighted **the need for a wider discussion on whether the Melina Mercouri should be increased and also the need for the allocation of specific EU funding to the action**. Both interviews and participants in focus groups stressed how, despite being such a flagship action of the EU, the ECoC does not come with dedicated financing and respondents to the Public Consultation (N=60) indicated the availability of dedicated funding among the top three factors relevant to the success of ECoC. While the lack of EU funding pushes cities to invest in culture and seek the involvement of other key players such as regional and national Governments and private sector stakeholders, the lack of dedicated EU funding is felt as a missed opportunity in terms of what could be achieved with more financial leverage from the European Union. More dedicated EU funding could also help the Commission reinforce some of the perceived weaknesses of the ECoCs' cultural programme (e.g. legacy and the European dimension) whilst at the same time giving clearer independence to ECoC teams on the artistic focus, scale and scope of its cultural programme.

Beyond the amount of the prize, **there could be scope to revise the timing of its award** as several stakeholders consulted stressed the need to reinforce the link of the prize with the stated objective of supporting the legacy of the action. Although there is not a clear agreement among stakeholders with some advocating the need to anticipate the prize to increase the ECoC budget and emphasise the need for early preparation of the legacy of the action, the nature and objectives of the prize would instead align with a delayed payment of the award. Hence, delaying the payment toward the end of the title year or even paying it in several instalments over the years following the closure of the ECoC even could perhaps ensure that the prize is concretely allocated to legacy activities instead of being used for the implementation of the title year.

Although reinforcing the Melina Mercouri Prize could contribute to better programming of the legacy and the post-legacy period, consultees also stressed the need to **strengthen the legacy plans already at the bidding phase**. Under Article 5 of the current legal basis, the legacy aspect is not specifically marked as a standalone criterion, but is linked to the first criterion on the contribution to the ECoC long-term strategy of cities, where it is required to consider (the relevant part is bolded):

- 'that a cultural strategy for the candidate city, which covers the action and **includes plans for sustaining the cultural activities beyond the year of the title**, is in place at the time of its application;
- the plans to strengthen the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors, including **developing long-term links** between the cultural, economic and social sectors in the candidate city;
- the **envisaged long-term cultural, social and economic impact**, including urban development, that the title would have on the candidate city;
- the plans for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the title on the candidate city and for disseminating the results of the evaluation'.

⁴⁸ Evidence collected suggests that the ECoC budget is not proportional to the size or annual budget of title cities. The budgets of ECoCs covered by this evaluation reached about 100 million EUR in Marseille (about 900,000 inhabitants) and Leeuwarden (about 125,000 inhabitants), showing that two cities with very different population size can put forward similar budgets. This implies that funding received by a city hosting the title will be far more appealing for cities that normally have access to much smaller funds/budget.

Furthermore, 'the provisions for the legacy activities' are to be evaluated as part of the 'management' criterion together, however, with several other aspects. Having the legacy provisions as a standalone criterion, further describing and explaining what legacy is and what is more concretely expected from ECoCs in terms of the sustainability of the action could allow a smoother post-ECoC transition and a stronger and more durable legacy of the action. In particular, stakeholders highlighted the need for a **structured process for managing the ECoC legacy** encompassing:

- long-term political commitment at different levels (local, regional and national). Political support is needed to ensure that culture remains high on the political agenda in the years following the ECoC year and that sufficient funds are allocated to implementing cultural activities and developing and maintaining infrastructures;
- securing and maintaining skills and competencies acquired during the ECoC implementation. ECoC is an opportunity for title cities to develop competencies and talents that can sustain the cultural development of the city beyond the title year. Ensuring these competencies are retained and not dispersed after the end of the ECoC is essential to ensure the success of the legacy;
- adequate and continued support to cultural organisations developed in the context of ECoC to ensure they continue to be active even after the end of the ECoC year; and,
- including the legacy years in the monitoring and evaluation processes to capture progress and impacts beyond the ECoC year.

Box 11. Legacy of Wrocław's ECoC year

Wrocław's designation as the 2016 European Capital of Culture laid the groundwork for sustained cultural and urban transformation. A few key factors allowed several **initiatives and practices implemented during the ECoC year to remain central to the city's cultural identity and development still today.**

Engaging with citizens and fostering local ownership were two key success factors in Wrocław's capacity to capitalise and sustain the ECoC impact in the longer term. Key programmes, such as the MikroGRANTY scheme⁴⁹, continue to foster civic engagement and grassroots cultural projects. For instance, by prioritising small-scale, community-driven initiatives, the MikroGRANTY programme has become a model for sustaining local creativity and social integration. Open to individuals and informal groups, it provides grants of up to 5,000 PLN (around €1,200), along with organisational support in administration, legal matters, logistics, and promotion. Surveys conducted after the title year indicate that **90.5% of participants** strongly supported its continuation after the ECoC year, recognising its role in empowering citizens to shape their cultural environment. Similarly, the Neighbouring initiative⁵⁰ (formerly 'Wrocław – Backyard Door') has evolved into a cultural platform that revitalises urban spaces, bringing together residents, artists, and institutions to build stronger community connections.

Consistent and effective governance allowed Wrocław to maintain cultural momentum after 2016. In part, the key ECoC governance body, retained its structure and staff post-event, ensuring continuity in the coordination of cultural activities, audience development, and international collaborations.

⁴⁹ MikroGRANTY was established in 2014 as part of Wrocław's preparations for its European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2016 celebrations. It has since evolved into a city-wide initiative supporting local, community-driven projects through financial and organisational assistance. More details are available in Annex 4 – Case Study 8 and at: <https://instytutkultury.pl/mikrogranty/>.

⁵⁰ The Neighbouring initiative builds on Wrocław's legacy as the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2016. Originating as 'Wrocław – Backyard Door,' it has since evolved into a long-term programme fostering local engagement through artistic and cultural activities. More details are available in Annex 4 – Case Study 8 and at: <https://strefakultury.pl/en/neighbouring/about/>.

Finally, a strong political support enabled the mobilisation of significant financial resources, in particular for investments in cultural infrastructure, such as the National Forum of Music and renovations of iconic venues like the Capitol Music Theatre, further strengthening the city's status as a cultural hub over the years.

Spotlighting legacy activities and giving former ECoC a platform to share their initiatives and good practices could help foster ECoC legacy. Stakeholders consulted mentioned that once the ECoC year is over, the attention moves to the next title cities with little attention to former ECoC and their legacy activities. Having a European platform, where it is possible to communicate and promote the activities implemented as part of the legacy plans, could encourage cities to continue investing in culture beyond the title year.

2.1.2.3. Access to other EU funding

Figure 4 shows that overall EU funds from other EU sources do not prominently figure in ECoCs' budgets. In 9 of the 18 ECoC, the only EU funds used by each ECoC was the Melina Mercouri Prize, with very little funding coming in from other EU sources in the remaining cities, with a few exceptions as mentioned above. Stakeholders highlighted a few main reasons for this. Firstly, they tended to highlight that their EU funds (in particular the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) or the European Social Fund (ESF)) were already allocated and 'tied up' on other themes and projects outside of the ECoC action. They often stated that their Cohesion Funds were targeting themes linked more to competitiveness (e.g. enterprise, green transition, etc.) and that the ECoC programme was generally not seen as a firm competitiveness action. Secondly, some stakeholders highlighted that it was difficult to encourage those allocating EU funds (often at a national or even regional level) to earmark funding (often well in advance) to a specific location or even a specific theme.

Stakeholders also mentioned that EU funds are not necessarily aligned with the schedule and requirements of ECoC. Eligibility criteria mandated by some EU programmes might be challenging to meet by newly created ECoC foundations as often the existence of a track record or having a number of years of functioning history are key requirements. Furthermore, bidding cities are required to develop a solid cultural programme and budget at the bidding phase. At that early stage, it is challenging for cities to foresee and integrate the use of EU funding as most programmes are based on annual calls only.

However, ECoC might well apply for additional EU funding although this has historically been more the case for financing infrastructure development or specific projects, and cities have rarely included this additional EU funding in the overall ECoC budget. The box below provides examples of how ECoC have used EU funding over time. An exception to this is Košice (2013), whose budget included a large share of EU Structural funds. Unfortunately, evidence of the use of EU funding is scarce and not consistently collected in cities' evaluation reports. This makes the assessment of the use of other EU funds difficult. Ensuring that ECoCs keep track and report the EU funding usage in preparation of and during the title year would provide a better and more complete assessment of the overall EU contribution to ECoC.

Box 12. Examples of EU fund use in ECoCs

Several ECoCs have leveraged additional funding from various EU programmes to enhance their cultural activities and infrastructure:

- **Umeå (2014, Sweden):** Multiple projects received EU funding from different programmes: the *CORNERS* project promoted transnational cultural cooperation and was co-financed through Creative Europe; the LIFE+ programme financed environmental projects like the musical *Trash* and Umeå hosted the final event of the Green Citizens project also financed

by the programme; finally, ERDF supported, among others, a project based on the long tradition of storytelling in Northern Sweden.

- **San Sebastián (2016, Spain):** This city participated in the *CORNERS* project co-funded by the Creative Europe programme.
- **Aarhus (2017, Denmark):** The Creative Europe MEDIA sub-programme was used to co-fund the *DICTE III* series, a crime and drama series set in Aarhus and featured in the cultural programme of Aarhus 2017. The EU's Europe for Citizens programme also supported Aarhus as the European Capital of Volunteering, complementing and providing new momentum to the cultural volunteer initiatives that spanned from the ECoC.
- **Paphos (2017, Cyprus):** Paphos secured ERDF co-financing for critical infrastructure projects, enhancing the city's cultural programme.
- **Valletta (2018, Malta):** Several EU funds were used for various projects, such as the *Orfeo & Majnun* project co-financed by Creative Europe. The collaborative project *Design4Innovation* was supported by Interreg, and infrastructure projects like the MUŻA museum and the Valletta Design Cluster (two important legacy elements of the ECoC year) were financed through the ERDF for €8 million and €4 million respectively.
- **Matera (2019, Italy):** Interreg funded the project *Night Light*, integrated with other cultural events such as *Social lights* and *Onda*. Matera 2019 also led the Erasmus+ project *DeuS – European Open Design School for Sustainable Regional Development*.
- **Rijeka (2020, Croatia):** Some 15 EU-funded projects were implemented in the period between the award of the title and the actual title year.
- **Kaunas (2022, Lithuania):** The *Magic Carpets* project, part of the ECoC programme, was co-funded by Creative Europe.
- **Novi Sad (2022, Serbia):** Some 45 organisations were involved in 23 projects funded through EU programmes such as Creative Europe, Europe for Citizens, Erasmus+, and Interreg-IPA Cross-Border Cooperation programmes.

2.1.2.4. *Human resources allocated to the implementation of the action*

This sub-section explores the role of human capital in the successful implementation of ECoCs as the efficiency of this action hinges on the contributions and collaboration of three key actors:

- the **cities**, responsible (through the managing entities they set up) for developing and implementing the cultural programme, ensuring its alignment with the objectives of the ECoC action;
- the **expert panel**, responsible for selecting the ECoCs and providing guidance and oversight throughout the ECoC monitoring process;
- the **European Commission**, acting as the overarching authority that supports and coordinates the ECoC action.

The following paragraphs assess, to the extent possible, capacity and competences of the three stakeholders as well as the key challenges they face in the implementation of the action.

ECoCs' capacity to plan and implement the event

Ensuring that cities have enough human resources with the right skills to plan and manage an event such as ECoC is essential. Results of the Public Consultation (N=60) place the capacity of city authorities to run an ECoC as the second most important factor for the success of the ECoC. Available data on the actual number of human resources involved in the implementation of ECoC over the period 2013-2022 is patchy and difficult to compare as cities have reported the number of human resources involved in different ways, in some cases reporting only the core team managing the project, while in others, including project managers and volunteers. Data, however, indicates that the ECoC implementation is a resource-intensive activity that reaches its peak in the title year. Indeed, as the cities approach the title year, the team managing the event increases substantially. As emerged

from the consultation conducted, being such a resource-intensive endeavour, smaller cities face more challenges in adapting to the scale of the event, as they often end up relying only on small teams to deliver the entire cultural programme over several years.

Evidence from interviews and focus groups indicates that cities often also struggle with identifying and employing enough skilled personnel to manage and implement their ECoC project. This is often evident at the bidding stage, when bidding cities are known to rely to some extent on external consultants or experienced professionals from previous ECoC cities to develop their bid book. It can, however, become a hindering factor once a city has been selected, slowing down the setting up process of the ECoC managing entity and the actual start of the implementation. This issue is particularly evident in relation to some specific leadership roles, such as those linked to the artistic direction of the ECoC. Cities often foresee in the bid book an open competition for the selection of these key figures. While in principle this could favour the identification of the best candidate, in reality, the pool of actual candidates is rather small, in particular in smaller countries, due to the need to speak the local language and the busy schedule of high-skilled professionals, who might not be available at such short notice.

Furthermore, many stakeholders consulted referred to the ECoC implementation as a 'learning on the job experience' suggesting that the team behind the planning and implementation of the event do not often possess the required skills and competencies from day one. Instead, these competencies are acquired over time creating inefficiencies and unnecessarily slowing down the process.

Ensuring already at the bidding stage that the necessary skills and competencies are available and that there are clear plans for timely capacity-building well integrated into the bid book would potentially ensure continuity between the bidding and implementation phase, as well as strengthen the quality of the event. For instance, cities passing the pre-selection could be asked to have capacity-building activities in place during the period preceding the submission of the revised bid book. Capacity-building activities could also be provided by the European Commission, ensuring knowledge sharing and exchange of good practices between former ECoCs and bidding cities (as it happened through the ECoC capacity-building project run between 2019 and 2022 further described in the box below)⁵¹.

Box 13. Capacity-building for European Capitals of Culture project

The capacity-building for the European Capitals of Culture project was a 30-month service contract commissioned by the European Commission and managed by the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport, and Culture.

Running from October 2019, the project aimed to address skill gaps in ECoCs through practical support, including tools, materials, expertise, and networking opportunities. Key initiatives included Academy Camps, toolkits, webinars, MOOCs, and a repository for relevant resources, initially curated by the project team and later open to user contributions.

As on 31st May 2022, the project came to an end after having produced 100 hours of training on-line and in hybrid mode; 15 hours of training on video; 25 podcasts; training material and a database including 282 experts in various ECoC-related topics.

Source: <https://cultureactioneurope.org/projects/capacity-building-for-european-capitals-of-culture/>

⁵¹ Section 2.1.1.6 discusses the role of external consultants in supporting the ECoCs in the preparation of their bids, further highlighting the sometimes lack of sufficient skills and competences at city level.

Panel of experts' capacity and competences

Currently, the panel of experts comprises ten independent experts appointed by European Union institutions and bodies and up to two by the Member States hosting the ECoC⁵². Given their central role in the selection and monitoring of the ECoCs, it is essential that the experts are provided with sufficient resources to fulfil their mission. In particular, participants of focus groups highlighted some key intervention areas:

- **Experts' selection:** while the expertise of the members of the panel was overall recognised, it was suggested that the panel composition could aim to be diverse in terms of the representation of minority groups, geographical diversity, and gender balance as well as in terms of skills and competencies. For instance, it was considered important to ensure artists were sufficiently represented in the panel and that the group of experts presented complementary competencies, including legal skills and legal knowledge (especially regarding how public and cultural sectors operate in different countries).
- **Experts' onboarding and handover:** while renewing the panel of experts is essential to bring in new perspectives into ECoC, it was noted that new panel members might require additional onboarding or training. At the moment, there seems to be a lack of tools and formal mechanisms for transitioning the new members (though half-day training session is organised with newcomers). This lack of a more structured handover process can lead to the loss of relevant knowledge and experience (of the members leaving the panel) and the uneven involvement of new panel members. Developing a handbook or a structured onboarding process could ensure better preparedness of the members.
- **Time and resources:** reviewing the bidding documents and monitoring reports and providing guidance to cities is a time-consuming process. A contract with the experts defines the amount of time members of the panel are expected to spend reviewing and processing documents. For instance, half a day is allocated to the reading of bid books during the preselection phase (up to sixty pages) and a full day for bid books during the selection phase (up to 100 pages)⁵³. Panel experts consulted suggested that this allocation, coupled with the limited timeframe often available and the sometimes large number of documents to review, might not allow the panel experts to accurately review the bids, ultimately risking frustrating bidding cities that might feel their work is not fully appreciated.

European Commission and management of the action

Finally, the European Commission plays a central role in the overall management of the action and is deeply involved in all ECoC activities and stages, supporting Member States, the panel experts, and the cities.

It is challenging to quantify the amount of work and resources the European Commission would need to effectively and efficiently manage the ECoC action for several reasons: a) there are large yearly variations in the number of cities bidding to host ECoC, spanning from a minimum of 1 (in the case of Luxembourg for the 2022 title) to a maximum of 21 (in the case of Italy for the 2019 title); b) the work distribution is not linear but presents high peaks, in particular in relation to pre-selection and selection meetings. Currently, it is estimated that, within the Commission, about 2 FTE are allocated to ECoC divided between policy

⁵² Experts appointed by the Member States are only involved in the competition in the country that have nominated them. There are no national experts in the competitions between cities in EEA/EFTA and (potential) candidate countries.

⁵³ Additionally, experts are remunerated for taking on additional work such as chairing monitoring and (pre)selection meeting, preparing (pre)selection panel reports, reporting from a meeting, contributing to or finalising (pre)selection reports in addition to allowances and reimbursement of expenses.

officers (about 75%, or 1.5 FTE) and financial assistants (about 25%, 0.5 FTE) time. While recognising the importance of the role played by the European Commission in the overall management of the action and the several competing priorities, stakeholders consulted highlighted how, despite being such a visible action of the Union, additional resources could be put forward within the Commission to ensure the action reaches its full potential.

For context, looking only at key quantifiable outputs, on average, the Commission participates in fourteen meetings per year for a total of about twenty-two days, reads twenty bid books and seven monitoring progress reports and reads and comments on four to five preselection and selection reports and seven monitoring reports (see Table 7), in addition to managing the experts' contracts, liaising with Member States and cities, and participating to ECoC related events.

Table 7. Average number of key outputs per year

Type of output	Stage	Average number
Meetings ⁵⁴	Preselection	3
	Selection	2
	Monitoring	7
	Other	2
Bid books	Pre-selection stage	14
	Selection stage	6
Reports	Pre-selection stage	2 or 3
	Selection stage	2 or 3

More human and financial resources could allow the Commission to provide stronger monitoring, additional support for networking and capacity-building between ECoCs as well as enhanced communication activities promoting the action. While there is scope for the action to be expanded, to ensure the European Commission is sufficiently equipped to support the coordination and implementation of the action, any change in this sense would need to be assessed against the available human and financial resources within the European Commission, in a context of several competing priorities and overall reduced resources.

2.1.2.5. *Efficiency of the selection and monitoring procedures and implementation timing*

The new legal basis of the action modified the selection and monitoring processes, establishing, among others, new selection criteria and more frequent monitoring meetings. In particular, the selection process encompasses the following steps:

- Call for submission of applications: 6 years before the title year.
- Application submission deadline: minimum 10 months after the publication of the call for submission of applications.
- Pre-selection meeting and report: 5 years before the title year.

⁵⁴ The average number of meetings is calculated on the basis of the meetings that took place in 2024 and that are planned for 2025, 2026, and 2027.

- Revised application submission deadline and selection meeting and report: about 9 months after the pre-selection.
- City Designation: 4 years before the title year.

Following the selection, three monitoring meetings take place, three years, 18 months and two months before the year of the title.

While stakeholders consulted consider the current selection and monitoring processes overall as working well⁵⁵, they also identified the following areas for improvement:

- **Application timeline:** While at the governmental level the timeline for the selection process is considered overall sufficient, cities find meeting the current deadlines challenging, in particular the nine-month period between pre-selection and final selection adds pressure on cities, particularly smaller or less-experienced ones, in terms of building international relations and securing commitments from local stakeholders. Extending the time allowed for this phase could allow cities to strengthen their proposals and address feedback from the panel of experts. However, it is important to note that extending the timeline for the selection process should not come at the expense of the preparation period post-selection, as cities require sufficient time for the event preparation, in particular when there is a need to develop infrastructures and re-engage partners to invest in the initiative.
- **Monitoring meetings:** Meetings with the panel of experts are a key moment for cities to receive guidance and advice on the implementation.
 - In this respect, some stakeholders stressed that these meetings should focus on providing support more than merely checking if milestones are reached. This suggestion is underpinned by the request for a shift from a monitoring process toward a more advisory role, with panel experts working closely with cities, offering real-time solutions and mentorship. This would be in line with the challenges identified above in relation to the lack of the required skills and capacity-building in ECoCs.
 - The timing of the meeting was also questioned by stakeholders consulted, with some mentioning that the twelve-month lag between the selection and the first monitoring meeting is potentially too long as cities tend to delay processes (in particular in relation to the identification and hiring of key figures in the managing entity). Furthermore, the lag between meetings does not allow for close monitoring of the ECoC implementation. Some stakeholders also mentioned the need to extend the monitoring to the year after the end of the title year to ensure legacy plans are actually implemented. Increasing the number and frequency of the meetings could allow better monitoring during the different phases of the ECoC implementation.
 - Finally, while meetings are now only held online, both representatives of ECoCs and members of the panel of experts highlighted how confining the monitoring to online means limits the panel's ability to engage with local teams, making it harder to identify problems and offer solutions. Both stakeholder groups would welcome more monitoring visits to allow panel members to better understand the local context and challenges, fostering deeper interaction with the local stakeholders and offering more practical, tailored advice⁵⁶.

⁵⁵ As reported by the large majority of the respondents to the public consultation as well as interviewees and participants in the focus groups.

⁵⁶ Implementing city visits would of course represent a cost for both the EU and the hosting cities. Although this financial aspect was not directly discussed with city representatives, concerns with regards the costs of

Once the selection process is completed, selected cities have about four years to prepare for the event. Stakeholders consulted indicated that while this time can in principle be sufficient for the preparation and implementation of a cultural programme, it can be less so depending on a number of factors:

- City preparedness: Cities bidding to host an ECoC have different levels of cultural development in terms of competencies, infrastructure, and cultural strategy among others. While staging an ECoC is an opportunity for change and to start a cultural renovation process, cities that are not fully prepared might struggle to deal with the complexity of an event as ECoC in only four years.
- Infrastructure development: ECoC is often the opportunity to implement (or accelerate) infrastructural projects; depending on the size and the national legal framework, these projects might require more time than initially planned.
- Community engagement: Depending on the level of cultural participation in the title cities, engaging and mobilising the local community might be challenging over that time span, hindering the ECoC from achieving its full potential.
- Political support, partnerships, and cultural network: Cities might struggle to build the required connections and partnerships over that period of time and, in particular, creating an international cultural network can be particularly demanding for smaller cities with little previous international exposure.

Overall, while four years could be enough for cities to implement the event, this timeframe might be challenging if a city has not already reached a certain level of cultural maturity. Hence, cities should be encouraged to start planning and preparing for the ECoC long before the formal announcement of the opening of the selection process. While this does not necessarily imply that less prepared cities should not be considered for hosting ECoC, their bid book should be realistically examined and judged in light of the city's actual cultural capacity, and if selected, sufficient guidance, monitoring and capacity-building opportunities should be provided.

Box 14. Early start good practices

The city of Matera started the preparation process for ECoC about ten years in advance of the title year, already in 2010. The growing interest in this initiative within the city and among local cultural and youth associations was key in mobilising the city and, as a result, an organisation of citizens called AssociazioneMatera2019 was created to raise awareness of the opportunity. This early start allowed the city to build strong political support at both local and regional levels for the candidacy and to start developing a network of cultural operators.

2.1.2.6. *Inefficiencies in the ECoC*

A number of inefficiencies were identified during discussions with stakeholders attached to the ECoC. These were often not quantified (in terms of resources wasted or lost) but still add into the discussion on efficiency. In particular:

- Resources used for unsuccessful bids to host an ECoC: Analysis shows that there were around 40 cities that bid for ECoC status that were unsuccessful between 2013 and 2022. Figures do not exist on the cost of submitting a bid, although cities taking part in the focus group estimated that it took between 6 and 8 months to prepare a bid meaning around 300 months were used by cultural stakeholders across the EU to prepare unsuccessful ECoC bids over the 2013-2022 period. Selecting an ECoC

such visits were not raised possibly suggesting that cities would not perceive these visits as an additional cost or as a cost disproportionate to the benefits they could provide.

city through a competitive bidding process has long been used as part of the action, with it helping to stimulate innovation and quality. The bidding process itself was mentioned by stakeholders as being a useful moment of reflection for cities with culture ranking up in the public discourse and the political agenda. Initiatives such as CultureNext show that there is interest in and willingness to still build on the work done by non-selected cities. However, when cities are finally not selected to become the next ECoC, there is no structured way of capitalising on the work done and competencies acquired. There could be scope for ECoC to become a moment of cultural renovation not only for the title cities but also for unsuccessful bidders.

- A lack of learning between ECoCs: another area of inefficiencies found within the ECoC linked to a lack of learning and communication between past, current and future ECoC cities. Although an ECoC network does exist, its work is sometimes limited and patchy, depending on which city is taking the lead in the network in any given year (current ECoC cities tend to chair this network). Other networks span from ECoC such as Culture Next and the UNeECC networks, however these are parallel initiatives whose action is separate from ECoC and not led by the Commission (although, notably, Culture Next is now funded through Creative Europe). Overall, this means less networking takes place between past, current and future ECoC cities and therefore good practice is sometimes missed and advice on pitfalls and challenges does also not get shared as much as it should do. This, therefore, leads to inefficiencies as mistakes are replicated, and efficiencies missed.

Box 15. Kaunas's know-how sharing

A legacy of Kaunas2022 was its own experience in the form of a wealth of resources and knowledge, including several publications such as a detailed Body of Evidence⁵⁷ and methodological books⁵⁸ on youth empowerment, community engagement, audience development, and volunteering. Additionally, the active monitoring tools put in place will continue to provide valuable insights into the city's cultural landscape. These resources serve as crucial tools for knowledge-sharing, containing best practices and lessons learned across various areas, and will undoubtedly be of great benefit to future title-holding cities and delivery bodies.

- More direction on interpreting key terms: Stakeholders also highlighted that another area where time is sometimes wasted relates to a misunderstanding of two key aspects of the ECoC- European dimension and legacy. Although those taking part in the evaluation stated they eventually had a clear understanding of each term, some stated that a better understanding of what the European dimension *looked like* in terms of actual activity would be useful and would save time at either bid or planning stages. As noted in section 2.1.1.1, stakeholders understood the concept of a European dimension but sometimes struggled to understand how to operationalise it and what, for instance, a project with good levels of European dimension would look like. This was also true for legacy, where stakeholders said it took them time and resources to properly understand what is expected of a legacy and how best to operationalise a legacy plan that was both ambitious and based on likely levels of culture and investment post-ECoC. The Commission, therefore, being more prescriptive with these two aspects would help save time across the bidding and planning stages of the ECoC.
- Lack of centralised communication at EU level: Stakeholders at all levels have indicated that while cities tend to have in place good communication plans, these are not sufficiently supported by communication activities at EU level. The ECoC brand is overall recognisable and well-known among European citizens, however,

⁵⁷ <https://kaunas2022.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Body-of-Evidence.pdf>

⁵⁸ <https://kaunas2022.eu/en/methodology/>

and despite its sought-after European dimension, the promotion of the action is left to the title cities. Implementing a communication campaign at the EU level could ensure higher visibility to cities hosting during the year, increasing the perception of the European dimension of the initiative, but also spotlight preparatory efforts by prospective title cities or legacy activities conducted by former ECoCs.

2.1.3. Coherence

In this section, coherence is assessed by examining how different components of ECoC work together to achieve its objectives⁵⁹ and how well they align with relevant policies and priorities at the EU, national, and sub-national levels. More specifically, the action is assessed in relation to its:

- **Internal coherence:** The extent to which ECoCs aligned their interventions, processes, and selection criteria with the overall programme objectives, while also balancing these objectives with the social and economic priorities of cities.
- **External coherence:** How well the ECoC matched and supported other EU policies and initiatives, including its fit with similar EU programmes, alignment with overall EU goals and priorities, and coherence with national priorities.

2.1.3.1. Internal coherence

The overall internal coherence of the ECoC action **appears strong**, as formal processes for selecting and managing title-holding cities align well with the objectives of the action. The application process, for example, requires bidding cities to embed their ECoC project into a cultural strategy and to actively engage with cultural operators, citizens, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders⁶⁰. This alignment ensures that bidding cities meet the necessary criteria and are adequately prepared, contributing to the successful achievement of the action's overall goals. The panel of independent experts also plays an important role from selection through to implementation, by offering ongoing advice, guidance, and progress assessments to support ECoCs throughout the selection and four-year preparation periods. This was seen to greatly help local ECoCs to remain as coherent as possible to the overall goals of the EU action and make sure they do not deviate away from the broader ECoC framework. Overall, the formal processes linked to bidding and implementing the ECoC reinforce the action's overall coherence and strengthen the programme's ability to achieve its objectives at the local level.

The design of the action further promotes strong collaboration between national and subnational levels across cultural, social, and economic areas. Article 5(4) of the founding decision takes into account the level of political backing from local, regional, and national authorities as part of the award criteria⁶¹. The competition for the title is also open to cities and their surrounding areas, fostering participation and collaboration that aligns with both EU objectives and regional socio-economic goals. This approach enables smaller cities, like Bodø (population around 40,000) in the Norwegian region of Nordland (population approximately 250,000), to involve the entire region in cultural initiatives that foster regional development and local growth, as well as collaboration at the European level.

⁵⁹ The general, specific and operational ECoC objectives can be found [here](#).

⁶⁰ [European Capitals of Culture - Culture and Creativity \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁶¹ European Parliament & Council of the European Union. (2014). [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 and repealing Decision No 1622/2006/EC](#). Official Journal of the European Union, L 132/1. 304, 1–6.

Quantitative evidence confirms alignment between different levels of governance, as ECoC costs are shared between national, local, and regional stakeholders. Data presented in the efficiency section reveals that approximately 30% of the typical ECoC budget comes from national funding, 24% from local funding, and 17% from regional funding. This relatively equal distribution suggests robust financial support for ECoCs across different layers of cultural policymaking. It also reflects coherence in objectives, as funding would not be granted if ECoCs did not reflect policy priorities at those levels. This diversity in public funding sources highlights the interconnectedness of ECoCs and suggests a 'uniting' effect of the action in bringing together various stakeholders and policies representing different levels of governance.

National stakeholders, in particular, have been observed to play a vital role in the success of ECoC – not only by often serving as the primary funding source – but also by actively participating in the development and delivery of the cultural programme itself. ECoCs generally have strong involvement from national stakeholders, who often sit on steering groups and management boards. This means ECoCs are designing and implementing their programmes in collaboration rather than in isolation from national policymakers, who are usually fully involved. National stakeholders in most cases see the ECoC as a matter of 'national importance' and support it through active engagement, aligning the initiative with their own goals such as promoting cultural tourism, boosting economic growth or strengthening the social cohesion of communities.

In contrast, evidence also suggests that a lack of engagement from national policymakers has a clear negative effect. Subnational stakeholders stress the importance of having national policymakers onboard to secure the necessary support and resources. For example, in one of the consulted cities, it took about a year to engage properly with the national cultural authorities to get them involved and recognise the national value of the ECoC project. This highlights the importance of timely and proactive engagement with national policymakers to ensure support and resources are available when needed, ultimately maximising the action's potential impact.

Stakeholder interviews undertaken for the evaluation further suggest that ECoC objectives tend to align well with cultural and socio-economic priorities at the local level. Cities report that they are eager to enhance their cultural profile, stimulate local economic development, and foster community engagement, which matches the overall ECoC goals. However, balancing these local priorities with the overall EU action's emphasis on promoting European cultural diversity and cohesion and hosting international events can be challenging, and the literature review conducted indicates that many applicants struggle to meet the 'European dimension' criterion, often prioritising local issues and themes over broader European objectives. For instance, cities might prefer to take the ECoC opportunity to focus on boosting their local economy or cultural infrastructure, rather than investing in programmes that engage with cultural partners across Europe. This tension between local priorities and the European dimension can hinder applicants from fully embracing the international aspects of the ECoC action.

Collected evidence also points to the importance of effective coordination and a shared vision among involved stakeholders, especially when transitioning from planning to implementation. City-level interviewees highlight the particularly challenging conditions faced by newly formed ECoC organisations, including tight deadlines, frequent staff changes and intense public scrutiny, as they work to transform the bid's vision into reality. Locally, expectations may be very different compared to the national level, making it important to coordinate actions across all involved parties to ensure success and avoid confusion, delays, and potential setbacks. This underlines the critical need for clear communication and collaboration among often a very diverse set of stakeholders – e.g. artists, cultural organisations and institutions, local governments, community groups,

private sponsors, and tourism boards – to pull in the same direction. For example, this coordination could involve creating a joint steering committee with representatives from all stakeholder groups, such as in Aarhus 2017, where a central foundation included members from the municipality, region, private sector, art consultants, musicians, architects, and the national sports association to ensure a unified approach⁶².

2.1.3.2. *External coherence*

The ECoC shows a high level of external coherence, as it is closely aligned with other EU programmes in culture and related fields. This view is reinforced by stakeholders consulted more widely. The majority of respondents⁶³ to the Public Consultation (N=60) felt that the ECoC action was either largely complementary (22%) or complementary (45%) with other EU initiatives and policies⁶⁴. Only 8% of stakeholders considered the ECoC to overlap with other EU initiatives and policies. For national initiatives and policies, the responses were somewhat similar: 20% viewed ECoC as largely complementary, 43% saw it as complementary, while 13% considered it to overlap with national initiatives and policies⁶⁵ – indicating a slightly higher perception of overlap at the national level. A prominent example of alignment at national level is the Italian Ministry of Culture's creation of the Italian Capital of Culture programme in 2015, inspired by the ECoC model, as a follow-up of the competition for the ECoC title in Italy, which attracted a record number of 21 candidates⁶⁶. Since then, the Portuguese and Polish ministries too decided to set up national capitals of culture in the wake of their respective ECoC competitions in 2022 and 2024.

Synergies between ECoC and other EU culture-related programmes, funds or initiatives are fostered by the action being often managed at national level by the same authority also facilitating access to these other programmes, funds or initiatives, such as, for instance, Creative Europe and the New European Bauhaus. As a result, information about various EU cultural funding opportunities is often shared through their channels, increasing awareness about these opportunities and increasing the potential for synergies.

The close ties to the umbrella programme of ECoC, Creative Europe, stand out when examining the external coherence, particularly regarding its Culture strand. There are common objectives, including the promotion and protection of cultural diversity in Europe and fostering stronger cross-border collaboration among cultural organisations⁶⁷. As discussed in section 2.1.1.4, the majority (around 40-65%) of ECoC projects have a good degree of transnational working and there are numerous examples of ECoC projects being co-produced or delivered by partners from different countries. Most ECoC studied to date also have strong examples of artistic exchange programmes, country visits and projects that toured one or more Member States.

Overall, ECoC is aligned with and supports the overarching objective of improving the competitiveness of the EU's cultural and creative sectors set out in the Creative Europe

⁶² [The Board of Aarhus 2017 | Aarhus 2017](#)

⁶³ "Among the respondents, 38% were EU citizens, 22% represented public authorities, 17% were from NGOs, 5% were businesses or business associations, 3% were from academic institutions, and 8% fell were 'others'.

⁶⁴ The remaining share responded 'I don't know'.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ See: <https://capitalidellacultura.cultura.gov.it/capitali-italiane-della-cultura/>.

⁶⁷ In addition to these general objectives, the specific objectives of the Action are: (a) to enhance the **range, diversity and European dimension** of the cultural offering in cities, including through **transnational cooperation**; (b) to widen **access to and participation** in culture; (c) to strengthen the **capacity of the cultural sector** and its **links with other sectors**; (d) to raise the **international profile** of cities through culture.

programme as well as the New European Agenda for Culture⁶⁸. Although not all ECoCs implemented capacity-building projects, around half did foresee actions aimed at improving the strength and robustness of these sectors. The very fact that host cities deliver a cultural programme that often had in excess of 1,000 separate cultural activities helped strengthen the sectors, allowing cultural operators to acquire new competencies and skills as illustrated above. ECoC's support to skills development through capacity-building helps entrepreneurs and artists scale their initiatives and compete globally, fostering long-term competitiveness in European cultural and creative sectors⁶⁹. Furthermore, although the action is not generally perceived as aiming at job creation, as shown in section 2.1.1.3, there is evidence of ECoC contributing to employment in the cultural and creative sectors. By strengthening the CCS, ECoC contributes to long-term economic growth and highlights the vital role of culture and creativity in the economy. There is also clear evidence that the ECoC action has strong coherence with another key objective of the Creative Europe programme, namely, to increase access to and participation in culture and to increase audience engagement and improve audience development. The ECoC action can be firmly seen as a mass cultural participation event with around 38.5 million people participating in ECoC cultural activities between 2013 and 2022, and often the large majority of the residents of title cities attending cultural activities in less traditional venues. ECoC also tends to focus much attention on reaching out to new audiences, often less exposed to culture, in a way that engages them through interesting and different cultural activities not previously seen in their city.

Both ECoC and Creative Europe are linked to strengthening European identity and values through cultural awareness, arts education, and culture-based creativity in education. Although some ECoCs took time to fully embrace the European dimension, they all aimed to implement cultural programmes that strengthened and promoted European identities, having key European values as major themes or topics of their programme. Stakeholders consulted highlighted how the ECoC had often made their cultural offer in their city much more international and diverse, full of content, works and performers going beyond the local dimension.

Beyond programme objectives, ECoC also shares common features with projects and cross-cutting priorities of the Creative Europe programme in relation to greening as well as inclusion and equality – priorities also closely linked to ECoC. For instance, ECoCs are encouraged to promote social inclusion by ensuring their cultural activities are accessible to all, with a specific requirement under Article 5(5) of the 2014 legislative act to prioritise accessibility for young people, people with disabilities and the elderly⁷⁰.

ECoCs analysed in the context of this evaluation presented a strong social dimension and they often used culture as a vehicle to stimulate a broad range of actions targeting disadvantaged communities and engaging with them through the power of culture. Many stakeholders consulted saw ECoC as being a social action as much as a cultural one, and many title cities reported to have used their ECoC year to tackle social issues. Member

⁶⁸ In particular in relation to the objective of 'Supporting culture-based creativity in education and innovation, and for jobs and growth' outlined in the New European Agenda for Culture and the priorities under this objective such as promoting innovation and collaboration among cultural industries, technology firms, and traditional businesses.

⁶⁹ European Commission. (2018). *Commission staff working document: A new European agenda for culture - Background information accompanying the document communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions A new European agenda for culture (COM(2018) 267 final)*. Available [here](#).

⁷⁰ European Parliament & Council of the European Union. (2014). [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 and repealing Decision No 1622/2006/EC](#). p.6. Official Journal of the European Union, L 132/1.

States and other participating countries also include additional themes that reflect their unique cultural heritage. Both Umeå and Bodø, for instance, had a focus on promoting their indigenous Sami populations, the only recognised Indigenous people in the EU, holding a special status in Sweden and Norway. Tartu, in its bid, highlighted 'Resilience' and 'Arts of survival', echoing the views of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) on the 'transformative power' of culture with the potential to strengthen society and communities.

Similarly, ECoCs are also increasingly integrating greening objectives, focusing on environmental sustainability through eco-friendly initiatives and raising awareness of climate change (see Box 16 below). There is, however, potential for ECoC to further strengthen its alignment with sustainability and environmental priorities, which are central not only to Creative Europe but also other EU initiatives such as the New European Bauhaus. Although some ECoCs had projects focusing on a 'greening' theme (examples provided in the box below), this is not a central theme of the action, as, for instance, there is no relevant selection criterion. More recently, sustainability concerns were, however, embedded in bid books, which, very often, mentioned the environmental impact of the ECoC year. However, these concerns mostly translated into a broad overarching ambition rather than the implementation of specific projects or the development, for instance, of specific criteria to monitor the environmental impact of activities implemented.

Box 16. Examples of green initiatives implemented by ECoCs

Aarhus2017 was the first European Capital of Culture to create a model for sustainable development in the cultural sector. The Aarhus Sustainability Model, developed in partnership with Samsø Energy Academy and WorldPerfect, ensured that sustainability remained a core value of the ECoC. This included using locally sourced food, recycled materials, and limiting resource use. The 'Hidden Places' project opened sustainable urban gardens throughout Aarhus, promoting green spaces and environmental awareness.

Galway2020 faced the challenge of delivering its cultural programme amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The city responded by shifting many events to digital platforms. This digital pivot not only ensured the continuation of cultural activities but also reduced the environmental impact associated with large in-person gatherings and travel. Additionally, Galway's 'Hope it Rains' workshops focused on climate resilience and environmental awareness, engaging the community in discussions about sustainable practices.

Elefsina2023 leveraged its ECoC title to address its post-industrial challenges, being one of the most polluted bays of the Mediterranean Sea and promote sustainable urban regeneration. The 'Mysteries of Transition' programme included projects like the 'Landship' installation, which engaged citizens across Europe in reflecting on environmental issues.

Tartu2024 developed Guidelines for Organising Environmentally Friendly Events, which are now mandatory for all city-supported cultural projects as well as for the Tartu 2024 projects in the city and the region. The Estonian Ministry of Culture is exploring the possibility to extending these guidelines countrywide.

A closer look at the alignment between ECoC and Creative Europe projects highlights several initiatives that contribute to their shared objectives. One prominent example is Culture Next⁷¹, a cooperation project funded under Creative Europe. This initiative is made up of current and former candidates for the European Capital of Culture title, which supports cities to implement culture-led local development programmes and policies. The Deconfining⁷² project, is another notable example involving several ECoC cities. It aims to create improved cultural ties between Europe and Africa by developing a sustainable reference model of cultural cooperation. Among other outputs, the project offers peer-to-

⁷¹ <https://culturenext.eu/about/>

⁷² [Deconfining – Arts, Culture, & Policies in Europe & Africa](#)

peer exchange programmes on intercontinental mobility and cultural cooperation between Africa and Europe.

The external aspect of ECoC aligns with broader European efforts to strengthen the EU's enlargement policy, by including cities from candidate and potential candidate countries in the initiative. In doing so, ECoC also feeds into the New European Agenda for Culture, which aims to strengthen cultural diplomacy and international cultural relations, including in Eastern Europe and Central Asia⁷³. Interviews with relevant stakeholders suggest that there is room to further align ECoC objectives with EU external policies with the aim, in coordination with the European External action Service (EEAS), of establishing cultural partnerships in countries where the EU has a strategic interest. One existing channel that could be leveraged is the EU Cultural Diplomacy Platform⁷⁴, which provides advice on external cultural policy, facilitates networking, organises activities with cultural stakeholders, and offers training programmes for cultural leadership. Cultural diplomacy has the potential not only to strengthen international cultural relations but also to enhance the competitiveness of the European cultural and creative sectors, aligning with the objectives of ECoC. By fostering cross-border collaborations, knowledge exchange, and market access, cultural diplomacy helps European artists, cultural institutions, and creative businesses expand their reach and influence globally. ECoC often involves international artists and has a global echo, which could be leveraged to further strengthen cultural ties with non-EU countries, foster cultural diversity and dialogue, and create opportunities for cultural entrepreneurs. This may also attract investment and increase the visibility of European culture. In this way, cultural diplomacy through ECoC can serve as both a tool for soft power and a driver of economic growth, reinforcing Europe's strong position in the global creative economy.

Despite most evidence showing that the ECoC action is generally coherent to broader EU approaches linked to culture, data shows that this alignment does not necessarily manifest itself in terms of EU funding being channelled into ECoC related activity and projects. As discussed in section 2.1.2.2, the main source of direct EU funding for a ECoC tends to be the Melina Mercouri Prize and EU funding is often less than 10% of the total budget of an ECoC programme. Finance from the Cohesion Funds including those linked to regional funding, employment, social inclusion and even education are used less to support the ambitions of the ECoC, suggesting a lack of coherence with the main EU funds. However, it should be noted that evidence on the use of EU funds is scarce and does not provide the full picture of the extent ECoCs have been able to channel EU funding directly through the foundation or indirectly through projects implemented. Indeed, interviews with stakeholders highlighted how EU funds, and in particular ERDF, were used to support projects that often indirectly complemented the ECoC programme but were not necessarily counted as part of their official programme budgets. For instance, in Paphos, ERDF funding was used to enhance public spaces and the public realm, providing improved venues for cultural activities during the ECoC year (a list of examples of funds used by in the context of ECoCs is provided in section 2.1.2.3). It is also estimated that Rijeka received the equivalent of €24.65 million from ERDF to cover capital investments connected with their ECoC project, in particular for the rehabilitation and transformation of the former Benčić factory into cultural buildings that now house the City Museum of Rijeka, the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, the Rijeka City Library and the Children's House (the first building of its kind in Croatia, dedicated to the development of children's creativity).

⁷³ European Commission. (2018). *Commission staff working document: A new European agenda for culture - Background information accompanying the document communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions A new European agenda for culture (COM(2018) 267 final)*.

⁷⁴ [Cultural Relations Platform](#)

Furthermore, even if not used directly for the ECoC implementation, evidence suggests that prior experience in broader European collaboration in EU-level networks and projects, as well as in accessing EU funding, facilitated participation in ECoC. For example, a national ministry highlighted that they were not surprised by a city's interest in the ECoC programme, ahead of its bid, given its track record of actively pursuing European initiatives and funding. Although not necessarily evidence of coherence with ECoC, it is an indication that often, stakeholders participating in EU initiatives undergo a learning process enabling them to use their experience and networks to apply for and deliver the ECoC event. Considering the challenges in successfully implementing the European dimension of the action (as discussed in section 2.1.1.1), previous experience in using EU funds and participating in EU activities could be used as a preferential criterion for the selection of future ECoCs.

2.2. How did the EU interventions make a difference and to whom?

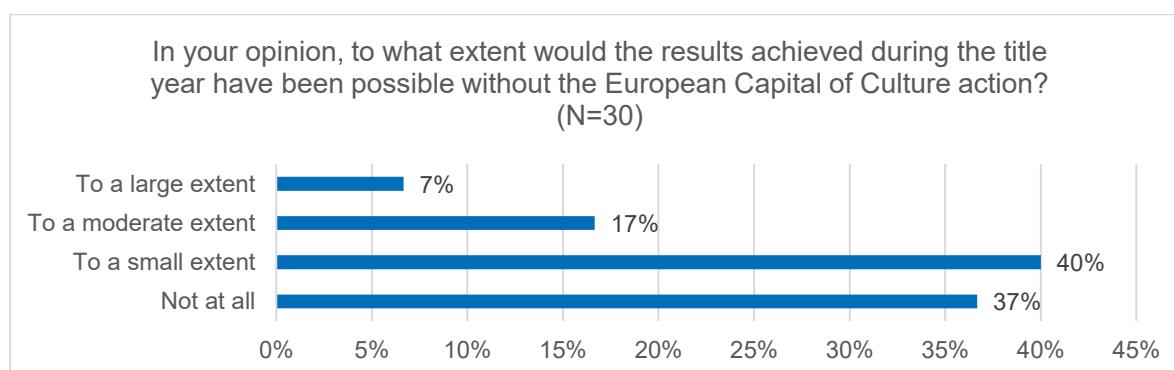
This section sets out key areas in which the ECoC provides added value and the extent to which the action's outputs, results and impacts could have been possible or achieved without the EU intervention.

2.2.1. EU Added Value

2.2.1.1. Main areas of EU added value

Overall, ECoC is recognised for being able to sort a number of impacts that would not be possible without it. Stakeholders consulted largely agreed that the results achieved by cities hosting ECoC would not have been possible without action at the EU level. For instance, Figure 5 below shows that 77% of the Public Consultation respondents (N=60) considered the action essential to the results achieved. A similar level of support emerged from the interviews and focus groups. In particular, stakeholders highlighted the importance of the action in pushing the cities toward exploring and embracing a European dimension of culture both in terms of contents and values and collaborations. ECoC also provided a level of international visibility otherwise unattainable, often giving smaller cities the opportunity to shine on the European and international stage. Representing such an opportunity for title cities to attract an international audience, ECoC also fosters the development of ambitious cultural programmes with an unprecedentedly large and diverse offer. These aspects are further explored in the subsections below.

Figure 5. Opinion of respondents to the ECoC Public consultation on the action EU added value



Source: ECoC Public consultation

Promoting cross-border collaboration in the field of culture

The ECoC action has played a crucial role in promoting cross-border collaboration in the cultural and creative sectors in a way that national-level programmes do not aim to achieve. It has enabled cities, especially smaller ones, to work with international partners from across Europe and beyond. This collaboration has **significantly enriched the cultural offerings of host cities**, creating opportunities for artists and cultural institutions to connect globally.

Each ECoC typically engaged with a large number of international partners during their title year. For example, the ECoC in Plzeň collaborated with partners from 50 countries, Aarhus with 35, and Umeå with 18⁷⁵. Even smaller ECoC cities, such as Paphos and Plovdiv, involved 12 and 11 countries, respectively, highlighting the extensive international scope of the programme. These collaborations elevated the international profile of the host cities and provided access to a new and broader cultural network.

In addition to fostering European partnerships, the ECoC action **facilitated cooperation between EU cultural players and artists from non-EU countries**. For instance, local artists in host cities worked with artists from countries such as Japan (e.g. Košice, Wrocław, Matera, Valletta), the United States (e.g. Wrocław), Botswana (e.g. Umeå), and Canada (e.g. Mons), to name but a few⁷⁶. These partnerships expanded the variety of cultural programmes, incorporating international perspectives alongside local ones. Activities such as artistic exchanges, foreign visits, and artwork swaps demonstrated the cross-border collaboration that ECoC fosters.

Interviewees highlighted the added value of EU-level support in enabling this international cooperation. Some stakeholders reported how the European dimension of ECoC helped them establish networks that would have been difficult to achieve through national initiatives alone. A representative from the Austrian Ministry of Culture remarked that 'international connections are a huge asset that cannot be achieved by a country alone'. In Galway, for instance, the ECoC designation enhanced its international engagement pushing the city to involve 34 artists from 11 countries across four continents through the 'Small Towns Big Ideas', 'Space Between' project⁷⁷ exploring the history of lacemaking in Headford, County Galway, whilst embracing the common interest across countries. As noted by a stakeholder from the Galway Culture Company, ECoC reinforced international cooperation and continues to grow through dedicated initiatives such as, for instance, the EU Funding Support Programme⁷⁸, which provides access to and support for EU funding and partnerships specifically for the cultural sector.

The international prestige associated with the ECoC status also played a critical role in **attracting global attention**. In Poland, for example, the ECoC brought international recognition to the cultural efforts of Wrocław as indicated in Section 2.1.1.4 on increased tourism and international media mentions, far surpassing what could have been achieved through a national initiative.

Finally, for many small host cities, the ECoC designation **created opportunities for artists and cultural players to build connections that did not exist before** and thus develop collaborations that would not have happened otherwise. Many of these cities had limited or no previous links with international cultural partners, making cross-border collaboration one of the most significant outcomes of the EU's intervention.

⁷⁵ See references in section 1.5.

⁷⁶ See references in section 1.5.

⁷⁷ [Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture The Space Between - Art Trail - Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture](#)

⁷⁸ [EU Funding Support Programme - Galway Culture Company](#)

Stimulating much higher levels of culture in cities

Another key area of EU added value links to the ECoC action playing an important role in **significantly increasing cultural activity in host cities in a way that national level programmes would not be able to achieve**. As noted elsewhere in the effectiveness section, the analysis shows that, on average, ECoC programmes feature 1,000-1,200 separate activities during the title year. This represents a 300-400% increase compared to a typical non-ECoC year. Such high levels of cultural activity are possible and worth doing only when there is an audience large enough. Without an EU's intervention able to provide such an international stage to title cities and, hence, an unprecedented access to an international audience to attract, cities would be less inclined to implement so many cultural activities.

Box 17. Cultural scene in Elefsina

Elefsina did not have an established art scene or a culture department within the municipality when the ECoC2023 project started. Indeed, the virtually non-existent local cultural scene forced the emergence a strong European dimension within the curation of the Eleusis2023 programme. Ultimately the city managed to gather almost 1,600 idea proposals from 47 countries, which is four times as many as any other city applying for the ECoC title has attracted.

This surge in new and extra cultural activity highlights the initiative's transformative effect on a city's cultural landscape. The ECoC action has not only increased the scale of cultural events but also attracted vast numbers of participants. Analysis shows that between 2013-2022, 38.5 million people took part in ECoC-supported activities, either as audience members, curators, or project beneficiaries. Many of these participants were new to cultural events, according to the interviewees, as highlighted in our findings in Section 2.1.1.2, and this level of cultural participation could not have happened without EU intervention.

The impact of ECoC is particularly strong in cities where cultural movements may have struggled to gain traction without EU support. For example, an interviewee from a national-level public institution in Estonia noted that the initiative fostered cultural growth in titleholders that would have been difficult to achieve otherwise. In Slovakia, a representative of a national-level public institution observed that ECoC served as a vital stimulus for both urban and cultural development, especially in smaller cities.

Box 18. Sustaining the ECoC Impact: Košice's Creative Momentum

In Košice, ECoC acted as a catalyst for business investments, urban revitalisation, and the development of a thriving cultural environment. In particular, the creative organisation, CIKE, was originally established to deliver the city's ECoC programme in 2008 and has since been active, continuing to support culture, creative industries, and city development.

Košice has now positioned culture and creativity as core elements of its growth strategy, continuing to allocate resources (such as grant schemes) to support culture.

The city's cultural strategy is also more internationally oriented. Košice joined networks such as the UNESCO Creative Cities Network⁷⁹ and the Media Art Network⁸⁰ to foster international collaboration, exchange best practices, and enhance the city's cultural and creative industries. Additionally, CIKE implemented one of the largest residential and artistic programmes in Slovakia, still running eleven years after the ECoC year⁸¹.

⁷⁹ <https://www.unesco.org/en/creative-cities>

⁸⁰ <https://mediaartscities.com/>

⁸¹ <https://www.kair.sk/en/open-call-for-art-science-residency-in-creative-city-kosice-2/>

Larger cities have also benefitted from this cultural boost. For example, in Marseille, the ECoC helped regenerate urban areas and introduced a wide range of cultural events such as the 'Quartier Créatifs', an 18-month project where artists working primarily in the fields of architecture, design and landscaping, collaborated with local citizens to transform public spaces. Public events and a workshop took place every month throughout the project. These activities would not have occurred without the EU's support and show how the ECoC initiative can stimulate much higher levels of cultural activity, creating lasting impacts on both smaller and larger cities.

Raising the international profile of cities

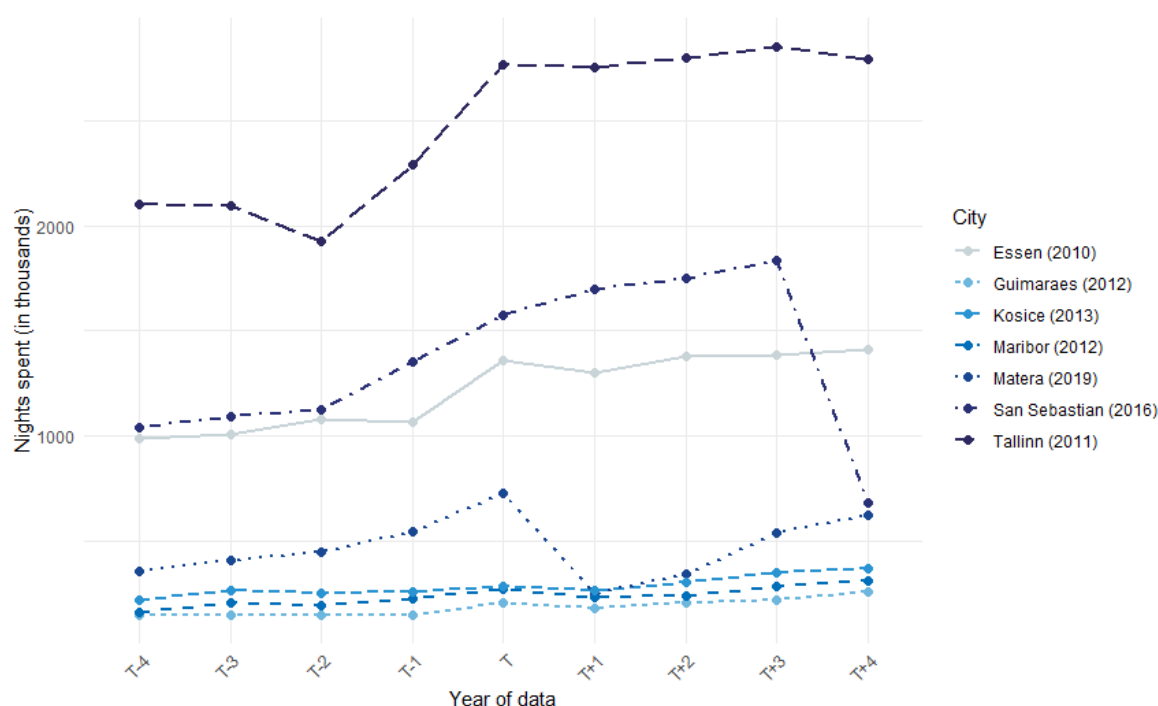
The ECoC action has shown significant EU added value in raising the profile of host cities by **increasing international tourism**. The analysis of nights spent in tourist accommodation in seven ECoCs⁸² showed an average and steady increase in tourist presence. Over the four years preceding the title year, data shows an average yearly increase of 11%, with the highest average increase of 20% for Matera. This steady increase in tourist presence translates into a staggering 50% average increase when comparing nights spent during the title year with those spent in those cities four years earlier. In Matera, this increase was about 110%, but also San Sebastián showed an increase of 50% during the title year, reaching almost 1.6 million nights spent in tourist accommodations. Although data shows that just after the title year there is a noticeable and, to some extent, expected decrease in tourist presence compared to the title year (about -11% on average across the cities examined), the absolute value is still largely higher than the year prior to the ECoC (about 15%)⁸³. Finally, in the years following the ECoC (T+2 to T+4), all cities considered showed an average increase of 11% in nights spent in tourist accommodation⁸⁴.

⁸² The analysis was conducted on seven cities for which different data time point were available, specifically from T-4 to T+4 where T is the ECoC year. To ensure the average to be better grounded, we included four cities from outside the evaluation period, namely Essen (2010), Tallinn (2011), Guimaraes and Maribor (2012).

⁸³ Data was corrected to account for Matera which had to face the aftermath of Covid-19 in the year following its ECoC.

⁸⁴ Data was corrected to account for San Sebastián T+4 which fell on 2020 and hence born the consequences of the Covid-19 outbreak.

Figure 6. Nights spent in tourist accommodations per city



Source: Eurostat data on culture and tourism, available here: https://doi.org/10.2908/URB_CTOUR

The ECoC raised not only the international profile of host cities in terms of tourism, but also their **media coverage**. During their hosting year, ECoCs saw their cities increasingly mentioned in international media. An interviewee from the Plzeň city administration noted that it received coverage from major global media outlets not just in Europe, but also in America and Asia. Similarly, an interviewee from the Aarhus Foundation noted that in the year the city hosted the title, it received 27,753 media mentions in 70 countries.

These findings highlight that the EU added value that hosting the ECoC provides. The action helps to internationalise cities and increase international tourism and international coverage to a level that the city would not have without hosting the title.

Promoting a European dimension and values through culture

The action EU added value is also present in terms of promoting a European dimension and European values. According to local evaluations, approximately 40-65% of **all projects supported through the ECoC had a significant European dimension**. Hosting the title encouraged cities to collaborate with organisations and artists from other European countries and to organise cross-border cultural activities. Moreover, it **helped to promote European values at the local level**, with ECoC projects championing themes such as tolerance, co-existence, peace, and equality.

Box 19. Examples of ECoC projects with strong European Dimension

Galway's Wires Crossed Project⁸⁵ was conceived as a large-scale European collaboration bringing together funambulism practitioners, circus artists, and cultural organisations from 13 countries. At its core, the project promoted intercultural exchange through the development of a common artistic practice—tightrope walking—which required trust, cooperation, and the sharing

⁸⁵ <https://www.galwaycommunitycircus.com/news/wires-crossed-the-journey-and-beyond>

of skills across national borders. European funding such as Erasmus+ and a key collaboration with the École de Cirque de Bruxelles ensured that the project reached beyond Galway, creating long-term training programmes that connected communities across Europe. Public performances in multiple cities reinforced the project's European scale, and its culminating event in 2020 saw participants from across the continent converge to showcase the outcome of years of international collaboration. By using a physical and symbolic act requiring balance and coordination, Wires Crossed illustrated the necessity of trust and interdependence—fundamental principles underpinning European unity.

Similarly, Kitchen of Diversity⁸⁶ in Rijeka was explicitly designed as a European-wide project to highlight cultural plurality and the histories of marginalised communities across the EU. Bringing together partners from eight different cities, including representatives from regions with strong migration histories, the initiative fostered cultural exchanges through culinary heritage. The project worked to establish direct links between Rijeka and other European cities, where similar migration patterns had shaped local cultural identities. By connecting these histories, Kitchen of Diversity demonstrated the shared European experience of mobility and migration, positioning Rijeka as a meeting point for broader continental narratives.

Elefsina's TimeCircus⁸⁷ was a transnational initiative that emerged from a long-standing European collaboration between Belgian and Greek cultural actors. The project, centred around the concept of sustainable travel and cultural nomadism, involved the physical journey of a self-built, human-powered landship from Antwerp to Elefsina, covering approximately 3,000 kilometres across multiple European countries. This physical movement across borders was not incidental—it was a deliberate engagement with contemporary European concerns, including ecological sustainability and the social impact of mobility. Along the way, TimeCircus engaged with the local communities of countries crossed and their cultural institutions. The final construction of The Ark in Elefsina as an open creative space was not merely a symbolic gesture but a direct continuation of cross-border collaboration, providing a permanent infrastructure for international artistic residencies and exchanges.

Kaunas's CulturEUkraine⁸⁸ initiative was a direct response to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and highlighted the role of the ECoC in providing tangible cultural and institutional support for artists and creatives displaced by conflicts. CulturEUkraine functioned as a cross-border solidarity platform, linking cultural institutions in Kaunas with Ukrainian artists and organisations across Europe. The platform not only provided physical workspaces and resources but also facilitated international mobility grants, allowing displaced Ukrainian artists and creatives to continue their practice in collaboration with European counterparts. Partnerships with cultural organisations in Poland, Germany, and the Baltic States ensured that Ukrainian artists could access exhibition opportunities and residencies beyond Lithuania.

2.2.1.2. *Maximising the action EU added value*

While stakeholders consulted generally agree on the existence of a strong added value of the action, there is evidence that its potential is not yet fully reached. Some of the aspects that could be strengthened have already been presented in previous sections of this report, hence, we will provide here a focussed overview referencing the specific sections for the more detailed analysis.

As discussed in Section 2.1.2.6, **knowledge sharing between ECoCs remains limited** and often delegated to initiatives not directly linked to the action (e.g. the network CultureNext financed through Creative Europe). The lack of a strong network of cities that hosted the title negatively affects the action's capacity to foster dialogue and exchange between like-minded local authorities. This is a lost opportunity not allowing to build on the experience cumulated by the title cities in a virtuous cycle of constant improvement.

⁸⁶ <https://rijeka2020.eu/en/program/kitchen-of-diversity/>

⁸⁷ <https://2023eleusis.eu/en/flagship-events/time-circus/>

⁸⁸ <https://kaunas2022.eu/en/ukraine/>

Developing a stable and active network of title cities could also provide cities with a platform to showcase their progress in the cultural sector, increasing the possibility of monitoring the long-term effects of ECoC and, to some extent, put some pressure on former title cities to continue investing in culture.

Linked to the previous point, ECoC is also a **platform for cultural operators and artists** to develop skills and networks. However, while ECoC could act as a springboard for these stakeholders to expand their activities beyond their local communities, their participation in ECoC is not recorded in any centralised database, limiting the potential for internationalisation and also the chances to be contacted for future ECoCs or EU projects.

The **use of EU funds** by title cities was already presented in sections 2.1.2.6 and 2.1.3.1, highlighting that, although some cities have managed to use EU funds, there are some restrictions and bottlenecks somewhat hindering ECoCs' access to them. Ensuring that the timings of some relevant calls (e.g. under Creative Europe) are aligned with ECoC cultural programmes or requiring Member States that are due to host ECoC to allocate in their national plans some EU funds to cultural activities and infrastructures linked to ECoC, could streamline access to EU funding for title cities.

In addition to supporting title cities, access to EU funding could then be an effective leverage to enhance the European dimension of ECoCs and their cultural programme. As discussed in section 2.1.1.1, the **European dimension** remains an unclear concept and it has been present to different degrees in ECoC cultural programmes over the years. The lack of specific EU funding linked to the action limits the European Commission's and panel of experts' capacity to influence the cultural programme and its implementation.

As mentioned above, ECoC is able to raise the international profile of a host city. While cities have in place communication plans to ensure to make the most out of this opportunity, their efforts could be further supported by centralised **EU level communication activities**. Such activities would have the potential to reach out to a wider audience and cast a stronger light on the event and the cities, further increasing the popularity of the action and its attractiveness.

Finally, ECoC aims to have lasting impacts on host cities. Engaging with ECoC is meant to symbolise a sincere and convinced commitment toward culture and Europe that should go beyond the implementation of the ECoC event. However, as discussed in section 2.1.2.1, several factors, in particular political support, can affect the **ECoC legacy** and whether it remains an isolated event or the catalyst for a sustained cultural change with a European element in it. Although cities are required to have legacy plans, there is only limited actual monitoring of what actions are implemented to ensure it at the time of the final monitoring meeting. Similarly, there are no tools or measures to ensure that cities stay true to their engagement toward culture and Europe over time, in particular, once the spotlights have moved to another title city. Some stakeholders consulted have suggested that ECoC could follow the model of other EU initiatives (e.g. the European Heritage label), establishing a number of criteria cities need to continuously meet to keep the ECoC title. Ultimately, ECoCs would have the potential to become culture champions, promoting change in their regions and helping neighbouring cities to develop cultural capacity themselves.

2.3. Is the intervention still relevant?

2.3.1. Relevance

This section of the Final Report presents the key findings around the relevance of the ECoC action. The section focuses on the relevance of the ECoC initiative in terms of addressing

the needs of the cities and examines if the initiative remains relevant in light of recent developments across the ECoCs.

In overall terms, literature and interviews strongly point towards the **relevance of the objectives of the ECoC initiative to the needs of the cities**. Although it is now one of the longest-running EU initiatives, the European Capitals of Culture action remains relevant and past ECoCs clearly show strong alignment between the ECoC intervention and the cities' priorities and their socio-economic and cultural development.

The objectives of the ECoC action under the current legal basis explicitly include the 'contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities in accordance with their respective strategies and priorities'⁸⁹. This focus is relevant to the needs of the cities as long-term planning in the field of culture is particularly challenging for cities, especially due to elections or budget restrictions and also culture not generally being a core part of the cities' strategic approach or role⁹⁰. Long-term cultural strategies (with some level of flexibility) are highlighted as a key priority by many European cities and a crucial requirement to nurture a vibrant cultural sector⁹¹.

The relevance of the ECoC action's objectives is particularly noteworthy in terms of the development of **cultural strategies** and strengthening of the cultural offering. The ECoC bidding process is often an inspirational moment to redesign (and in some cases, to design for the first time) the city-level cultural strategies and policies in the field of culture. Integrated approaches to culture are developed as part of the impetus towards the ECoC title, and many ECoCs have developed or refined their cultural strategies as part of the bid development process. All ECoCs from 2015 onwards developed or adapted their cultural strategy, according to contextual data on cities' policies retrieved from the final evaluation report of each ECoC. These strategies provide a long-term vision and cover the bidding process, the ECoC plan and some legacy strategies, and are developed at an early stage of the bidding process⁹². As a result, unsuccessful bidding cities also benefit from the development of new cultural plans. For example, this was the case of Žilina in Slovakia and Broumov in Czech Republic, where a regional strategy for culture was developed starting from the one designed at the city level during the ECoC bidding process⁹³. Other cities like Kalamata (Greece) developed a cultural strategy for the first time and engaged local stakeholders in participatory meetings together with the Municipality to design its ECoC project. A cultural mapping was carried out for the first time and produced an online platform still regularly updated⁹⁴. More generally, the evidence produced, and data collected as part of the application and evaluation processes also played an important role to inform and refine wider cultural policies⁹⁵. The ECoC action, thus, plays a relevant role in strengthening cultural policies across cities.

⁸⁹ [Decision No 445/2014/EU establishing a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2020 to 2033](#)

⁹⁰ European Urban Initiative (2024) Urban Needs and Opportunities. Results of the Forward-Looking Survey. October 2024

⁹¹ See for instance key learning points from the 150 cities and regions involved in Culture for Cities and Regions: Culture for Cities and Regions (2017) Future creative cities: Why culture is a smart investment in cities. <https://culturalheritageinaction.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/03/Future-creative-cities-.pdf>

⁹² To name a few: City of Wrocław (2012). Strategy: Wrocław Through 2020 Plus. Galway (2016) Cultural Strategy for Galway City 2016-2025. Esch-sur-Alzette (2017) Connexions: cultural strategy for 2017-2027.

⁹³ City of Žilina (2021) Cultural Strategy - Creative Žilina 2035 <https://zilina2026.eu/en/kreativna-vizia-zilina-2035/> and Broumov (2021) Broumov Cultural Strategy 2022-2032 <https://www.broumov2028.cz/downloadfile-356>

⁹⁴ <https://oidp.net/en/practice.php?id=1106>

⁹⁵ Focus group participants from the expert panels and from past ECoC however note that baseline data should be required earlier in the process, for instance as part of the selection criteria or as part of the first monitoring meeting to facilitate the evaluation process and allow for comparisons over time in a given ECoC.

Box 20. Aarhus, an example of ECoC's contribution to cultural policies

A major impact of Aarhus, and probably one of the most lasting effects the ECoC title had in the city, is the increased prominence of culture in the city's strategic priorities and the wider region. About 75% of both Aarhus city and Central Denmark council politicians found that Aarhus2017 had an important effect for a greater prioritisation of culture at city and regional levels⁹⁶. In Aarhus, the concept of 'culture as welfare' was a legacy of the ECoC in the city's cultural policy. This means that culture became the starting point for thinking and elaborating initiatives for a wide array of policy areas, including urban design, social policies, economic development or health and well-being. Furthermore, several of the municipalities' new cultural policies in the region have become broader and culture is much more mainstreamed across other policy areas after Aarhus2017, including notably environmental and urban planning policies⁹⁷.

Introducing a long-term perspective among the objectives of the ECoC action is relevant as legacy planning is a key challenge of ECoCs, and more broadly of any city hosting large-scale cultural events. The **sustainability of the ECoC impacts** is indeed a notable area of concern, and several experts and past ECoCs note that the benefits of hosting an ECoC are not necessarily sustained over time, often due to weak legacy planning or fast phasing out of the ECoC delivery body (e.g. San Sebastián 2016⁹⁸ or Paphos 2017)⁹⁹. Cities organising other types of large cultural events such as cultural Olympiads or World Expo also observe similar challenges¹⁰⁰. However, several ECoCs have set up legacy organisations, often with cultural seasons happening every two or three years (e.g. Lille 3000, Arcadia in Leeuwarden, Mons2035) or through a wider development plan for the city (Aarhus 2017)¹⁰¹.

Measuring the true impacts of ECoCs remains a challenge and immediate post-title evaluations were not seen to fully capture the benefits, which often materialise years later, according to stakeholders taking part in the focus groups. The data limitations set out in section 1.5 of the report also show the discrepancies across evaluations and the lack of long-term impact evaluations of ECoCs. The ECoC initiative makes a relevant contribution to improving the evaluation of cultural policies and large-scale cultural programmes at city level. This is a relevant area for many cities, as highlighted by the focus of major associations of European cities, which set up a specific workstream on cultural impact evaluation¹⁰².

In the cases where a country already has cultural policies in place, such as Ireland, the ECoC **strengthened the already existing measures** and extended them further. For instance, Galway 2020 included a strategy to develop a regional film fund to strengthen its local creative economy, in line with the national strategy for skills development inter alia in the audiovisual sector¹⁰³. Furthermore, the process of bidding, often, gave politicians and

⁹⁶ City of Aarhus (2021) Cultural Strategy for 2021-2024.

⁹⁷ Hans-Peter Degn et al. (2018) AARHUS 2017. BEFORE - DURING – AFTER: A research-based evaluation of the effects of the European Capital of Culture project. rethinkIMPACTS 2017 at Aarhus University. <http://www.projects.au.dk/2017>

⁹⁸ LKS (2017) Evaluación de Donostia-San Sebastián 2016 Capital Europea De La Cultura. Donostia San Sebastián 2016

⁹⁹ Ecorys (2018) European Capital of Culture – 2017 Ex-post Evaluation. Study for the European Commission, DG EAC, November 2018.

¹⁰⁰ Jones ZM (2020) Cultural mega-events: opportunities and risks for heritage cities. Routledge, Abingdon

¹⁰¹ City of Aarhus (2021) Cultural Strategy for 2021-2024.

¹⁰² Eurocities (2020) How to measure the value and social impact of culture? A digest of inspiring examples and new approaches. Eurocities Culture Forum Working Group 'Cultural services & culture for inclusive cities': <https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Measuring-the-impact-of-culture.pdf>

¹⁰³ Galway's bid book makes reference to the 2015 action plan for jobs, available at: <https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/publications/publication-files/action-plan-for-jobs-2015.pdf>. This materialised in

the management team confidence in the local cultural sector and gave a more strategic role for culture, addressing the important issue of advancing the level of prioritisation for culture in policymaking¹⁰⁴. This resulted in the allocation of resources towards culture-driven urban regeneration across many ECoCs. Notable examples include the re-use of abandoned or underutilised buildings for cultural purposes (e.g. Dokk1 library in Aarhus 2017 to revitalise a brownfield harbour into a cutting-edge library mixing cultural and social uses)¹⁰⁵, the development of a cultural quarter in the city (e.g. Kapana creative district as part of Plovdiv 2019's Urban Dreams project cluster: through a series of open calls, the district became home to 179 creative companies and regularly hosts diverse cultural events¹⁰⁶), or the development of strategic plans for specific areas. For instance, Waterford (bidding city for the 2020 title in Ireland) went on and developed a strategic plan for Waterford Cultural Quarter, combining cultural and creative activities with a view to uplifting the attractiveness and liveability of the area¹⁰⁷. More details and examples of urban regeneration activities are provided in the box below.

Box 21. Examples of urban regeneration

The European Capital of Culture (ECoC) initiative has provided cities with the opportunity to reclaim urban spaces giving them new meanings that citizens can relate to, creating lasting physical legacies.

One of the most evident legacy effects of **Elefsina2023** lies precisely in the repurposing and renovation of numerous industrial buildings that make up the vast heritage of the industrial past of the city. A Director of Venues, Premises & Infrastructure, with a background in industrial archaeology, was appointed to implement the idiosyncratic mission of Elefsina2023 of breathing new life and reactivating ten key buildings of the city. The ECoC was very successful on this front, for instance the Old Town Hall became the info-point and legacy centre. Thanks to the 'HeritACT' project, funded under the EU Horizon Europe programme, both the disused municipal workers' canteen and the old paint factory IRIS became polyfunctional cultural centres, and the former soap industrial complex (also known as Old Oil Mill Factory) was restored to function as an open-air theatre venue. The Old Railway Station was given to CultTerra group as a youth community centre, while the Eleourgiki industrial complex was elevated to a sports centre. Also, the historic Cine Eleusis was renovated and reopened after 35 years of inactivity for the screenings organised during the ECoC, while other premises were inaugurated specifically on the occasion of the title year, such as the X-Bowling Art Centre, comprising 900 meters square on the waterfront, where most of the repurposed industrial buildings are. The X-Bowling Art Centre became a pivotal venue to host the main in-door events and together with the other infrastructural projects contributed to the regeneration of the waterside front of the city into a new cultural district.

Novi Sad 2022 focused on transforming derelict industrial buildings into cultural stations through the 'Culture Station' project, with twelve cultural centres across the city. The most significant regeneration project was Novi Sad's Creative District (Liman), located near the University of Novi Sad campus on the banks of the Danube. Several former tool-making factories spanning over 11,000 square meters became a hub of contemporary culture and creativity. It is now home to many creative spaces, including the Youth Centre for Creativity, which serves as a 'one-stop' youth centre managed by youth organisations and an important space for the city's creative community. This transformation not only preserved the city's industrial heritage but also created new spaces for cultural activities, fostering a sense of community and togetherness.

2019 with a series of training schemes (500+ people trained between 2019-2022) and the creation of a regional film fund: <https://wrapfund.ie/about-wrap/>

¹⁰⁴ Culture for Cities and Regions (2017) Future creative cities: Why culture is a smart investment in cities.

<https://culturalheritageinaction.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/03/Future-creative-cities-.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ The library offers various cultural products for loans, but also hosts citizen services including social services, and provides open spaces for various types of community workshops: <https://www.dokk1.dk/english>

¹⁰⁶ <https://plovdiv2019.eu/en/platform/transforms/130-urban-dreams/418-kapana-creative-district>. The main activities in the area have been mapped between 2016-2021: <https://visitkapana.bg/en/2021/11/30/2020-2021/>

¹⁰⁷ <https://waterfordculturalquarter.ie/> with the first plan developed in 2017.

In the years following the ECoC year, **Wrocław** committed to reinforcing cultural tourism and strengthening its role as a regional cultural hub by integrating cultural activities into the broader urban development strategy. As such, a key aspect of the legacy was the establishment of lasting physical and socio-cultural structures, which became integral to the city's broader urban development strategy. Substantial investments enhanced the city's cultural venues, including the renovation of key sites such as the Capitol Music Theatre and the University of Wrocław's new library. New cultural institutions were also established, such as the National Forum of Music, which has since become a major cultural landmark.

Matera 2019 strongly focused on cultural renovation. The Open Design School was established as the first European design school founded on the principles of open culture, transforming Matera into an area of radical innovation in the arts, science, and technologies. The renovation of the scenic Cava del Sole provides a good example of the successful efforts of the Foundation to allocate additional funding to the restoration and repurposing of a venue and its transformation into a multifunctional space for cultural and creative activities. Today, the Cava is still used for events and artistic performances, providing unparalleled cultural experiences amid stunning scenery.

In **Kaunas**, the 'Modernism for the Future' initiative activated more than 500 modernist buildings (such as the old post office) previously unnoticed and undervalued through 402 events, reinforcing citizens' emotional attachments to their built heritage and resulting in their listing into UNESCO world heritage.

However, the process of **balancing the aspirational goals** of a city with its practical needs is sometimes a challenge. The ECoC bidding process sometimes focused on ambitious projects driven by artists' desires and ideas, rather than the city's essential needs. While aspirations are crucial for the vision and impact of an ECoC, they must be grounded in practical, achievable goals to ensure sustainable development. Some ECoCs consulted also highlighted the difficulty of implementing ECoC initiatives within an unsupportive national legislative framework, especially in terms of rigid frameworks for public procurement, which cause important delays in staffing the ECoC delivery body and in implementing the bid book's projects.

International positioning and access to networks are relevant for cities, notably to strengthen the attractiveness of their territories¹⁰⁸, and for their cultural and creative sectors. The ECoC objective to 'enhance the range, diversity and European dimension of the cultural offering in cities, including through transnational cooperation' finds its relevance in bolstering these international efforts. The examination of final evaluation reports of all ECoCs shows that the candidacy helps cities and their cultural sector to **position themselves in Europe and take part in European projects**, either as part of the ECoC momentum or as a follow-up to the initiative. For instance, Valetta2018 benefitted from Creative Europe funding with the 'Orfeo & Majnun' participatory opera project, and from Interreg funding for the 'Design4Innovation' project. After 2022, the towns of the ProSud consortium (i.e. the 19 towns of the Esch2022 area) worked together on a proposal for an **Interreg project** in the field of culture and environment, based on the experience of Esch2022. Interestingly, this positioning is also felt by some candidate cities. For instance, Broumov is developing a cooperation with the Polish Government and seven bilateral Czech and Polish projects have been implemented¹⁰⁹, as well as other international projects¹¹⁰.

¹⁰⁸ Metropolis (2022); Monitoring internationalisation strategies Graphic design: www.bernatfont.com in cities and metropolitan areas

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.broumov2028.cz/projekty/nova-polozka>

¹¹⁰ See for instance the grant scheme by Broumov2028+ foundation for international cooperation: <https://www.broumov2028.cz/mame-radi-broumovsko> or international projects from some local cultural operators <https://www.klasterbroumov.cz/projekty>

Box 22. Elefsina's network-building effort

The stakeholders interviewed from within the delivery body of Elefsina2023 expressed particular pride in the extensive networks established throughout the ECoC journey. 'We have finally put Elefsina on a mental European map'¹¹¹ the head of audience development remarked, highlighting the city's integration into key cultural networks. These connections include active participation in the CultureNext Network, the UCLG (United Cities and Local Governments) with the involvement in the Pilot Cities Project of Agenda 21 for Culture, as well as with Culture action Europe, where Elefsina hosted the Beyond the Obvious annual international meeting in June 2023. Similarly, partnerships were forged with the International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts (IETM), culminating in Elefsina hosting the 2019 campus for performing art professionals, and with the European Festivals Association, where the city welcomed the International Atelier for Festival Managers in June 2023. Elefsina's outreach extended also to the European Network for Street Arts and Contemporary Circus and the IN SITU Platform for art in public spaces, and many more international networks that allowed mobility and exchange of professionals. These collaborations embedded the small town into a dense, international web of cultural relationships, forming a legacy that will endure beyond the ECoC year. The impact of this network-building effort is tangible: 'Now, people in Athens, and also abroad, know that Elefsina can do things, can produce. It is a brand now; it's something that gives us an opportunity to continue' noted the head of audience development¹¹².

In terms of promoting quality tourism, the ECoC initiative, with its specific objective to raise the international profile of cities through culture, is relevant to cities' priorities and actions: sustainable tourism and the attractiveness of cities is a core component of the cultural policies of cities¹¹³. Generally **positive impacts on tourism** of the ECoC initiative are noted across final evaluation reports, with a 20% increase in tourism in large cities such as Marseille, Aarhus or Wrocław during the year and a much higher increase in smaller cities (e.g. +198% for Matera between 2014 and 2019,¹¹⁴ or +400% for Mons between 2014 and 2015¹¹⁵). A longitudinal analysis of overnight stays in ECoCs shows an average increase of 8% across the ECoCs between 1998 and 2014¹¹⁶. Minor concerns were, however, raised by interviewees and focus group participants about over-tourism: while the ECoC action and selection criteria place a clear emphasis on quality and sustainable tourism, the focus on generating impacts leads bidding cities to place an important emphasis on boosting tourism and increased participation in cultural activities, ultimately leading to possible over-tourism.

Cultural programmes of ECoCs typically involve an important level of **cooperation across the wider region**, although this varies heavily depending on the size of the city, the level of cooperation across the ECoC region (and in particular different political sensitivities), and the role of cities/regions in terms of cultural policies. In a few cases, the regional dimension (which is not an obligation under the current legal basis) was not fully leveraged and the attractiveness of other cities in the region can be detrimental to the ECoC-hosting city. For instance, Eleusis2023 did not benefit from an extensive promotion in Athens, and few cultural cooperations took place, despite its geographic proximity to the Greek national capital. However, all the core team members of the Foundation were sourced from Athens'

¹¹¹ Interview conducted by KEA on November 26th 2024

¹¹² Interview conducted by KEA on November 26th 2024

¹¹³ See for instance UNWTO (2018) Tourism and Culture Synergies. ISBN: 978-92-844-1897-1 or Urban Agenda for the EU (2019 Partnership on culture and cultural heritage orientation paper.

https://futurium.ec.europa.eu/system/files/migration_files/cch_orientation_paper_-_final-public_version.pdf

¹¹⁴ <https://opendata.matera-basilicata2019.it/en/impact/>

¹¹⁵ Data compiled from final evaluation reports of ECoCs 2013-2022.

¹¹⁶ Falk, Martin & Hagsten, Eva. (2017). Measuring the impact of the European Capital of Culture programme on overnight stays: evidence for the last two decades. European Planning Studies. 25. 2175-2191. 10.1080/09654313.2017.1349738.

and Thessaloniki's cultural organisations and university departments¹¹⁷. Examples include the General Artistic Director (from Athens, who also taught at the universities of Patra, Nafplio and Thessaloniki), the Director of Production (from Athens, who was previously curating 'Lost in Jazz' in Pelion), the Director of Contemporary Art (from Athens, who initiated the Greveniti Residency in the region of Zagori), the Director of Digital Media (from Athens, who was working as a Journalist for GYNAIKA Magazine), the Head of Audience Development (from Athens, who has been working at the Ethnological Museum of Thrace since its foundation), the Director of Intellectual Property & Legacy (from Thessaloniki, who worked in various international artistic festivals like TOA in Berlin and Athens Digital Art Festival) as well as the Director of Performing Art (from Athens, who worked at the Greek National Opera as assistant director), and many other members.

The size of the city is currently not a criterion, but feedback from consultations points to the difficulty of comparing cities with different sizes, inhabitants, and capacities. Rural areas face particular challenges in bidding for ECoCs and suffer from the lack of investment in infrastructure and mobility, and there is often no clear leadership from one particular city to onboard a rural area towards an ECoC candidacy¹¹⁸.

Box 23. Examples of inclusion of rural areas and regional collaboration

Since decentralisation and accessibility are often pillars of bid books, many ECoCs tend to enlarge the spillover effects of their cultural programmes to the surrounding regions, sometimes including them directly in governance structures, cultural calendars and so on.

Galway 2020 provides a successful example of the implementation of digital online initiatives and dedicated programmes to create a connection between urban and rural communities. For instance, the Small Towns Big Ideas programme was designed to celebrate the diversity of Galway in both urban and rural settings through collaboration with small towns around Galway. Small Towns Big Ideas is no longer active, but all materials are available in the Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture archives¹¹⁹.

Stakeholders from **Wrocław** highlighted that the ECoC title had a profound impact not only on Wrocław's cultural and economic landscape but also on the broader Lower Silesian region. Stakeholders highlighted that the designation acted as a catalyst for regional development by fostering greater collaboration between local and regional authorities and enhancing the visibility of the region's cultural and economic potential. One of the most notable outcomes was the impetus it provided for advancing regional strategies, such as the *Development Strategy of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship 2020*¹²⁰. The ECoC title underscored the importance of integrating cultural dimensions into broader development plans, leading to increased investment in cultural infrastructure, tourism, and creative industries across the region.

Another noteworthy practice that could be more widely shared was **Kaunas 2022's** decision to share the title with the broader Kaunas District. Tightly integrating the entire district into the ECoC programme ensured that cultural initiatives were decentralised and accessible. Fifteen local municipalities within the district were actively involved, especially through the 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods' project. A representative of the Department of Culture for Kaunas District remarked: 'It is precisely in the Kaunas District where the changes brought by the European Capital of Culture are most clearly felt'.

¹¹⁷ Final Evaluation Report for Eleusis 2023, "Παραδοτέο 6: Τελική έκθεση αξιολόγησης της ELEUSIS 2023 για το 2023," Elefsina 2023 European Capital of Culture

¹¹⁸ Corroborated by focus groups from the expert panels and ECoC management teams, as well as key stakeholders interviewees.

¹¹⁹ <https://galway2020.ie/en/category/galway-2020/>

¹²⁰ Marshal's Office of Lower Silesia. (2020). *Development strategy of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship 2020*. Urząd Marszałkowski Województwa Dolnośląskiego. ISBN 978-83-936353-2-0.

2.3.2. Continued relevance

This section explores how the objectives and scope of the action remain relevant over time, and how it addresses the evolving needs and new policy priorities of ECoCs.

The **Decision No 445/2014**¹²¹ constitutes the current regulatory framework for the action and concerns the title years 2020-2033. Some key elements of the action remained unchanged from the previous legal basis, such as the chronological order of entitlement for Member States, the two-stage selection process based on year-long cultural programmes created specifically for the event, and the fact that cities will remain titleholders (though bids may continue to involve the surrounding region). Among the main changes from the 2020 title year are¹²²:

- The removal of a need for confirmation of winning cities at EU level, with ECoC titleholders designated directly by the Member State concerned;
- Partial opening of the action to cities in candidate countries and potential candidates and then also to EFTA/EEA countries (with the European Commission responsible for official designation in these cases);
- More specific and robust selection criteria, including a stronger emphasis on the long-term impact of the action and reinforcement of the European dimension;
- A reinforced monitoring process with a third formal meeting added.

It is important to note that the current legal basis has been amended over time, in particular, to address the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and provide some degree of flexibility for affected ECoCs. Hence, the cities holding the title in 2020 were allowed to continue to hold the title until 30 April 2021, without the year of designation being changed, and the three titleholders for the year 2021 had their title years postponed to 2022 and 2023¹²³. These measures sought to ensure that the scope and objectives of the initiative remain relevant over time and adapt to a fast-evolving and changing environment, which poses additional threats and challenges to both bidding and title-holding cities. The ECoC is also seen by city representatives interviewed and focus group participants as a relevant initiative to highlight the importance of culture while cities' yearly budgets for cultural funding are often under pressure. Such a flagship initiative helps other cities to make the case for cultural funding locally, and ECoC evaluations do make a robust case for cultural investment, for instance by measuring the leverage effect of the budget invested in ECoCs, or by documenting the positive cultural and economic impacts of hosting a ECoC.

The **selection criteria for the European Capital of Culture are generally regarded as relevant**, by EU-level, expert panel, national and cities stakeholders consulted, who welcome the important acknowledgement of the role of culture for cities. The openness and flexibility of the selection criteria are also appreciated by representatives of cities. The ECoC process is considered to be very original and a unique opportunity to try new approaches: cities are given the space to invent and experiment. These criteria are seen as a useful framework to steer cities in a particular direction, but their interpretation is subjective and varies from one ECoC to another, which is very positive.

¹²¹ [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 and repealing Decision No 1622/2006/EC.](#)

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ [Decision \(EU\) 2020/2229 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 December 2020 amending Decision No 445/2014/EU establishing a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2020 to 2033](#) (Text with EEA relevance).

Stakeholders' views are conflicted over the complexity of the selection criteria and the application process, with some saying they should be simplified or adjusted, while others argue they are essential for creating a strong bid book and guiding discussions throughout the application process.

The broad definition of the 'European dimension' in the selection criteria can lead to varying interpretations. While this criterion is clearly seen as relevant in the context of the ECoC initiative¹²⁴, it is, in practice, challenging for cities to action this in relation to their local needs. Many bidding cities are small and may lack the resources to effectively develop the European dimension and would benefit from targeted support to address this dimension. Clearer definitions and objectives are needed to streamline the bidding and implementation process, allowing cities to concentrate on specific goals. The significance of the European dimension could be reinforced but there is no strong consensus on whether this dimension should remain a distinct criterion or become a horizontal one, integrating it across all criteria while maintaining its importance, though potentially diminishing its visibility.

The capacity of a city to deliver the ECoC programme is an important aspect of the ECoC selection and delivery process. Most stakeholders consulted agree that the capacity to deliver is relevant but should be a prerequisite rather than a selection criterion, for the selection process to focus more on the quality of the bid and exclude unrealistic projects. According to interviewees and focus group participants, stricter guidelines or agreements are needed regarding the formation and validation of the delivery agency, which should be established before proposal submission. A stricter commitment to the bid book could address some of the known issues for ECoCs: delays often occur due to political disputes, hindering a smooth transition from city designation to ECoC development. Important variations can also happen between the designation of an ECoC and its actual delivery due to political changes or budget cuts, for instance.

Another important criterion that needs to be tightened relates to the sustainability of ECoC projects post-implementation, where the expert panel has a limited role and ability to guarantee long-term sustainability and legacy: there is no ex-post monitoring visit, and the last monitoring report takes place very closely to the ECoC year, so any changes or suggestions are difficult to address.

The selection criteria have not been updated since the adoption of the 2014 Decision. The environmental and digital dimensions have gained significant prominence since then in terms of policies and actions, but they are not explicitly addressed in the selection criteria for ECoCs (though more recent candidates systematically cover these dimensions in their bid books). Some stakeholders argue that environmental sustainability needs to become a formal criterion as well, whereas the digital dimension could be embedded in all the other criteria and across the entire ECoC project.

The links between **culture and environmental sustainability** are well established and many cities are developing strategies and actions to connect culture and environmental policies¹²⁵. Whilst this is not directly addressed in the current selection criteria, these are sufficiently open to enable ECoC to address these themes, nonetheless. For instance, Leeuwarden had a strong focus on the environmental dimension, with locally produced food for 80% of the ECoC projects, through the extensive use of renewable energy, and a

¹²⁴ Feedback expressed by stakeholders both in interviews and focus group discussions.

¹²⁵ For instance, the Eurocities Lille Call to Action for low carbon and more inclusive culture invites mayors from across Europe to commit to the development of local cultural policies and events that prioritise sustainability and inclusivity. The call has now been signed by more than 50 cities. Similarly the Agenda 21 for culture has developed a framework combining cultural policy objectives with sustainability, and has piloted this approach in 20 cities globally: <https://agenda21culture.net/>

systematic reuse of materials, as well as the landmark event Elfwegentocht (two weeks without fossil fuels for the whole Friesland province), culminating in large-scale parades¹²⁶.

Interviewees actively working on cultural diplomacy or in European Neighbourhood Policy countries note that extending the ECoC title to non-EU cities is relevant as it helps to **strengthen cultural cooperation** with the EU, but also to develop closer ties between the EU and candidate countries (and potential candidates) and/or EFTA/EEA countries. Beyond the alignment on the ECoC objectives, this is perceived as pursuing the aims of promoting prosperity, stability and security on the EU's external borders. The actual evidence from past ECoCs is still lacking, with only a few ECoCs awarded to non-EU countries in recent years¹²⁷.

2.3.3. Selection criteria

The 2014 Decision sets out the selection criteria for ECoCs 2020 to 2033, as well as the chronological order of countries hosting the ECoC during that time period. The list of Member States hosting the ECoC is pre-determined. In a way, this long-term planning is helpful for potential candidate cities to initiate the candidacy process well in advance, and several ECoCs initiated their pathway towards the ECoC title way before the national competition officially started, with varying success. For instance, both Leuven and Ghent in Belgium started their work very early towards becoming ECoC 2030: Leuven first announced its intention to bid back in 2017, and Ghent initiated its first consultation processes around 2019. Importantly, several host countries are hosting a ECoC for the second or third time, which opens up opportunities for smaller cities to apply for the title. The relevance of the ECoC initiative may be seen through the continuing interest in many host countries. For instance, in the competition for the 2016 edition, 15 Spanish cities and 11 Polish cities expressed a desire to become their country's European Capitals of Culture and engaged in a fiercely competitive bidding process¹²⁸.

Nonetheless, in other Member States, the number of applications was much lower, although this varies heavily from one cycle to another: one in Belgium for 2015¹²⁹ but six for the 2030 competition, one in Malta for 2018 but two for the 2031 title, three in the Czech Republic for 2015 and Cyprus for 2017 but respectively four for 2028 and five for 2030¹³⁰. This is probably linked to the fact that some Member States have a far larger pool of realistic candidates than others, which may become a problem in the future and selecting weaker candidates for the title in some countries may risk damaging the prestige and brand value of the ECoC in the longer term. However, the 'brand value' of the initiative is arguably not tied to one particular ECoC, and additional promotional and marketing activities around the initiative could offset the potential issue¹³¹. Additionally, the smaller number of applications

¹²⁶ Leeuwarden (2019) final evaluation report of Leeuwarden Friesland 2018.

<https://www.friesland.nl/uploads/media/5c8a6c2d209c4/bijlage-slotmeting-lf2018-engels.pdf?token=/uploads/media/5c8a6c2d209c4/bijlage-slotmeting-lf2018-engels.pdf>

¹²⁷ See also case study on Novi Sad 2022 in Annex 4.

¹²⁸ European Commission. (n.d.). *Commission staff working document: European Capitals of Culture post 2019. Accompanying the document "Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2020 to 2033"*.

¹²⁹ The 2015 title in Belgium is however a special case as Mons had announced a very strong candidacy early on, and the title had been held by a Flemish city (Bruges) in the previous national competition, so it was expected to be held by a French-speaking city in 2015.

¹³⁰ European Commission. (n.d.). *Commission staff working document: European Capitals of Culture post 2019. Accompanying the document "Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2020 to 2033"*.

¹³¹ For instance through celebrations linking ECoCs of a given year to the next, or through cultural programmes involving past and current ECoCs.

can also be justified by particular circumstances, including a particularly strong candidacy emerging early in the process, budgetary constraints, or the timing of local elections.

It should also be noted that several small or medium-sized Member States have already hosted the ECoC title on a number of occasions (e.g. Luxembourg with three ECoCs hosted or Belgium with four¹³²). There is, therefore, a risk of having weaker ECoCs in certain years¹³³. It is worth noting that no countries have expressed any interest in 'opting out' of hosting the ECoC title, even in countries with fewer candidate cities. In practice, the legal basis does foresee the possibility that no city is selected in a particular country, but Member States do have an obligation to organise the competition. Another aspect that needs to be accounted for is the **size of the city**, which is currently not a criterion, but participants remarked on the difficulty of competing and comparing cities with different sizes, numbers of inhabitants, and capacities. Such comparison is complicated for Panel members as well. Some small cities do struggle with the competition and preparation phases, as significant efforts are required of small teams, who often experience risks of burnout.

The participation of small and mid-sized cities is, however, perceived as a positive aspect by all types of stakeholders interviewed, due to several factors:

- Diversification of cultural offerings beyond capital cities and increase of high-quality art and culture in small/larger cities;
- Addressing over-tourism in larger cities by strengthening the attractiveness of smaller cities. Although some smaller cities also suffer from overtourism as well, several ECoC cities were not amongst the main touristic destinations at national level prior to the title;
- Increased recognition of the cities at national/European level: ECoC evaluations measuring this aspect all report an improved cultural offering (between 60 and 75% for ECoCs between 2013-2022)¹³⁴.

Accessibility and smaller cities' capacities to apply for and manage an ECoC need attention. The cities' **capacity to deliver** should be an eligible criterion and not a selection one — cities with no capacity to deliver should not be able to apply. However, there is no consensus on this aspect across the cities and expert panel stakeholders consulted, as some of them would not restrict the possibility to apply only based on the number of inhabitants or to those cities having a minimum capacity. This topic sparked a discussion around the concept and meaning of 'city', which should be better clarified. The current concept of 'city' is seen as outdated and should thus be replaced by that of 'territory', therefore allowing provinces, regions, and alliances of smaller cities (comprising a leading city) to participate as well. In this sense, flexibility is a keyword to be kept in mind. Regional partnerships are seen as one of the possibilities to address this, and allowing regions and provinces to participate could solve the issue of capacity to deliver experienced in smaller cities.

The bidding process for smaller cities and rural areas is, however, a significant endeavour, and consultations have raised concerns over the important efforts required to produce a full bid, with one instance of a preselected city which eventually did not apply for final selection¹³⁵. The preparatory phase (once the ECoC is selected) represents even more

¹³² Note: out of these 4, Brussels hosted the European Capital of Culture title in 2000. This year was a particular case as 9 cities were selected to mark this special date. 2000 was also an exception to the cycle of host countries for the ECoC competition.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Data matrix compiled by the consortium, data from final evaluation reports of the ECoCs between 2013 and 2022.

¹³⁵ The city of Jurmala decided to not prepare a full bid after its preselection for the 2027 ECoC in Latvia. Expert Panel Report (2022) Selection of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) in 2027 in Latvia. European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, June 2022.

efforts. Although more resources are often unlocked at this stage, a city struggling to handle the application phase will most likely face capacity issues in the preparation and delivery phases. The possibility of including a lighter process for smaller cities could be a way to address this issue, potentially by developing different tiers of applications.

It is worth highlighting that surprisingly, small and mid-sized cities present similar high-level features in some key quantitative metrics for the period 2013-2022 (number of events¹³⁶ and overall budgets when compared to larger ECoC titleholding cities). There is however a more important gap in terms of the number of visitors, but the average number of visitors remains important considering the size of the ECoCs considered in the sample¹³⁷.

Table 8. Key metrics and city size

	Average all ECoCs	Average for small and medium-sized cities
Number of events organised	1350	1406
Average total budget (spent)	50,336,554	47,497,797
Average number of visitors	2,138,825	1,038,438

Source: Ecorys analysis, 2024

The data on events and budgets are partly skewed by the important final contribution of regional and national authorities in a few small to mid-sized cities (90% for Matera 2019, 63% of the ECoC total budget for Mons 2015, 61% for San Sebastián 2016, and 27% for Leeuwarden 2018), and a very high number of events were organised by cities in the region or province for ECoCs such as Esch-sur-Alzette or Leeuwarden.

2.3.4. Criteria for appointing panel members

The selection criteria for the expert panel are quite straightforward, and they focus on the experience and expertise in: the cultural sector (at least 8 years); the cultural development of cities (at least 8 years); or the organisation of a European Capital of Culture event or an international cultural event of similar scope and scale (at least 4 years), based on the curriculum vitae of applicants. Additionally, European Institutions seek to ensure complementarity and balance across the panel of experts in terms of competences, geographical distribution and genders¹³⁸.

While this selection process assesses relevant skillsets, it is, however, quite broad and could arguably benefit from a clearer match with the selection criteria for the designation of the European Capitals of Culture or feature more focused selection criteria reflecting transversal priorities of the European Union. Additional selection criteria could include a basic legal knowledge of how the public and the cultural sectors operate in some EU countries, to ensure that the recommendations provided are feasible from a legal point of view. This can also be best covered by national experts. The coherence between different profiles with a broad range of expertise is also important and could be strengthened by

¹³⁶ Note: events encompass different types of cultural activities and ECoC evaluations do not collect data on this in a harmonised way. In practice, some may include smaller activities, while others may focus on events with a ticketing service only.

¹³⁷ Cities classified as small and mid-sized as per the case study selection methodology (non-capital cities under 100,000 or 250,000 inhabitants).

¹³⁸ Open call for expression of interest EAC/A03/2021 for the establishment of a pool of experts to be potentially members of the Panel for the Union action "European Capital of Culture" under [Decision 445/2014/EU](#).

better emphasising the specific profile and field of expertise of each expert to guarantee complementarity, for instance, through optional criteria in the call for experts. Finally, the working methods of the expert panel between members are not very detailed, and the sharing of responsibilities and the rotation of leadership, rapporteurs, and field visits on a voluntary basis could be formalised in the open call for experts. These methods have already been implemented organically among experts comprising the Panel.

The selection of experts generally reflects the selection criteria, and the experts appointed are all very experienced and reflect quite well gender and geographical balance, with a broad set of skills and expertise in the cultural sector and cultural policies. Key stakeholders from expert panel and ECoC managers interviewed pointed out that the representation of artists and cultural operators in the panel is too limited, and that while gender and geographical balance are generally well-respected¹³⁹, diversity in terms of representation of minority groups is not addressed. A crucial point of the expert panel composition is also the balance between panel members appointed at European level, and national experts. National experts play an important role in making sense of the local context and appraising how realistic the ambitions of ECoC candidate cities truly are. They can also share views on information provided in the bid book that other experts might not feel qualified to question¹⁴⁰. This is particularly important in a post-COVID context, where more expert panel meetings take place online. Conversely, representatives from some member States have opted to not appoint national experts, as their national pool of experts might be accused of biases towards some of the candidate cities. An alternative option is to appoint nationally an expert from a different country who knows the specific country but has a lower level of involvement, for instance one Member State nominated a European expert with knowledge of the specific country¹⁴¹.

¹³⁹ Note: with the new experts starting in 2025 and those departing, the gender balance is not so well respected for this year (7 men / 3 women).

¹⁴⁰ Highlighted by focus group participants and interviews with national ministries.

¹⁴¹ Estonia nominated as one of its two experts a German citizen with a deep knowledge of the country.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE OF THE ACTION

Based on the findings of this evaluation, this section presents the main conclusions of the evaluation as well as the key issues that should be considered for the future of the action. The potential actions addressing the various issues identified during the evaluation are presented in the boxes below¹⁴².

3.1. To what extent was the intervention successful and why?

(Effectiveness, Efficiency and Coherence)

Overall, the ECoC action has successfully delivered against its objectives. The **action contributed to an enhanced cultural offer for host cities**, stimulating a significant increase in the number of cultural activities during the title year. A typical ECoC cultural programme consists of around 1,000-1,200 separate cultural activities, and the volume of cultural activity increases by around 300-500% in host cities compared to a non-ECoC year. There is also an increase in the scope of cultural activity taking place in the host city, particularly in terms of introducing new and sometimes *alternative* genres into the normal cultural calendar of the host city (including comedy, youth theatre, community choirs, film making, poetry and literature festivals). This additional cultural activity helped ECoC to produce cultural work that appealed to a wider audience and, in turn, increased the number of people interested in consuming culture. Results show that a large share of ECoC projects had partners from other European countries and also focussed on a strong European theme (e.g. diversity, coexistence, equality).

ECoC was successful in widening access to and participation in culture in host cities.

Around 38.5 million people participated in ECoC-supported cultural activity over the period 2013-2022, either as audience members, curators or project beneficiaries. Around six out of ten residents of a host city attended at least one ECoC event or project during the host year. ECoC was also successful in widening the type of beneficiaries who consumed culture and encouraging people who had not previously been active in culture to attend cultural activities. This result was possible, among others, thanks to ECoC supporting culture in non-traditional and more accessible locations of the city (including parks, streets and 'forgotten' neighbourhoods), as well as a wider variety of genres that broadened the appeal of culture, collaborating with organisations who regularly work with specific target groups (e.g. migrants) to deliver cultural projects, and also addressing the cost of culture by providing more opportunity for people to consume culture for free, often in public spaces.

ECoC contributed to strengthening the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors.

Around half of the ECoCs studied had a specific support programme in place to help develop the capacity of the local CCS. Other ECoCs, rather than explicitly implementing an intervention to strengthen the sector, relied on local CCS organisations receiving funding to deliver ECoC-related activities, which in turn helped develop their capacity. However, while hosting a multi-million-euro cultural programme should mean that benefits in terms of financial support and capacity development trickle down naturally to local CCS, in practice this was not always the case, suggesting it would be useful for ECoCs to consciously plan for the active involvement of its local CCS.

Hosting an ECoC also helped generate stronger networking within the local CCS, establishing either a formal or informal cultural ecosystem in their city and encouraging them

¹⁴² Each action indicates priority levels and the expected timeline (short-term: can be implemented rather quickly; medium-term: requires the development of specific systems or infrastructures; long-term: needs to be implemented consistently over time).

to work together to design and deliver cultural content. These relationships tended to last well beyond the ECoC year.

Delivering an ECoC also greatly helped to strengthen local talent within the local CCS through the implementation of often hundreds of cultural projects at a different scale than previously experienced, giving local CCS an opportunity to showcase their work to bigger audiences with bigger budgets and higher-quality productions or works.

ECoC contributed to raising the title-holding cities' international profile through culture. An ECoC year often increases visitor numbers in a host city by around 30-40% with around 30% of all visitors coming from abroad. A typical ECoC year also generates anything between 10,000 and 58,000 extra mentions or articles about the host city as a direct consequence of the city hosting an ECoC. ECoC, therefore, represents an opportunity for cities to raise their international profile. While cities have in place good communication plans to promote their ECoC year, no communication campaigns around ECoC are done at EU level by the European Commission or other European Institutions to promote the title cities, overall reducing the potential reach and impact of the action.

Potential actions for the future of ECoC	Priority level	Timeline
Develop and implement a coordinated EU-level communication strategy to enhance the visibility and impact of the European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) initiative. This strategy should work in synergy with the communication efforts of the title cities and include input from Member States. It should aim to raise awareness among EU citizens by promoting not only the activities of current ECoCs but also the preparatory work of future host cities and the legacy initiatives of former titleholders. To strengthen political support and visibility, consider appointing high-profile ambassadors—such as Commissioners or Members of the European Parliament (MEPs)—to publicly champion the ECoC programme across Europe.	Medium	Long-term

There were a number of **challenges that influenced the effectiveness of ECoC**. Firstly, as a typical ECoC had a €50 million budget, the financial strain was one of the most significant challenges of bidding for and implementing the ECoC title. Secondly, with a cultural programme often consisting of 1,000-1,200 separate activities during the year, planning and implementing this scale of extra-cultural activity was a significant challenge, even for larger host cities, but particularly for smaller cities. Thirdly, political influence was often an important external factor affecting the ECoC initiative, both in positive and negative ways. Aligning political goals and messages with the objectives of local ECoC and also the values and themes of the EU proved challenging in some cases and navigating national and local politics was a crucial aspect of the successful execution of ECoC programmes. Fourthly, to build broad-based support for ECoC activities, it was necessary to meaningfully involve a wide range of actors, including cultural organisations, political authorities and the general public. This broad, engaging effort required a large number of resources to ensure this success factor came to fruition.

Potential actions for the future of ECoC	Priority level	Timeline
The evaluation findings do not necessarily suggest that the size of the hosting cities is an issue per se. The budget allocated and the quality and scope of cultural activities seem to be more relevant. Ensure that bidding cities, despite their size, have high-quality cultural programmes and realistic budgets allocated. In particular,	High	Long-term

Potential actions for the future of ECoC	Priority level	Timeline
consider introducing an eligibility criterion linked to the cities' capacity to deliver an event of the size of ECoC.		
Explore the possibility of introducing formal agreements between designated cities, national ministries, and the European Commission to secure national funding commitments at the selection stage.	Medium	Long-term

Looking at **the legacy of the action**, it is worth highlighting that most ECoCs did not continue to research and evaluate the effects of the activity beyond the host year, making it challenging to fully assess the extent of the ECoC legacy. Nevertheless, stakeholders highlighted the lack of legacy and longer-term impacts as a weak aspect of the ECoC action. This is due to several factors: a general lack of legacy planning to help organise and maximise the impacts of the ECoC year; the fact that nearly all of the ECoC teams responsible for delivering their programme were not usually in post beyond 1-3 months after their ECoC year, leading to a loss of competences and skills; loss of momentum once the ECoC year had finished, leading to reduced political commitment on the longer term. These factors, in particular political support, can affect the ECoC legacy and whether it remains an isolated event or the catalyst for a sustained cultural change with a strong European element. Although cities are required to have legacy plans, there is no actual monitoring of what actions are implemented to ensure their sustainability post the ECoC year.

Potential actions for the future of ECoC	Priority level	Timeline
The action places great focus on its legacy, however, there is no monitoring framework in place for track long term impact of hosting the title. Developing monitoring tools for the legacy of the action and encouraging cities to use them could allow the cities and the EC to better track and understand the long-term impact of ECoC.	Medium	Long-term
Strengthen the legacy plans already at the bidding phase ensuring there is a structured process in place for managing the ECoC legacy encompassing a) long-term political commitment at different levels, b) securing and maintaining skills and competencies, c) adequate and continued support to cultural organisations; d) clear monitoring and evaluation processes for the legacy years (carried out by the cities themselves).	High	Long-term

Overall, the **selection procedure** to identify host cities and the two-step process were effective in ensuring that cities had enough time to submit high-quality bid books and for the expert panel to review and assess them. However, the tight timeline is considered challenging for cities that lack sufficient expertise or the required international networks or who have yet to gather sufficient support at local and regional levels. Experts assessing the bid books might also face challenges due to the current timeframe and time allotted to the assessment, depending on the number and length of the bid book, especially in competition that attracts a high number of candidate cities. Furthermore, while the two-step process allowed to increase the efficiency of the selection procedure and gave bidding cities the possibility to enhance their original bid, there are concerns that this could result in cities putting forward a second bid substantially different from their original proposal.

Cities can draw on several guidance materials provided in English by the Commission and many bidding cities make use of external experts to prepare their bids and, while knowledgeable experts can represent a real added value to cities' bids, this might risk skewing the competition depending on the expertise cities manage to acquire.

Potential actions for the future of ECoC	Priority level	Timeline
Extending the time allowed for the selection phase could allow cities to strengthen their proposals and address feedback from the panel of experts. This could be achieved by possibly anticipating the start of the process by 6 months, so as not to reduce the time allowed for the preparation period post-selection. At the same time, extending the timeline could make the process more complex and increase the risk of external factors impacting the implementation process. Alternatively, ensuring early communication about the upcoming competition could give cities a sufficient 'heads-up' to start preparing for the bidding process.	Low	Long-term
Provide additional guidance to cities on bid book preparation to reduce over-reliance on external consultants and ensure a level playing field.	Medium	Short-term
Ensure all relevant materials, including guidance, past bid books, key dates, etc. are available on an on-line platform accessible by cities to ensure equal access.	Medium	Short-term
While English remains the working language, translating key guidance materials into additional EU languages, particularly for use at the sub-national level, would support wider dissemination and usability. This would help ensure that local stakeholders, who may be less familiar with English, can engage more effectively with the ECoC process.	Low	Short-term
Being successful at the pre-selection phase should allow cities to improve and build on their original bid book, this should not mean a complete deviation from the original bid-book or panel's recommendations. Clarify the objective and scope of the two-step selection and the extent of changes that can be done to the original bid book, to ensure that the competition remains fair in all stages of the process.	Medium	Long-term

The selection criteria are generally perceived as well-designed, proportionate, fair and in line with the cultural policy at the national level. The European dimension in particular is, however, a difficult criterion to understand, implement, integrate into ECoC bid books and cultural programmes, and evaluate once the year has passed. Indeed, the broad definition of the European dimension in the selection criteria can lead to varying interpretations. Implementing organisations sometimes find it hard to encourage local projects and local cultural operators (often with local target groups and local audiences) to go beyond their usual local perspective and 'think through the European lens', to quote a consultee. Smaller or less experienced cities might face more difficulties in building international relations and accessing networks of cultural operators, making it challenging to meet the European dimension criterion. Furthermore, stakeholders consulted stressed how the European nature of the action suggests that, instead of being considered as a self-standing criterion, the European dimension could permeate all aspects of the ECoCs, ensuring a stronger adherence to the action's goals.

Host cities of ECoC have generally got smaller over time and the size of the city plays a critical role in its ability to fully exploit the potential of the ECoC, with larger cities being generally able to count on established infrastructure, broader networks, and greater resources both financially and in terms of human resources. However, there is no quality benchmark to compare the different ECoC programmes that have been delivered in recent times, and it is only a perception that small host cities put on lower-profile ECoC programmes that could be considered lower in quality. Evidence suggests that smaller cities

often achieved strong results in key indicators such as, for instance, in terms of audience figures, budget size and quality of their ECoC programme.

Potential actions for the future of ECoC	Priority level	Timeline
Develop clear guidelines and support materials that clarify the European dimension criterion and highlight best practices and successful examples at projects level.	High	Short-term
Develop quantitative and qualitative targets linked to the European dimension cities should aim for when designing their bid book. These tools should not be prescriptive but should help cities interpret and integrate this dimension in a way that aligns with the principles and objectives of the criterion, while allowing for local adaptation and innovative approaches.	High	Short-term
Foster the European dimension through better activities implemented by cities but also through real collaboration between the title cities. Networking and peer-learning between past, current and future ECoCs could help to achieve this.	High	Medium-term
Ensure that cities, independently of their size, have access to international/European networks of cultural operators.	High	Long-term
Consider switching the European dimension to a transversal criterion permeating and informing the other selection criteria.	Medium	Long-term

The **monitoring process** is effective and overall efficient in supporting cities to implement ECoC and allowing the panel and the European Commission to identify and address issues promptly. Cities would, however, welcome additional guidance and a shift towards a supervising process where experts advise cities post-award more than checking milestones. While there are different views in terms of the ideal frequency of monitoring meetings, there is scope for anticipating the first and last monitoring meetings. Finally, the switch to online meetings increased the efficiency of the process and contributed to the sustainability goals of the EU. However, it also somewhat reduced the effectiveness of the experts' work, affecting their ability to make an objective and realistic assessment of the progress of the ECoC as well as providing guidance and support to cities.

Potential actions for the future of ECoC	Priority level	Timeline
Switch the role of the panel from merely monitoring to monitoring and mentoring. While the meetings are essential to monitor the progress on the preparation of the event, they could be a moment for cities to receive mentoring and tailored advice.	Medium	Long-term
Consider expanding the budget available, in order to increase the number and frequency of the meetings to allow better monitoring during the different phases. In particular, anticipating the first meeting, taking place 12 months after the nomination, to allow early detection of potential issues, as well as the last meeting allowing sufficient time for actionable recommendations and adjustments if required, and introducing post-ECoC monitoring checks on the legacy implementation.	Medium	Long-term
Re-introduce in-person meetings to establish better working relationships with the ECoC teams and allow the monitoring team to have a better understanding of actual progress made by the cities.	Medium	Long-term

Potential actions for the future of ECoC	Priority level	Timeline
Develop follow-up mechanisms to track cities' progress in implementing panel recommendations. This might also entail expanding the pool of experts and/or reviewing the selection criteria to strengthen the expertise of members in terms of mentoring and capacity-building.	Medium	Long-term

The **panel of experts** delivers quality outputs during the selection and monitoring procedures, effectively evaluating bids against the ECoC objectives and criteria and providing precise and actionable recommendations to cities. Stakeholders at the national level found the panel supportive and knowledgeable, highlighting its ability to monitor cities' progress and identify potential challenges. The new composition of the selection panel, which encompasses ten independent European experts appointed by the EU institutions, is also generally positively viewed with stakeholders highlighting the value of ensuring the panel's diversity in terms of the representation of minorities, geographical diversity, and gender balance, as well as in terms of its skills and competencies. The lack of interinstitutional dialogue in relation to the appointment of the experts makes, however, more difficult to ensure such diversity of the panel.

Potential actions for the future of ECoC	Priority level	Timeline
Reinforce interinstitutional dialogue between the Commission, the Parliament and the Council to ensure diversity within the expert panel in terms of representation and skills (e.g. expertise, gender, age, ethnicity and geographical balance, experts representing artists, experts with legal skills/knowledge).	Medium	Long-term
Implement a structured onboarding process (with, for example, a handbook) for new members of the panel to ensure their preparedness and a smooth transition and adequate handover between old and new members.	Medium	Long-term
Consider increasing the resources allocated to the experts to the review of bid books in light of cities' applications becoming more ambitious and competitive and the selection process more complex.	Medium	Long-term
Consider allowing more time for panel members to assess bids and provide meaningful feedback, particularly to unsuccessful cities.	Medium	Long-term

The action is efficiently **managed by the European Commission** directly, through the panel of experts and in collaboration with national authorities. However, resources allocated to the action within the European Commission do not seem proportionate to the visibility of the action and the increasing and variable workload, and do not allow the implementation of activities that could elevate its added value.

Potential actions for the future of ECoC	Priority level	Timeline
Ensure that the human and financial resources allocated to the European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) action are commensurate with its visibility, strategic importance, and evolving workload. Where feasible and in alignment with broader EU priorities and budgetary constraints, the European Commission should consider increasing the dedicated resources—both human and financial—to the ECoC action. This would help ensure its	Medium	Short-term

Potential actions for the future of ECoC	Priority level	Timeline
effective management, support the implementation of activities that enhance its European added value, and respond to the growing complexity and expectations surrounding the initiative.		

The only direct contribution of the EU made to the ECoC title is represented by the **Melina Mercouri Prize**, which accounts for the majority of the EU funds reported in ECoCs' budgets. It is estimated that each €1 spent on the Melina Mercouri Prize was matched by an additional €30 of other funding from either national, public or private sources. Overall, the action collectively stimulated around €900 million in funding for cultural activity across the EU between 2013 and 2023, with a typical ECoC budget of around €50 million. Hence, by design, the ECoC is a **cost-effective action** able to leverage public and private funding at a relatively low cost for the Union.

However, the prize's relatively low financial value compared to ECoC budgets makes it symbolic, and the prize does not directly impact the scale or scope of the ECoC and its cultural programme. Furthermore, the value of the prize, currently €1.5 million and unchanged since 2010, has depreciated over time, with the equivalent value in today's prices being about €2 million. Beyond the amount of the prize, the current payment of the prize at the beginning of the title year seems to weaken the link of the prize with the legacy of the action that the prize is expected to support.

Potential actions for the future of ECoC	Priority level	Timeline
The pecuniary value of the Melina Mercouri Prize has not changed since its introduction in 2010, and, due to the inflation in the EU area, it has depreciated over time. Adjusting the prize to account for inflation, the equivalent value in today's prices would be about €2 million.	Medium	Long-term
The relatively low value of the prize risks reducing the European Commission's bargaining power with the title cities. Increase the value of the prize, at least to match inflation.	Medium	Long-term
The timing of the prize, currently given at the beginning of the title year, seem also not aligned with its stated objective of supporting the legacy of the action. Delay the payment toward the end of the title year or even pay it in several instalments over the years following the closure of the ECoC event to ensure that the prize is concretely allocated to legacy activities instead of being used for the implementation of the title year.	Medium	Long-term

Evidence of the **use of other EU funding streams** by ECoCs is limited and not consistently collected in cities' evaluation reports (EU funding could have been used directly by cities to finance infrastructural projects linked to ECoC delivery but which are outside of the remit of their ECoC and thus not counted in ECoC budgets). EU funding, therefore, does not prominently feature in ECoCs budgets. Other EU funds are not readily available to ECoCs as those managed at national level might already be tied up to other priorities, while those managed at EU level (e.g. Creative Europe) are not necessarily aligned with the ECoC schedule or might have eligibility criteria challenging to meet (e.g. track record or having a number of years of functioning history). Furthermore, bidding cities are required to develop a solid cultural programme and budget already in the bidding phase when it is challenging for cities to foresee and integrate the use of EU funding as most programmes are based on annual calls. While the lack of dedicated EU financing encourages cities to invest their own funding in culture and seek the involvement of other key players such as regional and national governments and private sector stakeholders, it is also felt to be a missed

opportunity in terms of what could be achieved with more EU financial leverage into the action.

Potential actions for the future of ECoC	Priority level	Timeline
Support the allocation of existing funds (e.g. Creative Europe, ERDF, etc) to the development of projects under the banner of ECoC and streamline processes to ensure timelines and requirements can be met by ECoCs.	Medium	Long-term
Evidence of the use of EU funding is scarce and not consistently collected in cities' evaluation reports. Ensure that ECoCs keep track and report the EU funding usage in preparation of and during the title year.	High	Long-term

ECoC is overall internally coherent, being designed and implemented in a way that largely aligns with its objectives. In particular, the process of selecting and coordinating cities helps them connect their ECoC with broader cultural strategies and involve communities, fostering a sense of belonging to a common cultural area and highlighting the richness of European cultures.

The action objectives tend to align with local cultural and socio-economic priorities, as cities seek to enhance their cultural profile, stimulate economic growth and engage citizens. Balancing local priorities with a European dimension can be challenging, as some cities place greater emphasis on local issues, which can limit opportunities for broader European collaboration and partnership.

The success of ECoC relied on the involvement of various parties, particularly national stakeholders, who played a vital role as primary funders and active participants. They viewed ECoC as a matter of 'national importance', aligning it with national goals like promoting cultural tourism, boosting economic growth, and strengthening social cohesion. Overall, the action fostered strong collaboration between national and subnational levels in cultural, social, and economic areas.

ECoC is closely aligned with other EU programmes in culture and related fields. The close ties between ECoC and its umbrella programme, Creative Europe, stand out. Both share common objectives such as promoting cultural diversity, fostering cross-border collaboration, and strengthening the economic dimension of culture. ECoC also tends to align with Creative Europe's priorities on greening and inclusion.

Within the global context, ECoC also feeds into strengthening the EU's enlargement policy by including cities from candidate and potential candidate countries. This offers an opportunity to further align ECoC objectives with EU external policies, potentially in coordination with the European External action Service, to establish cultural partnerships in countries of strategic interest. By fostering cross-border collaborations and knowledge exchange, ECoC can also enhance cultural diplomacy, boost the competitiveness of European cultural sectors, and expand Europe's global influence in cultural sectors. Such an approach would not only promote cultural diversity and dialogue but could also attract investment and increase the visibility of European culture worldwide.

3.2. How did the EU intervention make a difference and to whom?

Overall, ECoC is recognised for being able to sort a number of impacts that would not be possible without it.

The action has played a crucial role in promoting **cross-border collaboration** in the cultural sector in a way that national-level programmes do not aim to achieve, significantly enriching the cultural offerings of host cities and creating opportunities for artists and cultural institutions to connect globally. The **international prestige** associated with the ECoC status also played a critical role in attracting global attention, generally increasing tourism and international media mentions, far surpassing what could have been achieved through a national initiative. By providing such an international stage to title cities, ECoC gives cities unprecedented access to an international audience to attract, motivating them to develop a **cultural programme of such scope and diversity** that would not be worthwhile without such a large potential audience. The impact of ECoC is particularly strong in cities where cultural movements may have struggled to gain traction without EU support. With approximately 50% of all projects supported through the ECoC having a significant European dimension, the action helped to **promote European values** at the local level, with ECoC projects championing themes such as tolerance, co-existence, peace and equality.

The evaluation found a few areas where the EU added value of the ECoC action could be strengthened. Firstly, the evaluation identified a lack of learning and communication between past, current and future ECoC cities. Although an ECoC network does exist, its work is sometimes limited and patchy. This means less networking takes place between ECoC cities and, therefore, good practices are sometimes lost, and advice on pitfalls and challenges also does not get shared as much as it should.

Similarly, due to the rotational schedule of ECoC host countries, each country typically implements the selection process every ten to fifteen years. This time gap does not allow the consolidation of standard practices and, often, implies the loss of knowledge due to public officers leaving their posts.

Finally, while ECoC is generally very well regarded and highly appreciated, there is demand for a discussion on the nature of action and what it aims to achieve in the long-term. In particular, even if the action is seen as an opportunity for long-lasting change in hosting cities, the effects of hosting the title in its current form risk being limited to the title year.

Potential actions for the future of ECoC	Priority level	Timeline
Although an ECoC network formally exists, it is not consistently managed, leading in practice to a lack of exchanges between cities and hindering the ECoC action to reach its full potential in particular in relation to its European dimension. Implement a sustainable network of ECoCs fostering knowledge sharing, exchange of good practices, capacity building and promotion of legacy activities.	High	Medium-term
To address the challenge of knowledge loss due to the country rotation system, the Commission could establish a formal network for national Managing Authorities. This platform would enable Member States to exchange good practices, access resources from previous ECoCs, and benefit from peer learning, ensuring continuity in the selection process and knowledge retention at the national level.	Medium	Medium-term
Open a discussion about the nature of the action and whether it should evolve from its current form into a wider project recognising and fostering cities' commitment toward culture, not limited to the ECoC year, but as a process to be monitored and continuously earned.	Medium	Short-term

3.3. Is the intervention still relevant?

The objectives of the ECoC initiative are strongly relevant to the needs of the cities. Although it is now one of the longest-running EU initiatives, the European Capitals of Culture action remains relevant and past ECoCs clearly show strong alignment between the ECoC intervention and the cities' priorities and its socio-economic and cultural development.

The relevance of the ECoC action objectives is particularly noteworthy in terms of the development of **cultural strategies** and strengthening of the cultural offering of an ECoC. The ECoC bidding process is often an inspirational moment to redesign (and in some cases to design for the first time) or strengthen the city-level cultural strategies and policies in the field of culture. Notable examples include the allocation of resources towards culture-driven urban regeneration across many ECoCs, for instance, for the re-use of abandoned or underutilised buildings for cultural purposes, or the development of a cultural quarter in the city.

The ECoC's objective to 'enhance the range, diversity and European dimension of the cultural offering in cities, including through transnational cooperation' finds its relevance in bolstering international efforts of cities, notably to **position ECoCs' cultural organisation in Europe and take part in European projects**, either as part of the ECoC momentum or as a follow-up to the initiative. The ECoC initiative, with its specific objective to raise the international profile of cities through culture, also plays a relevant role in **promoting sustainable tourism** and the attractiveness of cities.

However, the relevance of the action could be strengthened in light of policy and societal changes. The **environmental and digital dimensions** have gained significant prominence since the adoption of the Regulation in 2014 in terms of policies and actions but are not explicitly addressed in the selection criteria for ECoCs. The links between **culture and environmental sustainability** are well established and many cities are developing strategies and actions to connect culture and environmental policies. Whilst this is not directly addressed in the current selection criteria, these are sufficiently open to enable ECoC to address these themes. Nonetheless, environmental sustainability could become a formal criterion, whereas the digital dimension could be embedded in all the other criteria and across the entire ECoC cultural programme.

3.4. Lessons learnt for cities and Governments

Based on feedback, it appears that the 'European dimension' criteria is often not fully understood by the different ECoC stakeholders. Cities should ensure that sufficient attention is allocated to understanding and implementing this criterion. Cities should also, among others, seek cross-country collaborations, possibly engaging other cities, in particular, but not only, former, current and future ECoCs.

Good practices show that cities that start preparing for ECoC long before the competition is actually launched in their respective country have better chances of being awarded the title and implementing successful events. Cities seeking to bid for ECoC should consider implementing a serious, long-term cultural strategy, developing the required competencies and the international network required.

There is a tendency for cities to involve the same advisers in the preparation of the bid book, while this is helpful for cities, it leads to standardisation of bid books and less innovation/originality. Cities should strive to develop the right competencies in-house, perhaps with the help of external advisers/trainers, so as to be able to secure skills and knowledge not only for the bidding process but also for the overall implementation of the event.

Political instability is one of the main issues often impacting ECoC implementation. Cities bidding for the title should seek wide political support across parties for the cultural programme to ensure constant support during the course of the implementation.

ECoC's final budgets tend to be smaller than what was originally envisaged at the bidding stage. This is mostly due to less funding coming from national sources or overestimating revenues from ticket sales. Cities should seek formal agreements with national ministries to secure national funding commitments at the selection stage and set realistic expectations on the number of paying participants expected.

There is limited evidence on the use of EU funding by ECoC as this information is not fully captured by cities' evaluations, which often look only at the funding streams managed directly by the ECoC foundation managing the event. For instance, there is evidence that EU funds have often been used by ECoC to support infrastructural investments done in occasion of hosting the title and directly by cultural operators to fund their ECoC-related projects. Cities should strive to use EU funding where possible and report on its use in their evaluations.

Furthermore, there is evidence that EU funding is often accessed directly by cultural operators, cities can foster their capacity to do so, by implementing capacity-building activities targeted to the use of EU funding as well as an overview of relevant available funding opportunities.

Prior experience with EU funding seems to be an asset for cities interested in bidding for the ECoC title. Cities should consistently invest time and resources in developing a successful track record of access to EU funding opportunities, in particular those earmarked to cultural projects.

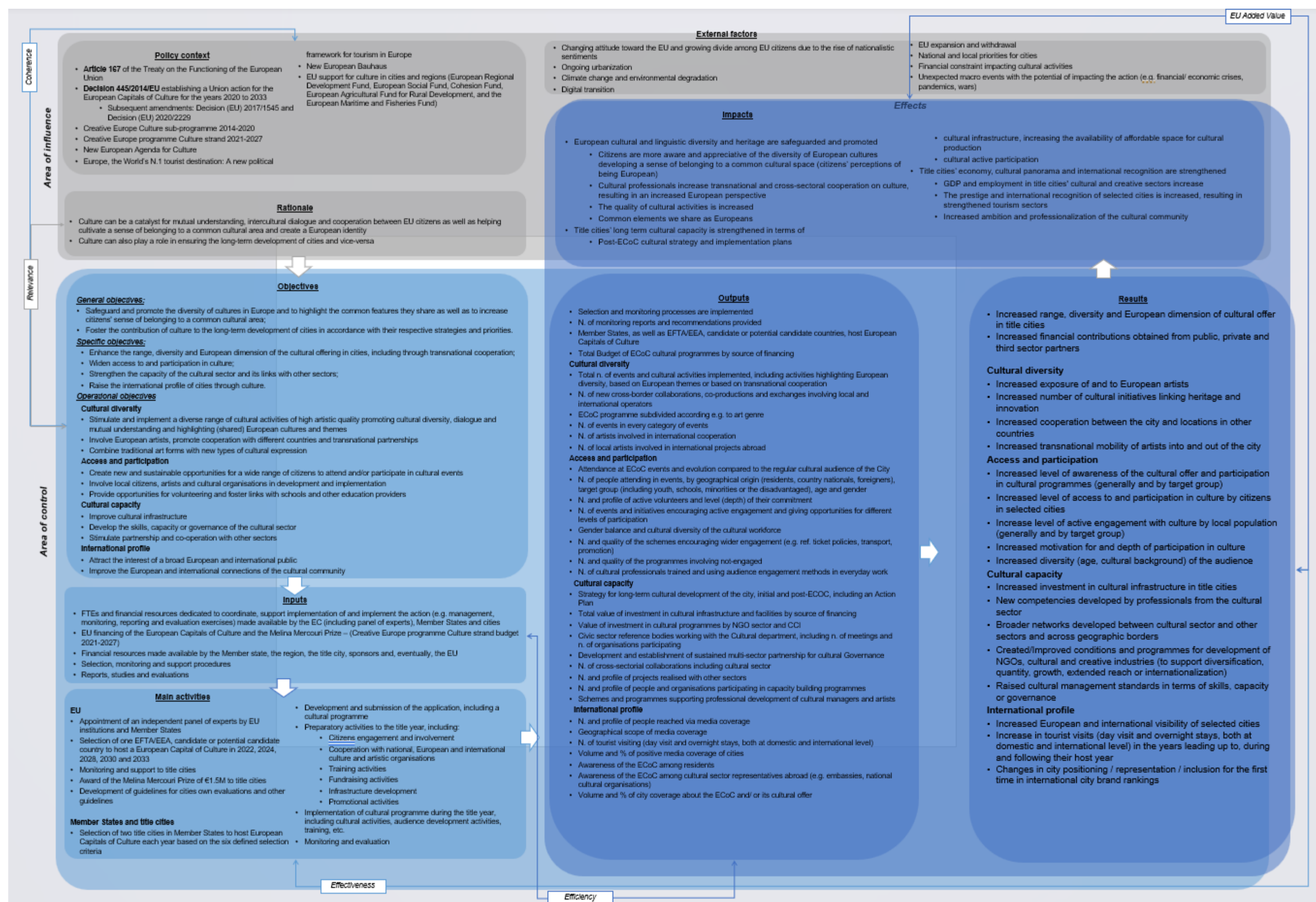
Ensure staff working on ECoC has the language skills required to access and fully take advantage of all guidance material available, as well as exchange opportunities with the panel of experts.

National ministries should ensure that key documents are translated into national language, in order to support their wider dissemination and usability.

ECoC should not be a one-off event, but a long-term project. Cities should strengthen their legacy plans foreseeing concrete actions and milestones following the end of the title year, allocating sufficient financial and human resources and striving to build on the competences cumulated through the ECoC implementation.

4. ANNEXES

Annex 1: Intervention logic



Annex 2: Evaluation matrix

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
Effectiveness										
To what extent has the EU intervention delivered its expected outputs, results and impacts in relation to its specific target areas (Cultural diversity Access and participation Cultural capacity International profile)? (EQ6)	Target area 1: Cultural diversity	ECOC delivered the implementation of a large number of events having a strong European Dimension, involving European artist and developed through international partnerships. ECOC increased citizens exposure to European culture, artist and cultural activities. On the long-term, ECOC contributed to raise citizens awareness of the diversity of European cultures and to strengthen the cultural offer in the title-holding cities through better cultural strategies and increased spending on culture.	Outputs Quantitative evidence from past ECOC evaluations on: - Total n. of events and cultural activities implemented, including activities highlighting European diversity, based on European themes or based on transnational cooperation N. of new cross-border collaborations, co-productions and exchanges involving local and international operators N. of artists involved in international cooperation N. of local artists involved in international projects abroad Results - Quantitative evidence from past ECOC evaluations on the level of citizens exposure to European culture, artists and cultural activities Impacts - Quantitative evidence from past ECOC evaluation on the impact of the action on the citizens awareness of the diversity of European cultures and sense of belonging to a common cultural space - Quantitative evidence from desk research on public culture spending in Title-holding cities in the years after the ECOC event - Evidence of existence of a long-term cultural strategy			x			x	

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
			in the Title-holding cities with a strong European dimension - Qualitative evidence from interviews with local stakeholders (e.g. cultural and civic organisations, representatives of local authorities) on the quality and European dimension of the cultural offer in the Title-holding cities in the years after the ECoC event - Qualitative and quantitative evidence and concrete examples of long-term impacts from the Case studies - Quantitative impact estimates from the counterfactual impact evaluation assessing the causal effects of the ECoC action on: transnational mobility of artists, transnational cooperation among cultural sectors.							
	Target area 2: Access and participation	ECoC allowed a large and diverse audience to access to, attend and participate in culture. In particular, less traditional audience was involved in culture through ECoC. Overall, ECoC led to an increased access to and participation in culture by traditional and non-traditional audience. On the long-term, ECoC led to societal changes allowing audiences that were less used to access to and participate in culture to do so and to develop new realities for citizens engagement in culture.	Outputs Quantitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations on: - Attendance at ECoC events and evolution compared to the regular cultural audience of the City N. of people attending in events, by geographical origin (residents, country nationals, foreigners), target group (including youth, schools, minorities or the disadvantaged), age and gender N. and profile of active volunteers and level (depth) of their commitment N. of events and initiatives encouraging active engagement and giving			x			x	

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
			opportunities for different levels of participation N. and quality of the schemes encouraging wider engagement (e.g. ref. ticket policies, transport, promotion) N. and quality of the programmes involving not-engaged N. of cultural professionals trained and using audience engagement methods in everyday work Results Quantitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations on: - citizens awareness the cultural offer and participation in cultural programmes - level of access to and participation in culture by citizens in title-holding cities - level of active engagement with culture by local population (generally and by target group) - level of motivation for and depth of participation in culture - level of diversity (age, cultural background) of the audience Impacts - Qualitative evidence from interviews with local stakeholders (e.g. cultural and civic organisations, representatives of local authorities) on the continued access to and participation in cultural activities by local population - Qualitative and quantitative evidence from desk research and							

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
			interview (e.g. cultural and civic organisations) on whether local citizens organisations were created as a result of ECoC and whether these are still active - Quantitative evidence from cultural statistics on access and participation in culture - Qualitative and quantitative evidence and concrete examples of long-term impacts from the Case studies - Quantitative impact estimates from the counterfactual impact evaluation assessing the causal effects of the ECoC action on participation in cultural events and activities, including: attendance at cinemas, museum visits and general participation in cultural events and activities.							
	Target area 3: Cultural capacity	ECoC was the catalyst for the development of a long-term cultural strategy, the allocation of private and public funding to the development of cultural infrastructures, and the provision of training to cultural professionals. ECoC led to increased investments in cultural infrastructure, the acquisition of new skills by cultural professionals and new cross-sectoral partnerships. On the long-term, ECoC set the basis for continued investments in cultural infrastructures in title-holding cities as well as for continued involvement of cultural organisations in the local cultural governance. The cultural sector in the	Outputs Quantitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations on: - Existence of a strategy for long-term cultural development of the city, initial and post-ECoC, including an action Plan - Total value of investment in cultural infrastructure and facilities by source of financing - Value of investment in cultural programmes by NGO sector and CCI - Civic sector reference bodies working with the Cultural department, including n. of meetings and n. of organisations participating - Development and establishment of sustained multi-sector			x			x	

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
		local and regional area of title-holding cities is strengthened (in terms of employment and n. and size of cultural operators.	partnership for cultural Governance N. of cross-sectorial collaborations including cultural sector N. and profile of projects realised with other sectors N. and profile of people and organisations participating in capacity-building programmes - Schemes and programmes supporting professional development of cultural managers and artists Results Quantitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations on: - Level of investment in cultural infrastructure in title cities - New competencies developed by professionals from the cultural sector - Broader networks developed between cultural sector and other sectors and across geographic borders - The creation of conditions and programmes for development of NGOs, cultural and creative industries (to support diversification, quantity, growth, extended reach or internationalization) - Level of cultural management standards in terms of skills, capacity or governance Impacts Quantitative and qualitative evidence from desk research and interviews (e.g. cultural and civic organisations,							

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
			representatives of local authorities) on: - Continued investment in cultural infrastructures after the title year - Continued and new partnerships and activities in cooperation with other sectors after the title year - Continued involvement of civic and cultural organisations in the local cultural governance - Quantitative evidence from cultural statistics on: - Cultural employment in the area of the Title-holding cities N. and size of cultural operators in the Title-holding cities - Quantitative evidence from desk research on public culture spending in Title-holding cities in the years after the ECoC event - Quantitative evidence from cultural statistics on cultural infrastructure and spending - Qualitative and quantitative evidence and concrete examples of long-term impacts from the Case studies - Quantitative impact estimates from the counterfactual impact evaluation assessing the causal effects of the ECoC action on: Number of cultural sites in the city, quality of cultural infrastructure in the city, innovation in the city's cultural sector, size of the cultural sector in the city, number of partnerships formed between the city's cultural sector and other sectors.							

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
	Target area 4: International profile	ECOC brought a large number of national and international tourist to the title-holding cities. ECOC led to an increased international recognition of the title-holding cities leading to a large number of international tourists visiting the Title-holding cities not only during the title year, but in the years before and after it	Outputs Quantitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations on: N. and profile of people reached via media coverage N. of tourists visiting (day visit and overnight stays, both at domestic and international level) - Awareness of the ECoC among residents - Awareness of the ECoC among cultural sector representatives abroad (e.g. embassies, national cultural organisations) - Volume and % of city coverage about the ECoC and/ or its cultural offer Results Quantitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations on: - The level of European and international visibility of selected cities - The level of tourist visits (day visit and overnight stays, both at domestic and international level) in the years leading up to, during and following their host year - The city positioning / representation / inclusion for the first time in international city brand rankings Impacts Quantitative evidence from statistics on: N. of tourists visiting (day visit and overnight stays, both at domestic and international level) in the years following the title year - Quantitative and qualitative evidence from			x			x	

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
			desk research and interviews on long-term effect of holding the ECoC title on the international recognition of the Title-holding cities • Qualitative and quantitative evidence and concrete examples of long-term impacts from the Case studies • Quantitative impact estimates from the counterfactual impact evaluation assessing the causal effects of the ECoC action on tourism in the city.							
	What socio-economic effects of the intervention can be identified? (EQ1) Are these effects as expected when introducing the intervention? (EQ1) Have there been any additional unintended effects? (EQ8)	ECoC intervention produces a wide variety of effects on Title-holding cities and beyond, including, but not limited to, economic growth, strengthened cultural sector and participation in culture. The extent to which these effects produced, meeting or failing expectations, depended on identifiable and quantifiable factors Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected as to unintended effects that might have produced	Quantitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations on socio-economic effects of ECoC including on economic growth, strengthened cultural sector and participation in culture: • Quantitative and qualitative evidence from desk research and interviews on potential socio-economic effect of ECoC, whether these were expected and factors that might have influenced them • Quantitative and qualitative evidence from desk research and interviews on potential unintended effect of ECoC • Quantitative impact estimates from the counterfactual impact evaluation assessing the causal effects of the ECoC action on impact measures related to the specific and operational objectives.			x				
To what extent has the EU intervention achieved (or progressed)	To what extent did ECoC contribute to an enhanced cultural offer in the cities holding the title (e.g. in terms	ECoC stimulated the implementation of a diverse range of cultural activities of high artistic quality	• Quantitative and qualitative assessment of relevant outputs, results and impacts against the	x	x	x	x		x	

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
towards) its general, specific and operational objectives? (EQ6) To what extent have the ECoC programmes implemented by the title-holding cities succeeded in attaining the objectives of the action? (EQ6)	of scope and scale) with stronger European Dimension? (New)	promoting long-term change of the local cultural scene strengthening diversity, dialogue and mutual understanding and highlighting (shared) European cultures and themes. Through ECoC, a large number of European artists were involved in Title-holding cities cultural activities further promoting cooperation with different countries and transnational partnerships.	intervention operational, specific and general objectives - Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations on whether the ECoC programmes implemented by the title-holding cities succeeded in attaining the objectives of the action - Qualitative evidence from interviews with local stakeholders (e.g. cultural and civic organisations, representatives of local authorities and of national culture ministry) on whether ECoC contributed to enhance the cultural offer in the title-holding cities by elevating its European dimension, engaging international and European artists participation and developing international partnerships - Qualitative evidence from public consultation on whether ECoC contributed to enhance the cultural offer in the title-holding cities by elevating its European dimension, engaging international and European artists participation and developing international partnerships - Qualitative and quantitative evidence and concrete examples of how the intervention achieved its objectives from the Case studies - Quantitative impact estimates from the counterfactual impact evaluation assessing the causal effects of the ECoC action on impact							

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
			measures related to city's cultural offer.							
	To what extent did the ECoC implementation widen access to and participation in culture in the title-holding cities? What actions were taken to include specific target groups in the cultural activities? (New)	ECoC represented the opportunity for Title-holding cities to create new and sustainable opportunities for a wide range of citizens to attend and/or participate in cultural events. In particular, ECoC was the opportunity to widen access to culture to new, less-traditional, audiences. Through ECoC local citizens, artists and cultural organisations were involved in development and implementation of the city cultural programme ECoC allowed the creation of new opportunities for volunteering and to foster links with schools and other education providers ECoC encouraged the creation of new cultural organisations in Title-holding cities that continued their activities beyond the title year	- Quantitative and qualitative assessment of relevant outputs, results and impacts against the intervention operational, specific and general objectives - Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations on whether the ECoC programmes implemented by the title-holding cities succeeded in attaining the objectives of the action - Qualitative evidence from interviews with local stakeholders (e.g. cultural and civic organisations, representatives of local authorities) on whether ECoC contributed to widen access to and participation in culture in the title-holding cities in particular in relation to less-traditional audiences - Qualitative evidence from interviews with local stakeholders (e.g. cultural and civic organisations, representatives of local authorities and of national culture ministry) on whether ECoC contributed to the sustainable development of new cultural and civic organisations and their continued involvement in the implementation development of the cultural programme of the title-holding city - Qualitative evidence from public consultation on whether ECoC contributed to widen access to and participation in culture in the title-holding cities - Qualitative and quantitative evidence and	x	x	x	x		x	

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
			concrete examples of how the intervention achieved its objectives from the Case studies Quantitative impact estimates from the counterfactual impact evaluation assessing the causal effects of the ECoC action on impact measures related to cultural participation.							
	To what extent did ECoC help strengthen the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors and its links with other sectors in the title-holding cities? (New)	Cultural infrastructures were either built anew or renovated in preparation of the title year, making of ECoC a catalyst for the sustainable and long-term improvement of cultural infrastructure in the Title-holding cities The preparation of the ECoC and specific capacity-building activities implemented in preparation of and during the title year supported the development of skills, capacity or governance of the cultural sector A number of new partnerships and activities in co-operation with other sectors took place in preparation, during and as a consequence of the ECoC year	- Quantitative and qualitative assessment of relevant outputs, results and impacts against the intervention operational, specific and general objectives - Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations on whether the ECoC programmes implemented by the title-holding cities succeeded in attaining the objectives of the action - Quantitative and qualitative evidence from desk research and interviews (e.g. cultural and civic organisations, representatives of local authorities and of national culture ministry) on whether ECoC was a catalyst for continued investment in cultural infrastructures after the title year - Quantitative and qualitative evidence from desk research and interviews (e.g. cultural and civic organisations, representatives of local authorities) on whether ECoC fostered the continued involvement of civic and cultural organisations in the local cultural governance	x	x	x	x		x	

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
			- Qualitative evidence from public consultation on whether ECoC contributed to strengthen the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors in the title-holding cities - Qualitative and quantitative evidence and concrete examples of how the intervention achieved its objectives from the Case studies - Quantitative impact estimates from the counterfactual impact evaluation assessing the causal effects of the ECoC action on impact measures related to the capacity of the cultural and creative sector.							
	To what extent did ECoC raise the title-holding cities' international profile through culture? (New)	Title-holding cities international recognition is increased thanks to hosting the ECoC title leading to a large number of international tourists visiting the Title-holding cities not only during the title year, but in the years before and after it	- Quantitative and qualitative assessment of relevant outputs, results and impacts against the intervention operational, specific and general objectives - Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations on whether the ECoC programmes implemented by the title-holding cities succeeded in attaining the objectives of the action - Quantitative and qualitative evidence from desk research and interviews (e.g. cultural and civic organisations, representatives of local authorities and of national culture ministry) on whether ECoC contributed to raise the international profile of title-holding cities - Qualitative evidence from public consultation on whether ECoC contributed to raise the international	x	x	x	x		x	

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
			profile of title-holding cities - Qualitative and quantitative evidence and concrete examples of how the intervention achieved its objectives from the Case studies - Quantitative impact estimates from the counterfactual impact evaluation assessing the causal effects of the ECoC action on impact measures related to the international profile of cities.							
	What positive or negative external factors have affected progress towards the objectives and how? (EQ1) To what extent the size of the bidding/title city affect the ability of the city to exploit the full potential of ECoC for its long-term development? (New)	Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected as to potential barriers/success factors underlying outputs and results, distinguished by stakeholder category and type of activity affected	- Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research and interviews on positive or negative factors have affected progress towards the objectives and how - Qualitative evidence from past evaluations, interviews and analysis of panel of experts' evaluations of bids received on whether the size of the city and its cultural capacity was an element considered for the long-term success of the action - Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on positive or negative factors have affected progress towards the objectives and how			x		x		
	To what extent and why have ECoC events exceeded initial expectations? What effects has this had? (EQ8) Where expectations have not been met, what factors have hindered the development of the action? (EQ8)	ECoC events generally met expectations of the different stakeholders involved (i.e. European Commission, panel of experts, Title-holding cities representatives, ECoC coordinators, citizens, visitors). Evaluative judgment on the	- Quantitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations on whether expectations were met - Qualitative evidence from interviews (e.g. cultural and civic organisations, representatives of local authorities and of national culture ministry) on	x		x		x		

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
		basis of evidence collected as to the extent of effects of Title-holding cities where the implementation of the ECoC events exceeded expectations and how these compare to the effects in Title-holding cities where expectations were not met Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected as to the main factors that might have impacted the capacity of the ECoC events to meet or exceed expectations	whether expectations were met and why - Qualitative evidence from focus groups with members of the selection panel on whether expectations were met and why - Quantitative and qualitative evidence from desk research and interviews on relevant effects that might have been impacted by the specific ECoC aspect that exceeded/didn't meet expectations and comparison with other Title-holding cities							
	Does the ECoC planned cultural programme last the entire year? If this is not the case, what are the reasons? (EQ9)	Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected as to the length of the cultural programme in Title-holding cities and reasons for deviation from expected duration	Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research and interviews on the length of the cultural programme in Title-holding cities and reasons for deviation from expected duration	x		x				
	To what extent bidding cities devise and prepare the ECoC event as part of their long-term development? (EQ7) To what extent can the positive effects of the ECoC action be considered to be sustainable? (EQ8) To what extent did the ECoC action help raise the profile of culture as a vehicle for city development? (New)	ECoC is perceived as a catalyst for change and as pivotal opportunity for Title-holding cities for development far beyond the title year. Title-holding cities have a long-term vision and development plan which recognise the central role of ECoC but, at the same time, go beyond it, making sure to leverage and make the most of the ECoC opportunity. Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected as to the ECoC action sorted long-term effect on Title-holding cities and surrounding areas. Hosting the ECoC action led the title-holding cities to push culture higher in their political agenda and allocate more funding from	- Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research and interviews on the extent the ECoC event is designed in the context of a wider, long-term development strategy - Qualitative evidence from desk research and interviews on whether the new requirement to have in place a cultural strategy when bidding for hosting the ECoC title has changed the way ECoC is considered and integrated in a long-term development strategy - Quantitative and qualitative evidence from the analysis and mapping of cities cultural strategies indicating culture acquired	x		x			x	

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
		public sources into the culture agenda.	more importance as a consequence of hosting the ECoC event - Quantitative evidence on public spending by title cities on culture in the years preceding and following the title year - Quantitative and qualitative evidence past ECoC evaluations, desk research and interviews on the extent the ECoC event sorted sustainable long-term effects on Title-holding cities - Qualitative and quantitative evidence from the Case studies							
What are the main issues and challenges faced by the cities when bidding for the ECoC title and – if selected – when preparing the ECoC year? (EQ2)	In particular, what are the specific challenges that they have to manage regarding: governance, budget, relationships with local and national authorities, development of European and international connections? (EQ2) For example, to what extent do political considerations interfere with artistic choices and funding guarantees? (EQ2) Has this disrupted the preparation of the cities? (EQ2)	Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected as to main issues and challenges faced by the cities at the different stages (bidding, preparation, implementation and post-ECoC) of the action.	- Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research and interviews on the challenges and issues faced by cities when bidding for and preparing the ECoC year - Qualitative evidence from public consultation - Example of good practices implemented by Title-holding cities to overcome issues and challenges encountered	x		x	x			
To what extent is the new selection procedure introduced by the 2014 Decision effective in enabling the submission of higher quality bids and a fairer and more transparent selection of the Title-holding cities? (New)	What have been the effects of the new selection procedure introduced by the 2014 Decision? (EQ3) What was the impact of the new selection procedure on the overall quality of the bids? (EQ12) To what extent is the selection procedure considered fair and transparent by the cities? (EQ10)	The new selection procedure is perceived as being more transparent being based on six clear criteria, allows a fairer and shared selection and enables bidding cities to develop a stronger and more focused proposal. The selection procedure and the criteria in particular contribute to strengthen the European dimension of the ECoC event ensuring the bids with the strongest	- Qualitative and quantitative evidence from analysis of expert panel's recommendations and evaluations of bids and identification of differences and key trends - Qualitative evidence from interviews with Title-holding cities and representatives of Member States on the new process, its advantages and	x		x	x	x		

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
	Do the cities understand the selection criteria? (EQ10) To what extent are the ECoC selection criteria proportionate and well-focused? Are changes required (e.g. in relation to legacy and the twin transition)? Are there significant differences between years/Member States? What is causing them? (EQ12) To what extent does the selection procedure foster the European dimension of the ECoC event? (EQ30) Where relevant, are there differences between Member States involved? (EQ30)	focus on cultural diversity and commonalities of European cultures, heritage and history as well as the best European and international partnerships are selected. Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected on whether there are differences among Member States in relation to the impact of measures aimed to foster the European dimension of the initiative	disadvantages and whether it is considered fair - Qualitative evidence from interviews and focus groups with bidding and Title-holding cities on whether: - the selection criteria are clear and meaningful and help them prepare a stronger bid - the selection criteria are proportionate and well-focused - the selection procedure is designed in a way to allow the bids to express their full potential - Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on: - the new process, its advantages and disadvantages and whether it is considered fair - what factors can impact the quality of the bids, including bidding city size, existence of a well-established cultural strategy and vision, political support, etc. - the selection criteria are proportionate and well-focused - Qualitative evidence from public consultation on the effectiveness of the selection process and the selection criteria - Qualitative evidence from desk research, public consultation, and interviews and focus group on whether: - the selection procedure and the criteria contribute to strengthen the							

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
			European dimension of the ECoC – there are differences among Member States in relation to the impact of measures aimed to foster the European dimension of the initiative – changes to the selection procedure and/or criteria would be required to strengthen the European dimension of the ECoC event • Qualitative evidence from the validation workshops on advantages, disadvantages and impacts of changing the selection procedure and/or criteria to strengthen the European dimension of the ECoC event							
	To what extent has the role of the panel been reinforced during the selection phase? (EQ3) To what extent is the new composition of the panel (with a higher number of members nominated by EU institutions and bodies) an added value for the assessment of the bids? (EQ3) Are the appointed panel members relevant to the criteria requested in the 2014 Decision? (EQ3)	Having a larger share of members of the panel nominated by the EU institutions and bodies ensures that more technical expertise and objectivity is brought into the process to the advantage of the cities (that can count on better support) and of the overall fairness of the procedure The panel members appointed so far under the new procedure meet the criteria determined by Art. 6 of the 2014 Decision	• Qualitative and quantitative evidence from analysis of expert panel's pre-selection and selection reports and recommendations • Qualitative evidence from interviews with Title-holding cities and representatives of Member States on the composition of the panel of experts and whether it adds value to the process (including advantages and disadvantages) • Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on the composition of the panel of experts and whether it adds value to the process (including advantages and disadvantages) • Qualitative evidence from interviews with	x		x		x		

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
			representatives of Member States and EU institutions on the process followed to select and name the members of the panel and the overall quality of the members selected - Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on the process followed to select and name the members of the panel - Analysis of panel members' references selected in light of the criteria requested in the 2014 Decision							
	To what extent has the panel delivered a quality output during the selection procedure? (EQ13) For example, has the panel assessed the bids against the ECoC criteria and objectives? Has the panel taken other elements into account? On the quality of panel pre-selection and selection reports: are they clear and precise enough? Are they useful for the cities concerned, notably the parts on assessment and recommendation? (EQ13)	The panel overall delivered quality outputs during the selection procedure. Pre-selection and selection reports were based on a rigorous and transparent assessment of the bids against the ECoC criteria and objectives. Other elements considered were clearly indicated and justified. Pre-selection and selection reports are sufficiently clear and detailed to represent helpful guidance for the cities concerned.	- Qualitative and quantitative evidence from analysis of expert panel's pre-selection and selection reports and recommendations - Qualitative evidence from interviews with bidding and Title-holding cities on whether the pre-selection and selection reports and panel's recommendations were sufficiently clear, precise and overall containing helpful guidance - Qualitative evidence from interviews with bidding and Title-holding cities on how the pre-selection and selection reports and panel's recommendations could be improved - Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on what could be done to further improve their pre-selection and selection reports and panel's recommendations	x		x		x		
	To what extent has the new selection procedure fostered competition among bidding cities? (EQ4)	Proposals developed under the new procedure are overall stronger and of higher quality	Qualitative and quantitative evidence from analysis of expert panel's recommendations and	x		x		x		

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
	To what extent does the selection procedure help the cities design a programme that is relevant to the objectives and criteria laid down for the action? (EQ4)	The criteria set in the Decision as well as the recommendations issued by the panel during the preselection and selection stages allow the cities to design a programme in line with the objectives of the action The need to have a cultural strategy already in place provided an incentives to cities to develop one and strengthen the effects of the ECoC action	- evaluations of past bids under the previous and new procedure - Qualitative evidence from interviews with Title-holding cities on whether the selection criteria are clear and meaningful and help them prepare a better bid - Qualitative evidence from interviews with Title-holding cities and local cultural and civic organisations on whether the requirement of having a cultural strategy already in place provided an incentive to cities to develop a strategy in the first place and strengthen the effects of the ECoC action - Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on whether the new procedure led to stronger and higher quality proposal - Comparative analysis of effects between Title-holding cities that had and didn't have in place a long-terms cultural strategy							
	To what extent and how could the selection procedure be improved? (EQ4)	Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected as to the extent the current procedure could be improved and how	- Qualitative evidence from desk research, analysis of current processes, interviews with cities and the public consultation on possible ways of improving the selection process - Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on possible ways of improving the selection process - Qualitative evidence from the validation workshops on advantages, disadvantages and			X	X	X		X

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
			impacts of changing the selection procedure							
To what extent is the new monitoring procedure introduced by the 2014 Decision effective in supporting the Title-holding cities in the preparation of the ECoC year as well as identifying any criticalities ensuring their timely resolution? (New)	What have been the effects of the new monitoring procedure introduced by the 2014 Decision? (EQ5) To what extent is the new monitoring procedure adapted to the preparation of an event of the scale and scope of an ECoC event (for example, concerning the timing)? (EQ5) In particular, does it help title-holding cities in preparing a programme relevant to the objectives and criteria as specified in the 2014 Decision and in implementing a successful title year? (EQ5) To what extent do ECoC title-holding cities benefit from the European monitoring support during their preparation phase? (EQ5)	The extension of the monitoring period as well as the introduction of an additional meeting closer to the title year ensured a closer monitoring and stronger support to title-holding cities The procedure allows to timely identify criticalities and ensure they are successfully tackled The procedure timeline is considered adequate to monitor the implementation process Title-holding cities benefit from the multiple meetings and recommendations from the panel, improving the overall quality of their programme	- Qualitative and quantitative evidence from analysis of expert panel's recommendations and evaluations of past bids under the previous and new procedure indicating that the timing is adequate to allow to identify and tackle potential issues - Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on the effectiveness and adequacy of the monitoring procedures - Qualitative evidence from interviews and focus groups with title and bidding cities on the effectiveness and adequacy of the monitoring procedures - Concrete examples of how the monitoring procedure helped title-holding cities in preparing a programme relevant to the objectives and criteria as specified in the 2014 Decision and in implementing a successful title year	x		x		x		
	To what extent has the panel delivered a quality output during the monitoring procedure? (EQ14) Does it deliver relevant support and guidance to the titleholding cities during the event's preparatory years? In particular, to what extent does it take stock of the preparations for the event? (EQ14) To what extent does the panel check that the criteria are fulfilled? Are there other elements the panel has taken into account? (EQ14)	The panel overall delivered quality outputs during the monitoring procedure providing the Title-holding cities relevant and useful support and guidance, demonstrated by the clear acknowledgement reaction by title-holding cities. The panel's recommendations are based on evidence and full stock-taking of the progress made in the preparation for the event. In its assessment, the panel checks and clearly report on the fulfilment of the ECoC criteria. Other	- Qualitative and quantitative evidence from analysis of expert panel's monitoring reports and recommendations - Qualitative evidence from interviews with Title-holding cities on whether the monitoring reports and recommendation were sufficiently clear, precise and overall containing helpful guidance - Qualitative evidence from interviews with Title-holding cities on how the monitoring reports and	x		x		x		

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
	On the quality of panel monitoring reports: are they clear and consistent enough? Are they useful for the cities concerned, notably the parts on assessment and recommendation? (EQ14)	elements considered are clearly indicated and justified. Monitoring reports are sufficiently clear and detailed to represent helpful guidance for the cities concerned.	- recommendation could be improved - Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on what could be done to further improve their monitoring reports and recommendation							
	Could the monitoring procedure be improved, and if so, how? (EQ5)	Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected as to the extent the current procedure could be improved and how	- Qualitative evidence from desk research, analysis of current processes, interviews and focus groups with title-holding and bidding cities and the public consultation on possible ways of improving the monitoring process - Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on possible ways of improving the monitoring process - Qualitative evidence from the validation workshops on advantages, disadvantages and impacts of changing the monitoring procedure			x	x	x		x
To what extent does the reinforced conditionality of the prize in honour of Melina Mercury constitute an additional leverage for the panel and European Commission to ensure the success of the title year? (New)	Has it been an effective way of improving the quality of the preparation of the legacy plans in general? (EQ15)	The definition of clear criteria for the award of the Melina Mercury prize strengthened the value of the panel's recommendations and further ensured the success of the title year	- Qualitative evidence from interviews with Title-holding cities whether the new criteria and timing of award of the prize influenced the way panel recommendations are considered - Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on whether the new criteria and timing of award of the prize influenced the way panel recommendations are considered	x		x		x		
To what extent has the Commission been effective in managing, facilitating and supporting the	To what extent does the Commission set up and update regularly the ECoC website? (EQ16)	The Commission set up and update the ECoC website regularly, ensuring relevant information are available timely and in a	- Qualitative and quantitative evidence from analysis of the ECoC website, including KPIs as: n. of visits			x		x		

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
implementation of the action? (new)		format easily accessible by interested parties	– n. of single users – time spent on the website – n. of downloads • Qualitative evidence from interviews and focus groups with bidding and Title-holding cities on whether the website, the information and material published were useful • Qualitative evidence from interviews and focus groups with bidding and Title-holding cities on whether additional information or material would be needed to be published on the website							
	To what extent has the Commission been effective in facilitating and supporting the selection process? (EQ16)	The Commission manages the overall process supporting the work of the panel and ensuring that the process runs smoothly and according to schedule. The members of the panel are selected on time following a clear and transparent procedure. In case of delays, the Commission put in place the needed mitigating measures to compensate	• Qualitative and quantitative evidence from analysis of documentation related to the selection of the members of the panel • Qualitative evidence from interviews with representatives of Member States and EU institutions on the process followed to select and name the members of the panel • Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on the process followed to select and name the members of the panel • Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on the support received by the European Commission during the selection phase			x		x		
	To what extent are the documents and actions prepared by the Commission to guide the Ministries in the management of the competition helpful? (EQ16)	Ministries have access to all required information in order to successfully and effectively manage the competition. No additional information would be required	• Qualitative and quantitative evidence from analysis of documentation provided to Member States • Qualitative evidence from interviews with representatives of Member States on the			x				

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
			quality and usefulness of material provided by the Commission and how it could be improved							
	To what extent are documents prepared by the Commission to inform the bidding cities about the selection process and explain and illustrate the objectives and criteria helpful? (EQ16) To what extent are documents produced by the Commission to guide the title-holding in the preparation of the ECoC event helpful? (EQ16)	Cities have access to all required information in order to understand the process and selection criteria and prepare a bid that is in line with them. No additional information would be required Title-holding cities have access to all required information in order to successfully and effectively prepare the ECoC event. No additional information would be required	- Qualitative and quantitative evidence from analysis of documentation provided to cities - Qualitative evidence from interviews and focus groups with bidding and title-holding cities on whether the material provided is adequate in order to understand the process and selection criteria and prepare a bid that is in line with them - Qualitative evidence from interviews and focus groups with title-holding cities on whether the material provided is adequate to guide them in the preparation of the ECoC event - Qualitative evidence from interviews and focus groups with bidding and title-holding cities on the overall quality and usefulness of material provided by the Commission and how it could be improved - Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on the material provided to cities and how it could be improved			x		x		
	To what extent does the Commission foster the exchange of good practices? Which initiatives has it taken to that purpose? (EQ16)	Title-holding cities have the opportunity to meet and exchange good practices. Good practices are identified and promoted/shared.	Qualitative and quantitative evidence from desk research on existing networks and actions for exchanging good practices related to ECoC, including quantitative data on number of exchanges that took place, good practices exchanged and participants			x				

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
			- Qualitative evidence from interviews with the Commission and cities on the existence and usefulness of actions to exchanging good practices - Concrete examples of good practices exchanged							
	How could the Commission go further to support the preparations of the Capitals? (EQ16)	Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected as to additional activities that could be implemented to support the preparations of the Capitals	Qualitative evidence from desk research, past ECoC evaluations, interviews, focus groups and consultations on whether and how Commission support could be enhanced	x		x		x		
To what extent is the ECoC brand visible? (EQ23)	To what extent do ECoC use the title in the correct way (during the selection process and after their designation until the end of the actual title year)? (EQ23) Which actions do the designated cities implement to make clear that the event is an EU initiative? (EQ23) To what extent do people understand that it is an EU initiative? (EQ23)	The ECoC brand is visible during the ECoC event and, where relevant, in the years before and after the event. Cities (bidding and title year) use the title to promote their participation in the EU action highlighting the European dimension of the initiative. People recognise the ECoC brand and understand it is an initiative organised and funded by the EU. The ECoC brand is also recognised as quality mark for the title-holding city and the level of the cultural activities implemented. Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected on good practices put in place by cities to make clear the event in an EU initiative.	- Qualitative evidence from past evaluations, interviews and focus group on whether title-holding cities use the title in a relevant way (during the selection process and after their designation until the end of the actual title year) - Qualitative evidence from past evaluations, interviews and focus group on good practices implemented by title-holding cities to make clear the event is an EU initiative - Qualitative evidence from past evaluations, interviews and public consultation on whether people are aware of the EU nature of the initiative - Qualitative evidence from interviews, focus group and public consultation on whether new measures should be implemented to ensure more visibility of the ECoC brand and awareness of the EU nature of the initiative - Qualitative evidence from the public consultation on			x	x	x		

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
			whether the ECoC brand is recognised as a seal of quality for the title-holding city cultural programme and activities Qualitative evidence from the validation workshops on advantages, disadvantages and impacts of implementing new measures to ensure more visibility of the ECoC brand and awareness of the EU nature of the initiative							
Efficiency										
To what extent is the intervention efficient and how could the efficiency of the intervention be improved? (New)	To what extent are the resources (human and financial) allocated sufficient for the anticipated results and impacted to be produced? (New)	Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected on the human and financial resource allocated and used for the management of the ECoC action as well as the selection and monitoring processes. Resources allocated are overall considered sufficient for the management of the action and the effective execution of the panel's tasks. The panel has sufficient resources for the timely execution of their tasks both in relation to the selection process (e.g. including the analysis and assessment of bids as well as provision of recommendations and final selection) and the monitoring process (e.g. including meeting with the title-holding cities, assessing the progress implementation, drafting the monitoring reports). The lack of earmarked EU funding (with the exception of the Melina Mercury prize) does not negatively effect the implementation,	- Quantitative evidence from DG EAC activity reports on resources (Financial and FTE) allocated and used to manage the ECoC action - Quantitative evidence from activity reports on resources (Financial and FTE) used the selection and monitoring processes (If available) - Quantitative evidence from ECoC cities' monitoring, evaluation reports or open data platforms on resources (Financial and/or FTE) used to deliver the different activities of their cultural programmes (if available) - Quantitative and qualitative evidence from interviews with the Commission on resources (Financial and FTE) used to manage the ECoC action - Quantitative and qualitative evidence from focus group with the members of the panel on the resources (Financial and FTE) used for the	x	x	x		x		

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
		quality and overall success of the action.	- selection and monitoring processes - Quantitative and qualitative evidence from interviews with the Commission on the extent resources (Financial and FTE) allocated to manage the ECoC action are sufficient - Qualitative evidence from focus group with the members of the panel on the extent the resources (Financial and FTE) allocated for the selection and monitoring processes are sufficient - Qualitative evidence from interviews and focus groups with title-holding cities and bidding cities on whether the panel managed to execute their task timely and in line with expectations - Qualitative evidence from interviews and focus groups with title-holding cities and bidding cities on the extent of the impact of allocating specific funding to the action in terms of potential increased interest from cities, quality of the cultural programme and activities, capacity to leverage additional public and private funding - Comparison of resources allocated to the management of ECoC with those of other comparable actions - Concrete examples of when resources allocated were not sufficient							
	How timely and efficient is the selection process (timing, guiding documents and reports) to prepare the ECoC event? (EQ11) Is the timing of designation four years before the title	The timing of the selection process and of the designation of the title-holding cities is sufficient for the cities to develop strong bids as well as for the panel to thoroughly	Quantitative evidence from analysis of panels pre-selection and selection reports on the extent additional time would benefit the development of the bids	x		x	x	x		

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
	year sufficient to ensure the successful implementation of the ECoC event? (EQ11) To what extent is the selection procedure sustainable over time, in particular in smaller Member States? (EQ12)	evaluate them and provide useful recommendations. The four-year time between the designation and the implementation of the ECoC year is sufficient for title-holding cities to fully develop the cultural programme, do the required infrastructural works and preparation activities (including, for example, promotion) and successfully implement the ECoC event The selection process is considered adequate and does not pose particular challenges to cities and Member States (independently on the size of the Member State)	- Qualitative evidence from the focus group with members of the panel on whether the time allocated to the selection process is enough to thoroughly evaluate the bids and provide useful and comprehensive recommendations - Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations suggesting that the four-year time allowed for the implementation of the ECoC event was not sufficient - Concrete examples of activities that could not be implemented due to lack of time - Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research, focus groups, public consultation and interviews on whether the selection process and timing pose specific challenges to cities and Member States, and whether these challenges are linked to specific characteristics of the MS (e.g. size)							
	To what extent has the panel been efficient during the selection procedure (EQ13) and the monitoring procedure? (EQ14) Have any inefficiencies been identified? (EQ12) How could the efficiency of the action be improved? (New)	The panel managed to execute their tasks within the timeline foreseen and with the resources required. Title-holding cities and bidding cities not selected generally agree that the process worked well, without delays and bottlenecks. Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected on whether the selection and monitoring processes	- Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research, focus groups, public consultation and interviews on whether the selection process could be made more efficient - Qualitative evidence from interviews and focus groups with Title-holding cities on whether the process worked well, without delays and bottlenecks	x		x	x	x		x

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
		could be made more efficient	- Qualitative evidence from the focus group with bidding cities on whether the process worked well, without delays and bottlenecks - Concrete examples of ways in which the processes could be improved - Qualitative evidence from the validation workshops on potential measures and changes to improve the efficiency of the action							
To what extent is the scheme of co-funding through the Melina Mercouri Prize adapted to the legacy of the ECoC, in particular regarding the time schedule for delivering the Prize? (EQ15)	To what extent is the scheme of co-funding through the Melina Mercouri Prize adapted to the legacy of the ECoC, in particular regarding the time schedule for delivering the Prize? (EQ15) Has it been an efficient way of improving the quality of the preparation of the legacy plans in general? Is the use of the Melina Mercouri Prize planned in advance in the budget of an ECoC? (EQ15) Are changes to the prize required in terms of amount, payment modalities (including who is the recipient, if the city or the ECoC governance authority), and timing?	The Melina Mercouri Prize is used by title-holding cities to ensure the legacy of the ECoC year. The prize value is clearly allocated to legacy actions, and it manages to leverage additional co-funding. The delivery of the prize three months after the start of the year ensures that the prize is available for legacy activities at the same time avoiding the risk it is used for the ECoC Event itself.	- Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations on the use of the Melina Mercuri Prize - Qualitative evidence from interviews and focus groups with Title-holding cities on whether the timing of the delivery of the Melina Mercury Prize allows its timely allocation to legacy activities - Quantitative and qualitative evidence from focus group with the members of the panel on whether the Melina Mercuri Prize scheme is the most efficient way to ensure and improve the quality of the preparation of the legacy plans - Qualitative evidence from interviews and focus groups whether the current payment modalities of the prize are aligned with the cities' needs and the ECoC objective of ensuring the legacy of the action	x		x		x		
Relevance										
To what extent is the intervention relevant to cities/	To what extent are the criteria laid down in the 2014 Decision a relevant tool for	The intervention objectives, criteria and processes are relevant to the cities needs	Qualitative evidence from desk research, public consultation, and	x		x	x	x		x

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
regions/ people? (EQ17)	cities to work on local stakes, such as city regeneration, development of quality tourism, image enhancement, social inclusion, environmental sustainability etc.? (EQ21) To what extent does the ECoC planned cultural programme cover only the city or a broader region? (EQ22) Are there different degrees of relevance in covering an area broader than a city? (EQ22) What are the main drivers pushing cities to bid? What are the hindering factors?	and overall objectives. The Cultural programme of the title-holding cities is developed within and coherently with the wider cultural strategy of the cities and support them in meeting their needs in terms of city regeneration, development of quality tourism, image enhancement, social inclusion, environmental sustainability etc. Cultural programmes of title-holding cities cover not only the cities but their broader region indicating that the intervention is relevant beyond the title-holding cities. Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected as different degrees of relevance in covering an area broader than a city and the factors that influence them (e.g. size of the city and region, cultural diversity of the region, characteristics of the region (e.g. cultural development), etc.)	interviews on whether intervention objectives, criteria and processes are relevant to the cities needs and overall objectives • Qualitative evidence from title-holding cities' cultural strategies on whether there are needs that are not addressed by the cultural programmes developed under the action • Qualitative evidence from title-holding cities' cultural programmes on whether these cover not only the cities but their broader region and factors affecting the reach of the action • Qualitative evidence from interviews with Member States representatives and interviews and focus groups with Title-holding cities and bidding cities on whether intervention objectives, criteria and processes are relevant to the cities' needs and overall objectives • Qualitative evidence from interviews and focus groups with Title-holding cities and bidding cities on whether cultural programmes cover not only the cities but their broader region and factors affecting the reach of the action • Qualitative evidence from the validation workshops on the overall relevance of the action and on potential changes and measures to enhance it • Qualitative evidence from interviews with Member States representatives and interviews and focus groups with Title-holding							

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
			cities and bidding cities on the main drivers and hindering factors that are considered by cities when deciding on their candidacy							
To what extent did the objectives and scope of the action remain relevant over time? (EQ17)	To what extent do the objectives still correspond to the needs across the EU, in particular in the context of the Green Deal and the digital transition? (EQ17) To what extent has there been adaptability to unexpected developments ensuring the action remained relevant? (EQ17) To what extent has the opening of the ECoC action to cities in EFTA/EEA countries, candidate countries and potential candidates been relevant? (EQ25) To what extent the opening of the ECoC action to cities in candidate countries and potential candidates overlaps or complement the parallel initiatives conducted by DG NEAR? (Coherence)	The objectives and scope of the intervention are still relevant to the needs of the EU, its regions, cities and citizens. Changes introduced in 2014 (e.g. opening of the action beyond Member States) increased the relevance of the intervention. Changes introduced to face unexpected developments (e.g. COVID-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine, etc.) ensured the action remained relevant in light of new emerging needs. ECoC foster the role of culture as a catalyst and accelerator of sustainable development in line with the needs identified by the Green Deal and stressed by the digital transition.	- Qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research, the public consultation and interviews on the extent the ECoC intervention corresponds to the needs across the EU, in particular in the context of the Green Deal and the digital transition - Qualitative evidence from desk research, the public consultation and interviews with EU level stakeholders, title-holding and bidding cities on the new needs that the ECoC intervention should address - Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on the new needs that the ECoC intervention should address - Qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research, the public consultation and interviews on the extent the changes introduced in 2014 ensured the continued relevance of the action - Qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research, the public consultation and interviews with title cities from 2020 onwards on the extent the changes made to adapt to unexpected developments ensured the continued relevance of the action - Qualitative evidence from the validation workshops on advantages,	x		x	x	x		x

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
			disadvantages and impacts of adding additional flexibility to the action structure Qualitative evidence with EU level stakeholders on the complementarities and overlaps with other parallel actions implemented by the EU (in particular by DG NEAR)							
	To what extent does the relevance of the action vary across Member States? (EQ24)	Although to different degrees, the intervention is relevant to all Member States. Degree of relevance changes depending on specific factors.	- Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research, the public consultation and interviews on the extent the ECoC intervention is relevant to different Member States and what factors influence the degree of relevance of the intervention - Qualitative evidence from interviews with representatives of Member States and interviews and focus groups title-holding cities on whether there are needs that the ECoC is not addressing and whether the action would have the potential to address them	x		x	x	x		
	To what extent do the objectives and criteria of the action promote gender equality as well as inclusion of all, in particular people with disabilities, people belonging to minorities and people being socially marginalised? (EQ18)	ECoC objectives and selection criteria, in particular criterion 5 of Art. 5 of the 2014 Decision, are conducive and in line with the EPSR and the need to ensure inclusiveness and the action and promote gender equality. Cities cultural programmes have specific strategies in place to promote gender equality and ensure inclusiveness.	- Qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations on the degree the objective of ensuring inclusiveness and equal access to the action and culture were met - Qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research, the public consultation and interviews on the extent the objectives and criteria of the action promote gender equality as well as inclusion of all, in	x		x	x	x		x

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
			particular people with disabilities, people belonging to minorities and people being socially marginalised - Qualitative evidence from the public consultation, interviews and focus group with panel experts on whether there is a need to establish stricter criteria within the action in order to strengthen the promotion of gender equality and inclusion - Qualitative evidence from the validation workshops on advantages, disadvantages and impacts of adding new stricter criteria linked to gender equality and inclusion							
To what extent are the selection criteria laid down in the 2014 Decision relevant to the objectives of the ECoC action? (EQ20)	To what extent are the selection criteria laid down in Art. 5 of the 2014 Decision relevant to the objectives of the ECoC action? (EQ20)	The six criteria listed in Art. 5 of the 2014 Decision are relevant to the general and specific objectives of the intervention specified in Art. 1 of the Decision.	- Qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research, the public consultation, the focus group and interviews on whether the six selection criteria are relevant to the objectives of the intervention - Qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research, the public consultation, the focus group with panel experts and interviews with title-holding cities on the extent the selection criteria laid down in the 2014 Decision ensure that action remains relevant to the identified needs - Qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, cultural programmes and cultural strategies on the extent the culture programme of the title-holding cities is developed within and coherently with the wider cultural strategy of the cities and support	x		x	x	x		x

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
			them in meeting their needs - Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on the extent the culture programme of the title-holding cities is developed within and coherently with the wider cultural strategy of the cities and support them in meeting their needs - Qualitative evidence from the public consultation, interviews and focus group with panel experts on whether there is a need to change/add/remove some selection criteria - Qualitative evidence from the validation workshops on advantages, disadvantages and impacts of changing/adding/removing some selection criteria							
	To what extent is the chronological criterion of Member States entitled to host the event relevant to the ECoC objectives? (New) Has the chronological list of Member States entitled to host the event affected (positively or negatively) the implementation of the ECoC objectives? (EQ19) Has it been adapted to the potential of any Member States in terms of number of cities with the capacity of hosting such an event? (EQ19)	The chronological criterion of Member States ensured a fair and constant turn taking of the countries hosting the event contributing to meet the objective of safeguarding and promoting the diversity of cultures in Europe. It also ensured that all countries would have equal opportunities to host the event in line with the need to foster the contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities. Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected as to whether the criterion might lead to issues in relation to the potential of any Member States in terms of number of cities with the capacity of hosting such an event and whether	- Qualitative evidence from desk research, the public consultation, the focus group and interviews on whether the chronological criterion of Member States entitled to host the event is relevant to the ECoC objectives - Qualitative evidence from desk research, the public consultation, the focus group and interviews on whether the chronological succession of Member States impacted the ability of the action to adapt to changing circumstances and achieve its full potential in terms of results and impacts - Qualitative evidence from desk research, the public consultation, the focus group and interviews on advantages and	x		x	x	x		x

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
		adjustments to the criterion might be needed	disadvantages of the chronological criterion - Qualitative evidence from the validation workshops on advantages, disadvantages and impacts of keeping of changing the chronological criterion - Quantitative evidence from statistics on whether the chronological criterion might lead to issues in terms of number of cities with the capacity of hosting such an event and whether adjustments to the criterion might be needed							
	To what extent is the relevance of the action affected by the city size? (NEW) With a number of increasingly smaller cities bidding for the ECoC title, how does this fit into the brand? (EQ24) What are the reasons behind this trend? How could larger cities be encouraged to bid for the title or be involved in some forms? What are potential consequences of making size a criterion for selection? (EQ24) How could such a criterion be implemented without bias to smaller Member States? (EQ24) Is there a risk of a shortage of candidates in some Member States? (EQ24) Is there evidence of cities using different formats or partnership strategies (e.g. group bid) to bid for the title? Would explicitly foresee different format options in the	The city size does not affect the extent the ECoC action is relevant to cities, being perceived as a relevant opportunity by cities of different dimensions. The size of the cities did not impact the final results and impact of the action (being this influenced by other factors, e.g. the existence of a strong cultural strategy). ECoC implemented in smaller cities saw a stronger involvement of the surrounding areas/regions widening the reach of the action and its results. Evaluative judgment and simulation on the basis of statistical data collected on the changes to the potential pool of candidate cities should a size criterion for selection be introduced.	- Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past evaluations, desk research, the public consultation, the focus group and interviews on the scale of the trend (of larger cities seemingly passing over the opportunity to bid for the title) and potential reasons and solutions - Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past evaluations, desk research, the public consultation, the focus group and interviews on whether the size of the title-holding city impacted the achievement of the action results and impacts - Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past evaluations, desk research, the public consultation, the focus group and interviews on whether the size of the title-holding city affected the level of engagement and involvement of surrounding areas/regions	x		x	x	x		x

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
	future legal basis be needed?		- Qualitative evidence from desk research, the public consultation, the focus group and interviews on whether the increasingly smaller cities bidding for the ECoC title has the potential to affect the ability of the action to achieve its full potential in terms of results and impacts - Qualitative evidence for the pre-selection and selection reports on whether the size of the bidding cities affect the overall quality of the bid - Quantitative and qualitative evidence from desk research, the public consultation, the focus group and interviews on whether the relevance of and interest in the action are affected by the city size - Quantitative and qualitative evidence from desk research, the public consultation, the focus group and interviews on whether bidding and title cities have been using more creative approaches to their candidacy (e.g. group bid) and changes in this sense to the legal basis could be required - Quantitative and qualitative evidence from desk research, the public consultation, the focus group and interviews on advantages and disadvantages of introducing a size criterion for the selection of the cities - Qualitative evidence from the validation workshops on advantages, disadvantages and impacts of keeping of							

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
			introducing a size criterion for the selection of the cities Quantitative evidence from statistics on whether a new size criterion might lead to issues in terms of number of cities with the capacity to host such an event							
To what extent are the criteria requested in the 2014 Decision for appointing panel members relevant to carry out the selection and monitoring procedures? (EQ20)		The criteria determined by Art. 6 of the 2014 Decision for the selection of the panel members are relevant to the role, tasks and responsibilities linked to the assessment, evaluation and selection of the bids and monitoring of the event implementation.	- Qualitative evidence from desk research, public consultation, and interviews on whether the criteria determined by Art. 6 of the 2014 Decision for the selection of the panel members are relevant to the role, tasks and responsibilities linked to the assessment, evaluation and selection of the bids and monitoring of the event implementation or whether changes to the criteria would be required - Qualitative evidence from focus group with panel experts on their role, key challenges faced and needs in terms of skills and competences - Qualitative evidence from the validation workshops on advantages, disadvantages and impacts of changing the panel selection criteria	x		x	x	x		x
Coherence										
To what extent is the intervention internally coherent? (New)	To what extent are the various elements of intervention coherent with one another? (new) To what extent are the processes, selection criteria, Member States chronological criterion coherent with the objectives the intervention is set to achieve? (New)	The ECoC intervention is overall internally coherent: its objectives are aligned to the rationale of the intervention, as well as the activities implemented are in line with the objectives that they are meant to reach. Processes in place are synergic, avoid overlaps and gaps (e.g. in terms of	- Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research, focus groups, public consultation and interviews on whether the intervention presents any issues of internal coherence, specifically: - if the objectives are aligned to the	x		x	x	x		

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
		support to title-holding cities)	- rationale of the intervention – if the activities implemented are in line with the objectives – if the processes, selection criteria, Member States chronological criterion are coherent with the objectives - the intervention is set to achieve • Expert assessment of the coherence of the intervention							
	To what extent are the objectives of the title-holding cities supporting the objectives of the action (as specified in the 2014 Decision)? (EQ27) To what extent is the action supporting the cities' own objectives? (EQ27) Which balance do cities strike between the EU objectives and their local socio-economic objectives? (EQ27) Does this balance change after designation? (EQ27)	The ECoC objectives and the title-holding cities objectives are coherent, aligned and synergic mutually reinforcing each other. Title-holding cities develop and fit their socio-economic objectives within the scope of the ECoC objectives. When balance is struck, this still ensures that the ECoC objectives are respected throughout the implementation of the ECoC year.	• Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research, focus groups, public consultation and interviews on whether the objectives of the title-holding cities are aligned to the ECoC objectives • Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research, focus groups, public consultation and interviews on whether the objectives of the title-holding cities are somewhat constrained by the ECoC objectives • Quantitative and qualitative evidence from focus groups with members of the panel on whether the objectives of the title-holding cities and the balance between those and the ECoC objectives changed after the designation	x		x	x	x		
To what extent is the intervention	To what extent is this intervention coherent with other EU interventions that	The ECoC intervention is overall coherent with other EU interventions that have similar objectives. In	• Qualitative evidence from the analysis of ECoC objectives against the	x		x	x	x		

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
externally coherent? (New)	have similar objectives? (EQ26) To what extent is the intervention coherent with (current) wider EU policies and priorities (e.g. Commission policy priorities and other actions of the Creative Europe programme)? (EQ26) To what extent did the ECoC objectives correspond to wider EU policy goals and priorities? (EQ17)	particular, the ECoC intervention complement other EU interventions without evident overlaps. The ECoC intervention is overall coherent with the wider EU goals, policies and priorities	objectives of other similar interventions at EU level - Qualitative evidence from the analysis of ECoC objectives against the wider EU goals, policies and priorities set out in key policy documents such as: - Article 167 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union - Creative Europe Culture sub-programme - New European Agenda for Culture - Europe, the World's N.1 tourist destination: A new political framework for tourism in Europe - New European Bauhaus - EU support for culture in cities and regions (European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund, Cohesion Fund, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund) - Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research, focus groups, public consultation and interviews on whether the intervention is coherent with other EU interventions and the wider EU goals, priorities and policies							
	To what extent is this intervention coherent with other national interventions	The ECoC intervention is overall coherent with other national interventions that have similar objectives. In	Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research, focus	x		x	x	x		

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
	that have similar objectives? (EQ26)	particular, the ECoC intervention complement other EU interventions without evident overlaps and filling in existing gaps.	groups, public consultation and interviews on whether the intervention is coherent with other national similar interventions							
EU added value										
What is the EU added value of the intervention as well as possible and feasible ways to maximise the EU added value of the ECoC action? (Q28)	To what extent did the outputs, results and impacts of ECoC could have been reached without the EU intervention? (New) To what extent do the needs/problems addressed by the intervention continue to require action at EU level? (EQ17) What would be possible consequences if the action were not organised or funded at EU level? (EQ29)	The ECoC outputs, results and impacts in terms of cultural diversity, access to and participation in culture, Cultural capacity, and International profile of the title cities would have been at much lower scale (or not existing at all) if the action was not implemented at EU level. The ECoC intervention addresses needs and problems that require EU level action and should the intervention not be organised or funded at EU level alternatives measures put in place by Member States individually would have different scope and more limited European dimension, strongly impacting the achievement of the first general objective of the initiative (i.e. 'Safeguard and promote the diversity of cultures in Europe and to highlight the common features they share as well as to increase citizens' sense of belonging to a common cultural area')	- Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research, focus groups, public consultation and interviews on: - the overall EU added value of the initiative - advantages, disadvantages and impacts of not organising or funding the action at EU level - Quantitative and qualitative evidence from evaluations of other similar initiatives (e.g. the Italian capital of culture initiative) - Qualitative evidence from the validation workshops on advantages, disadvantages and impacts of not organising or funding the action at EU level	x		x	x	x		x
	To what extent does being an ECoC facilitate the access to other EU programmes/funds, in particular other actions of the Creative Europe programme (for example Culture Moves Europe or the cooperation projects under the Culture strand)? (EQ28)	Being ECoC not only facilitate accessing other EU programmes/funds in view of the title year, creating synergies with the action, but it grants the city with know-how, international partnership and a structure to access	Qualitative evidence from interviews and focus groups with title-holding cities on whether hosting the ECoC event facilitated access to other EU funding opportunities due to:			x		x		

Main evaluation questions	Sub-evaluation questions	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Desk-research/ literature review	Quantitative desk research/ statistical data mapping	Interviews	Public consultation	Focus groups	Case studies	Validation workshops
		funding opportunities also after and beyond the ECoC event	- developed knowhow in relation to applying to EU funding related to culture - developed international partnerships and cross-border cooperation - developed competences in attracting private co-funding / developed a network of private sponsorships - being in a stronger position (e.g. due to new infrastructures developed for the ECoC year) • Qualitative evidence from focus groups with bidding cities on whether taking part in the application process helped them develop competences and network useful to apply for and secure other EU funding opportunities							

Annex 3: Public consultation findings - A summary report of contributions submitted through the online consultation and an analysis of responses

Factual summary report of the online Public Consultation for the study supporting the First interim evaluation of the European Capitals of Culture action 2020-2033.

This document should be regarded solely as a summary of the contributions made by stakeholders in the context of the Public Consultation for the study supporting the First interim evaluation of the European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) action 2020-2033. It cannot in any circumstances be regarded as the official position of the Commission or its services. Responses to the consultation activities cannot be considered as a representative sample of the views of the EU population.

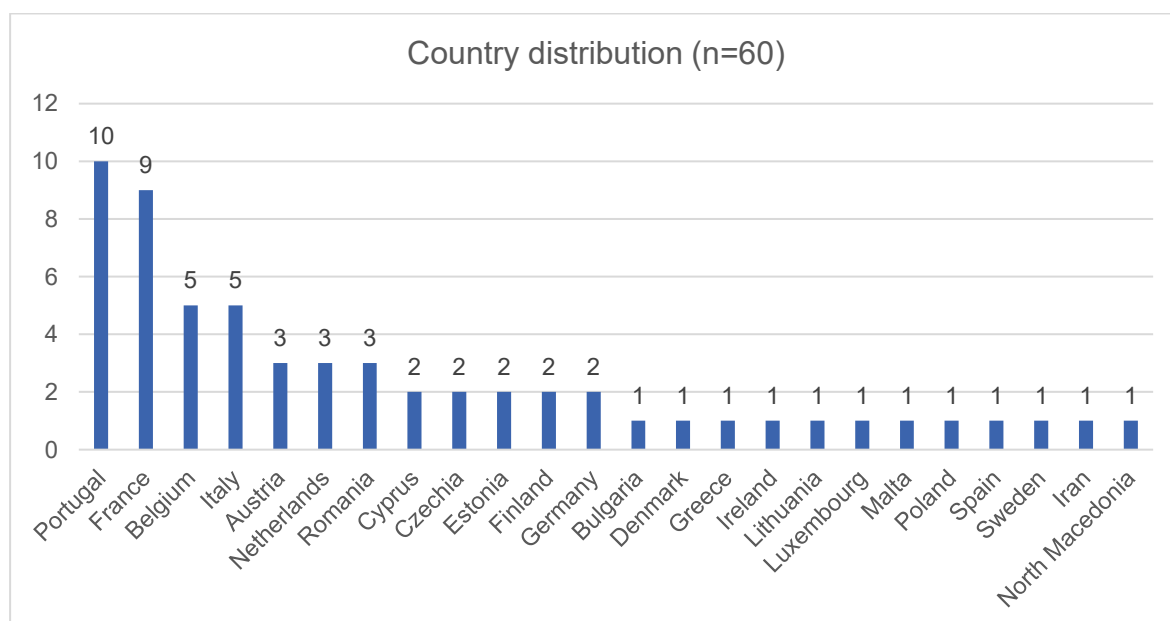
Objectives of the consultation

The aim of the Public Consultation was to gather feedback from a wide range of stakeholders on the performance of the stages of implementation, management and delivery of the European Capitals of Culture Feedback The questionnaire gathered feedback according to the evaluation criteria used to evaluate the agencies particularly focusing on relevance, effectiveness, coherence and EU added value. The Public Consultation was available from 18 June 2024 to 24 September 2024 in all official EU languages. Its purpose was to collect all relevant stakeholder feedback in relation to the effectiveness, coherence, relevance, and EU added value of the ECoC action work through closed and open-ended questions.

Who replied to the consultation?

A total of 60 respondents took part in the Public Consultation. Almost all the respondents (58 out of 60) came from within the EU, encompassing 22 Member States. An additional two respondents came from Iran and North Macedonia. The highest number of responses came from Portugal (10 out of 60), France (9 out of 60) and Belgium and Italy (5 out of 60 each).

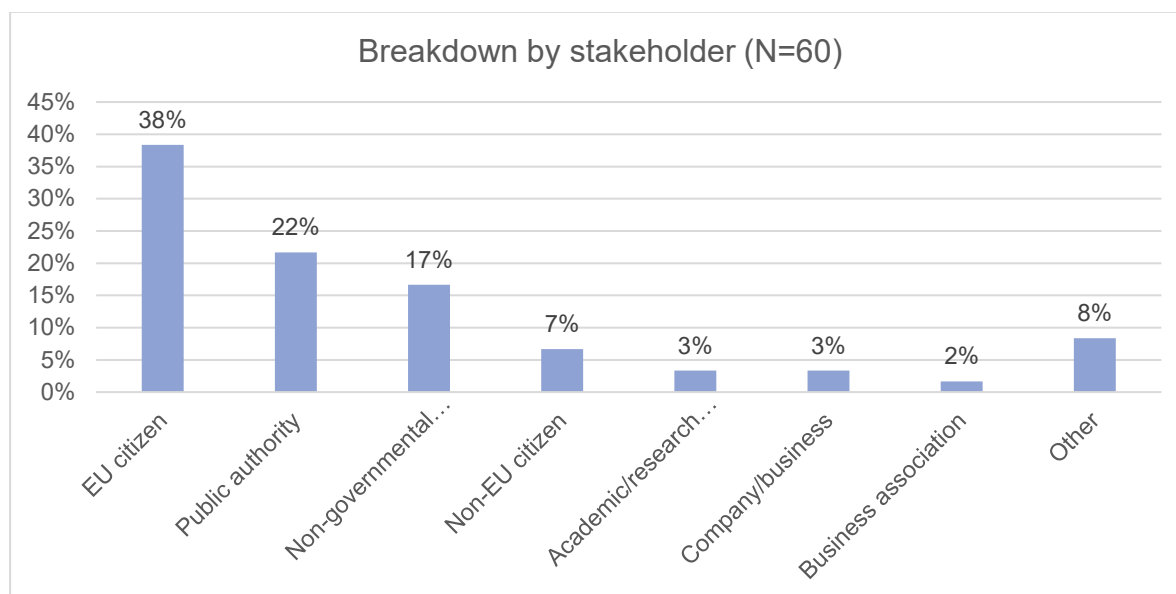
Figure 7. Distribution of respondents by country of origin



Source: Ecorys, 2024.

The Public Consultation received replies from a wide range of stakeholders. In particular, this Public Consultation targeted individuals involved in the implementation, management or delivery of the ECoC action and those interested and/or involved in culture. The highest number of respondents were EU Citizens (23 out of 60), followed by those working in public authorities (13 out of 60), and those working for non-governmental organisations (10 out of 60). The remaining respondents included non-EU Citizens (4 out of 60), individuals working for academic or research institutions (2 out of 60), members of companies/businesses (2 out of 60), representatives of business associations (1 out of 60) and others (5 out of 60)¹⁴³.

Figure 8. Distribution of responses by type of respondent

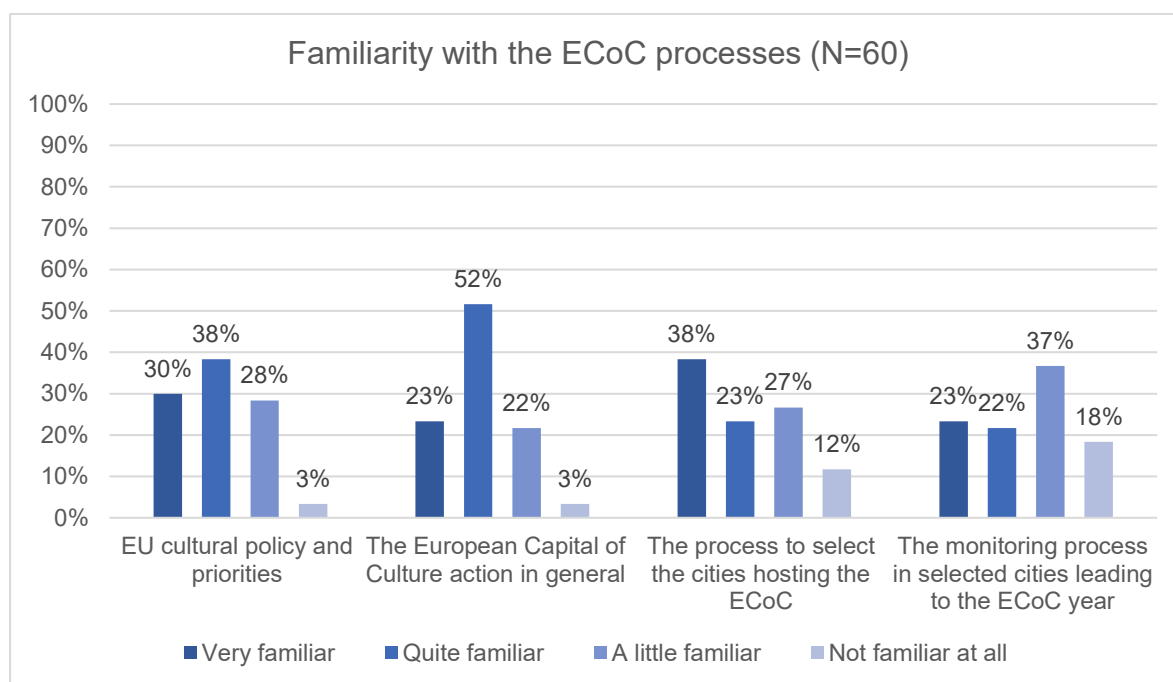


Source: Ecorys, 2024.

Respondents were asked to provide an overview of their familiarity with broader EU cultural policy and priorities, the ECoC action in general and its processes of selection and monitoring. They were most aware of the ECoC action in general, with 75% of them being either quite or very familiar with it (45 out of 60), followed by EU cultural policy and priorities (68%; 41 out of 60). Respondents were less familiar with the selection process of the cities hosting the ECoC, with 12% of them not being familiar at all with the process (7 out of 60) and 27% of them having little familiarity with it (16 out of 60). Respondents were least knowledgeable about the monitoring process. Over 18% were unfamiliar with the process (11 out of 60) while 37% were only a little familiar with it (22 out of 60).

¹⁴³ NB: Respondents who self-identified as "Other" but who could fit into other categories were not reclassified.

Figure 9. Familiarity with the EU cultural policy and the ECoC



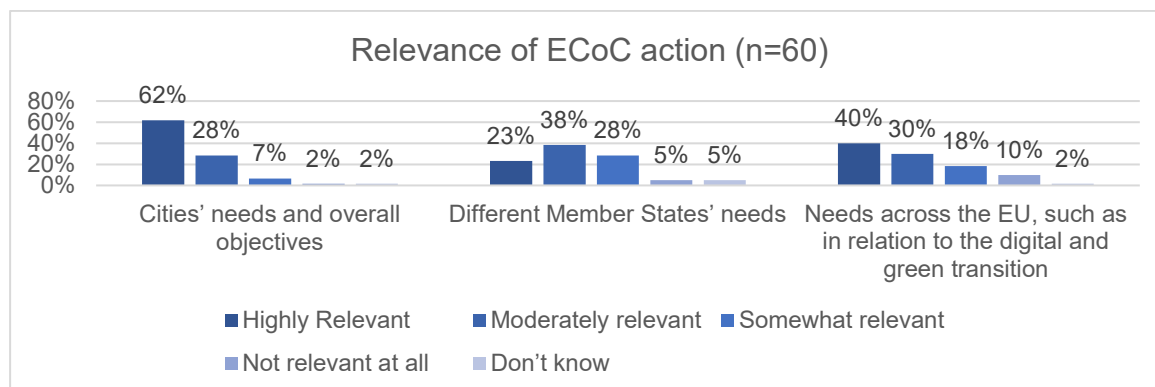
Source: Ecorys, 2024.

Main findings of the consultation

Relevance

Respondents were asked to evaluate the relevance of the ECoC action at a range of scales. Overall, they found the ECoC action to be most relevant to cities needs and overall objectives, with 62% of respondents agreeing that action is highly relevant (37 out of 60) and 28% as moderately relevant (17 out of 60). Only 7% of the respondents (4 out of 60) believed that the action is only somewhat relevant, and 2% (1 out of 60) deemed it not relevant at all. Relevancy at EU level, such as in relation to the digital and green transition was perceived to be the second strongest, with 40% finding the ECoC action to be highly relevant (24 out of 60) and 30% as moderately relevant (18 out of 60) to needs across the EU. 18% of the respondents (11 out of 60) deemed the action to be only somewhat relevant, and 10% (6 out of 60) believed it was not relevant at all. Respondents felt that the ECoC action was the least relevant to Member States' needs, with 23% evaluating the ECoC action as highly relevant (14 out of 60) and 38% as moderately relevant (23 out of 60). Meanwhile 28% (17 out of 60) indicated that the action was only somewhat relevant, and 5% (3 out of 60) deemed it not relevant at all.

Figure 10. Relevance of the ECoC action



Source: Ecorys, 2024.

Effectiveness

Respondents were asked to evaluate the extent to which the ECoC action has been able to achieve its objectives from 2013 to 2023. The vast majority felt that the action had achieved them to at least some extent, with only the support for the provision of training to cultural professionals falling below 50%¹⁴⁴ (45%; 27 out of 60).

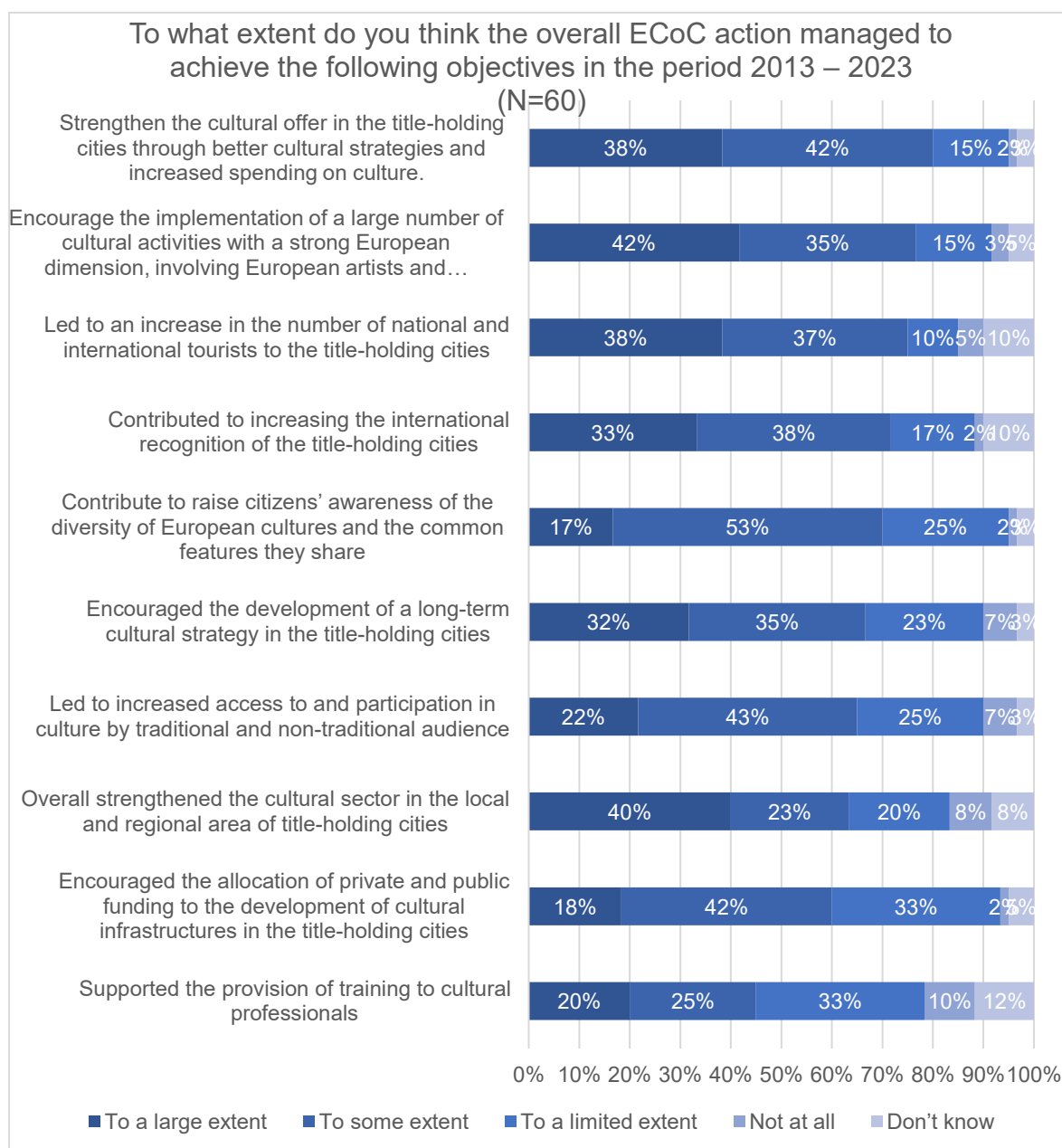
Strengthening the cultural offer in title-holding cities was deemed the most successful objective, with 80% of the respondents noting the achievement of the objective to a large or to some extent (43 out of 60). Encouraging the implementation of cultural activities with a strong European dimension was also very successful, with 77% of the respondents believing the objective was achieved to at least some extent (46 out of 60). Respondents also evaluated positively the extent to which the ECoC action was able to increase the number of tourists to the title-holding cities and to raise the recognition of the title-holding cities internationally with 75% (45 out of 60) and 72% (43 out of 60) respectively saying it had done so to a large or some extent. Moreover, 70% felt the action had contributed to raise citizen's awareness of the diversity of European cultures to some or to a large extent (42 out of 60).

Respondents also noted that certain objectives were only partially achieved, or in some cases, not fully realised. The support to the provision of training to cultural professionals (43%; 26 out of 60), the encouragement of the development of private and public funding to the development of cultural infrastructures (35%; 21 out of 60), and increased access by traditional and non-traditional audience in culture (32%, 19 out of 60) were less successful objectives.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ When combining the number of responses that indicated it had achieved its objectives 'to a large extent' or 'to some extent'.

¹⁴⁵ The percentages are based on the number of persons who selected 'to a large extent' or 'to some extent'.

Figure 11. Respondents' assessment of the effectiveness of the ECoC action

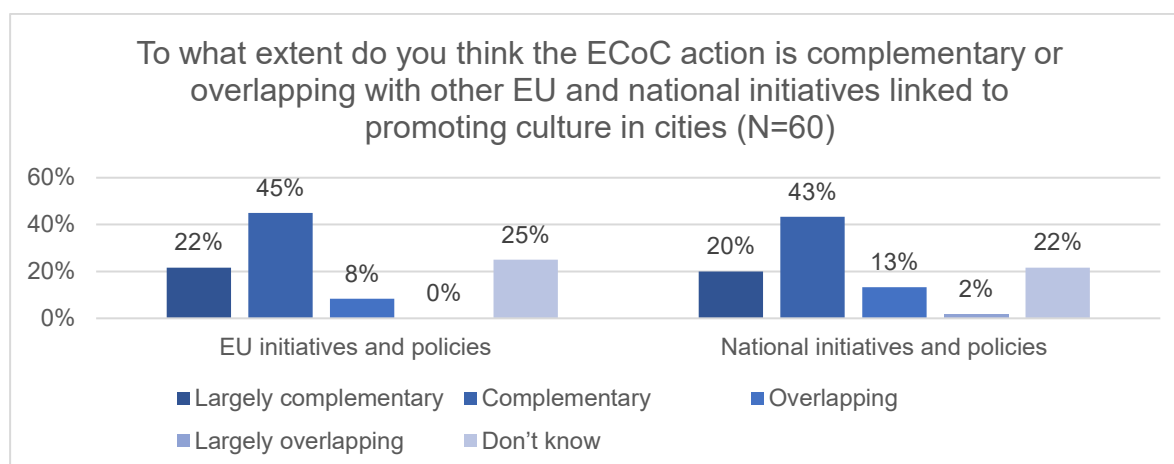


Source: Ecorys, 2024.

Coherence

Respondents generally agreed that the ECoC action is complementary to other EU and national initiatives and policies linked to promoting culture in cities. Figure 6 shows similar findings for complementarity across both EU and national initiatives. Approximately one fifth of respondents deemed the ECoC action to be largely complementary with both EU and national initiatives and policies (respectively, 22%; 13 out of 60 and 20%; 12 out of 60), and slightly less than half of the respondents rated the ECoC action as complementary to both EU policies (45%; 27 out of 60) and national initiatives (43%; 26 out of 60). Respondents were more likely to find the ECoC action to be overlapping with national initiatives (13%; 8 out of 60) than with EU initiatives (8%; 5 out of 60).

Figure 12. Complementarity of ECoC with other EU or national initiatives



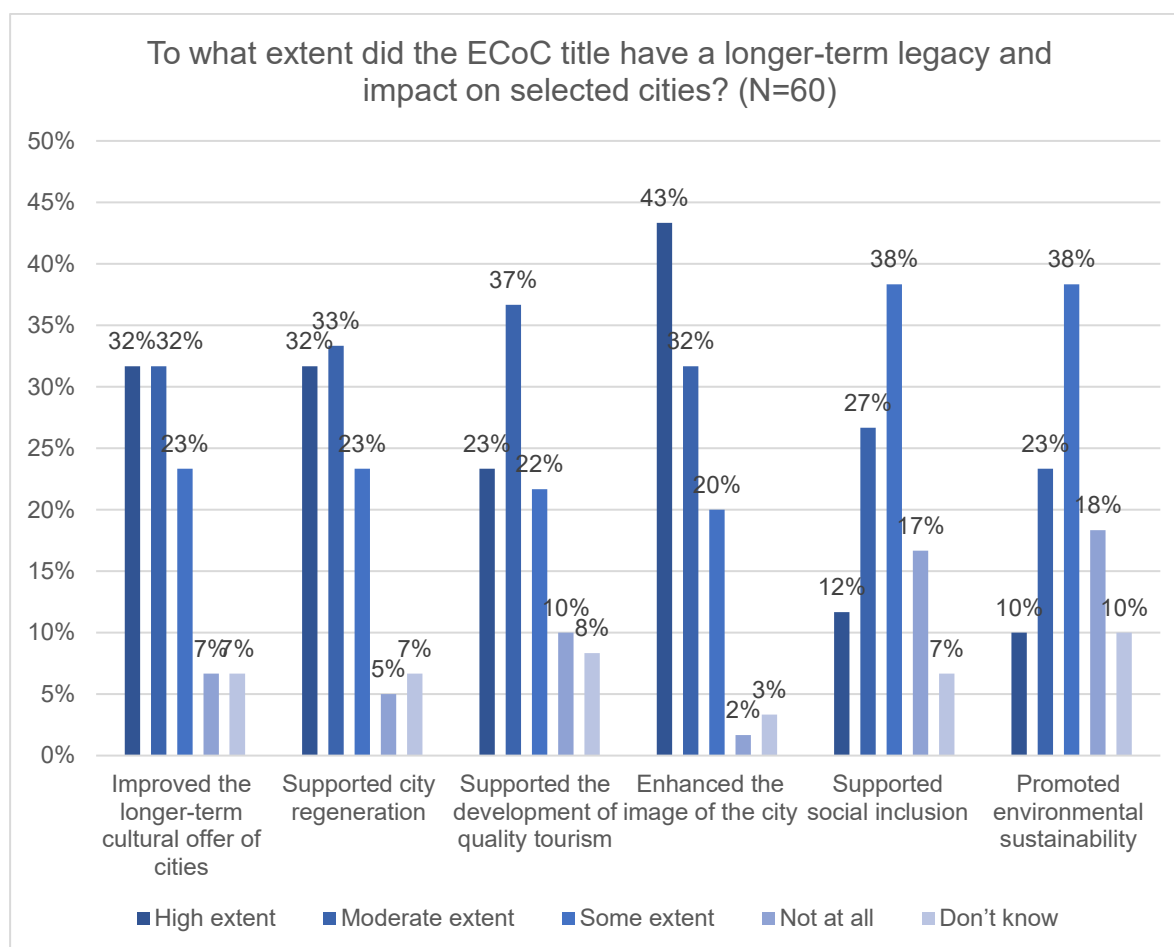
Source: Ecorys, 2024.

EU added value

Figure 13 analyses the impact of the ECoC title on longer-term legacy and other long-term objectives such as sustainability, social inclusion, and city regeneration. Respondents felt that the ECoC title was the most successful in enhancing the image of the city, with 43% (26 out of 60) saying it had done so to a high extent. Nearly a third of the respondents believed that it has also supported the city regeneration and improved the longer-term cultural offer of cities (32%; 19 out of 60 for both) to a high extent.

It is worth noting that in most cases at least half of the respondents rated the impact on the objectives as moderate or small (on average, 58%; 35 out of 60). Respondents were most sceptical about the impact of the ECoC title on environmental sustainability and social inclusion. For both these objectives, 38% of respondents (23 out of 60) felt that the impact was minimal. Meanwhile, 18% of respondents (11 out of 60) said the ECoC action had no impact on environmental sustainability at all, while 17% (10 out of 60) said the same about the impact on social inclusion.

Figure 13. Extent to which the ECoC title has impacted long-term legacy and impact



Source: Ecorys, 2024.

Annex 4: Case studies

Case Study 1: Aarhus 2017

The following case study analyses the results of Aarhus European Capital of Culture (ECoC) in 2017. It has been developed as part of the first interim evaluation of the European Capitals of Culture action (2020–2033), with the goal of gathering and analysing evidence to assess the implementation of the ECoC initiative and its longer-term impacts.

The study draws on extensive desk research and incorporates insights from key stakeholders directly involved in Aarhus 2017, through semi-structured interviews. It assesses how the ECoC action influenced Aarhus' cultural and creative sectors, engaged its communities, and generated impacts for the city, and seeks to identify transferable good practices for other ECoCs.

Context, background and key features of the ECoC

Key information on the city

Aarhus is a medium-sized city of around 330,000 inhabitants (1.4 million in the metropolitan area), the second largest metropolis in the country and the main urban area for the Central Denmark region.

Aarhus is an established hotspot for creativity and innovation: by some rankings is Aarhus University among the top 100 world universities and is home to a vibrant cultural and creative industries ecosystem. This includes inter alia a large film cluster (Filmby Aarhus), renowned architecture firms such as C.F. Møller, Schmidt Hammer Lassen or AART, as well as important higher education institutes such as the Aarhus School of Architecture or the design department of Aarhus University. Aarhus also carries the title of European Region of Gastronomy, along with Lombardy, Catalonia, Riga-Gauja and Minho regions.

The cultural sector is already strongly established in Aarhus and is underpinned by a longstanding support for culture in the city. Aarhus has made important cultural investments over years, strongly supported by private foundations, as tax incentives mechanisms have led to a significant private sponsorship ecosystem in the city and is an important cornerstone of cultural funding in Denmark. In many ways, Aarhus has a cultural sector that is bigger than a city of its size should have, with three museums welcoming more than 500,000 visitors per year each, which is more than 1.5 times the number of inhabitants in the city:

- Den Gamle By – ‘Old Town’ in Danish – is one of the oldest open-air museums of the world, and probably the oldest that focusses on urban history and culture. It includes over 75 houses from 24 different places representing four points of time from late 19th century to 1974. Each house presents a realistic setting of how people lived at different times of history, from various regions of Denmark. The museum pays special attention to catering for children and older visitors as well as those with accessibility needs such as visual impairments.
- The Art Museum of Aarhus – ARoS – is home to the classic art collection of paintings and sculpture from the 19th and early 20th centuries. To achieve its aims, ARoS arranges high level temporary exhibitions, offers exceptional attractions to its visitors based on latest technology, and organises events outside of the building, crowned since 2011 with the unique coloured glass and steel installation of the ‘rainbow panorama’ designed by Olafur Eliasson and his studio.
- Moesgaard Museum – also known as MoMu – originates from the 19th century. From its old building in Aarhus the natural and human history collection moved to an old manor outside the city in 1970, and after a while took the name of the manor.

It then relocated in 2014 at half an hour's drive from the city centre. One of the main attractions of the museum is its building designed by Henning Larsen, which opened back in 2014 and won several awards, including the 2012 Præmium Imperiale, the 2013 Mies van der Rohe Award and the 2019 European Prize for Architecture. This ambitious investment of well over €50 million quickly became a landmark of the city, with more than 500,000 yearly visitors and ambitious international large-scale temporary exhibitions.

The city is also home to cultural spaces with a strong focus on citizens' engagement, including Godsbanen, a cultural community centre run by the city, which hosts various types of citizen-driven cultural projects, including a fablab, an exhibition space, a market and a performing arts venue, all focusing on accessible and/or participatory events. Similarly, Dokk1 is a large library overseeing the harbour area through large glass walls. This impressive space embodies the role of contemporary libraries: beyond renting books and other types of cultural content, the library organises various training courses and events that appeal to a broad range of citizens (digital trainings, civic debates, and workshops for instance). Dokk1 also hosts several social services of the municipality, attracting people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Key features of the ECoC, in terms of programming, management, funding, processes

Aarhus held the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) title in 2017. The theme '*Let's Rethink*' aimed to create a 'cultural laboratory' in the region where innovative and alternative solutions could flourish (new practices, new ways of forming partnerships, new business models and new concepts of growth). Aarhus 2017 included a focus on diversified themes such as urban development, integration, business development, tourism, infrastructure and international collaborations. The ECoC and the city's cultural policy sought to bring about a mindset for change and innovation across today's (and tomorrow's) challenges for a city.

As such, 'liveability' of the city was at the heart of the ECoC 2017 programme as well as in the broader cultural policy of Aarhus, with the 2017-2020 vision document entitled 'The Good Life'. It was articulated around 3 pillars:

- **Culture sets the agenda** – it is a driver for new impulses across the city (i.e.: the Dokk1 library as the 'entry door' to the regenerated harbour district);
- European Capital of Culture legacy, with an annual funding commitment of €268,650 for four years towards legacy projects; Aarhus and the other municipalities involved in the ECoC project formalised their commitments to work on this legacy through the launch of the 'European Region of Culture', namely, a collaboration between Central Denmark Region and the 19 municipalities that together created European Capital of Culture Aarhus 2017. It is co-financed by the municipalities and Central Denmark Region, and it supports regional cultural activities around citizens' engagement, youth, and sustainability¹⁴⁶.
- A strong cultural sector (in all its dimensions, including high-quality cultural programming, active citizens engagement, and flourishing creative businesses).

No new infrastructure investment was required for the European Capital of Culture as investment in cultural spaces had already been planned before the title was awarded to Aarhus.

¹⁴⁶ <https://www.kulturregion.dk/>

Flexibility and partnerships were key in delivering on this vision, as the main cultural institutions operate independently from the city cultural department (arm's length principle). This means that flexible policy tools, such as production contracts between the ECoC Foundation and cultural institutions, as well as continuous dialogue between the city services and cultural institutions played a pivotal role in ensuring that the whole cultural ecosystem of Aarhus works towards similar objectives.

ECoC programming

Aarhus 2017 was articulated under the umbrella 'rethink' and three underlying core values: democracy, diversity and sustainability. These values materialised in various activities and the overall topic 'Rethink' ensured coherence across the programme:

- **Democracy:** great emphasis was placed on citizens' engagement and activism, which materialised in landmark participatory activities and civic engagement through culture. The volunteer programme was also an important success to strengthen citizens' engagement throughout the year.
- **Diversity:** in terms both of cultural content, but also of engaging diverse audiences through a strong commitment to accessibility of events (more than 50% free events).
- **Sustainability,** with the development of a guidebook for cultural institutions to embed environmental sustainability across their activities.

Aarhus 2017 followed a decentralised and multi-layered approach combining larger scale and long-term projects with more flexible and open programming lines. The programme featured different categories of events: at the core of its programming were the **Mega Events**, which stood out as the largest and most high-profile moments of the European Capital of Culture year. These included the Grand Opening Ceremony on the 21st of January, a large-scale artistic event involving 5000 participants, with a light procession flowing from the Musikhuset theatre to the city harbour. The event highlighted local heritage with six large Viking ships and over a thousand choral singers. This mass participation event also featured leading artists, such as Faroese singer Eivör and members of the Aarhus Jazz Orchestra and Aarhus Symphony Orchestra. This first event combined much of what Aarhus2017 offered throughout the ECoC year: the programme balanced well high-quality artistic programming with activities conducive to citizens engagement, and participatory activities took a central stage throughout the year. The second mega Event, The Garden – Beginning of Times, End of Times, was an ambitious exhibition running from April to September that explored humanity's relationship with nature. The summer months saw Red Serpent, an outdoor performance inspired by Viking mythology, while the year concluded with the Aarhus 2017 Finale – Celebrate the Year on December 9th, bringing together the city's cultural momentum in a final showcase.

To sustain public engagement throughout the year, Aarhus 2017 introduced the **Full Moon Events**, a series of monthly signature happenings, each carrying a specific theme and unfolding in different parts of Central Denmark Region. These ranged from Land of Wishes, a participatory initiative held in all 19 municipalities in January, to Watermusic, a spectacular waterfront performance in Randers in September. Other notable Full Moon Events included Liberate the Church Service in February, a creative rethinking of religious and secular traditions; Festival of the Century in March, which explored historical narratives; Off Road in April, an immersive event in Herning designed to push creative boundaries; and Move for Life, a large-scale participatory initiative in November that combined cultural expression with physical activity across the region.

Beyond these flagship events, Aarhus 2017 sought to foster alternative and experimental cultural production through **OFF Track 2017**, a platform that encouraged decentralised programming and cross-sector collaboration. This initiative created space for community-

led performances, public art projects, and sustainability-focused cultural experiments, emphasising the participation of emerging artists and grassroots organisations. Complementing this, a **dedicated seed funding programme** was established to support small-scale projects and new talents, ensuring that the momentum generated by the European Capital of Culture year extended beyond its immediate duration.

The overall Aarhus programme was unpacked around a series of themes, mainly used to classify the different types of events and help audiences to navigate a packed calendar of activities. It aimed to reflect the diversity of the cultural programme, and included themes linked to urban quality of life through culture (liveability around urban design, generations focusing on intergenerational cultural activities), but also connecting to the wider Central Denmark Region (nature, outdoor sports). Political themes were given a prominent space as well, with a focus on history, religion (rethinking belief) as well as debates and discussions.

Importantly, 20% of the total programme budget went to strategic development projects, which pursued a twin objective of developing events for the programme in 2017 but also to focus on a set of long-term development strategies pre and post 2017.

Sustainability

Aarhus 2017 was the first European Capital of Culture to create a model for sustainable development in the cultural sector. The Aarhus Sustainability Model is a tool and guide developed in partnership with Samsø Energy Academy and WorldPerfect. Aarhus 2017 ensured that sustainability remained a core value of European Capital of Culture, including through locally sourced food, by using recycled materials and limiting the use of resources, but also through events inviting audiences to reflect on and debate sustainability in the city. The content of the programme also played a role here: for instance, the Hidden Places project opened sustainable urban gardens throughout Aarhus.¹⁴⁷

Budget and management

Fonden Aarhus 2017 ('Aarhus 2017 Foundation') was composed of a Secretariat that dealt with planning and coordination of the programme, budget, communication and partnerships, and a Board that gave the overall direction to the project. Around 60 people were part of the Aarhus Foundation team. Their background and diversity of skills, including those of their external partners as well, were selected with the overarching goal to sustain the legacy of the ECoC after 2017, and city staff was seconded to the Foundation to foster the legacy of the ECoC year.

The Board consisted of 13 members of which seven were political appointments and six represented civil society.¹⁴⁸

The cultural infrastructure of the city meant that the budget of the ECoC could really focus on cultural programming. Over 70% of the 56 million euros budget was earmarked on cultural events and activities, and 15% on communication.

The budget breakdown shows a good mix of public funds and private support: National Government, ECoC City, Private investments (incl. sponsorship and donations) represent together the vast majority of the budget.

¹⁴⁷ Aarhus 2017 Foundation (2018), *Welcome Future*. Aarhus 2017 Foundation, April 2018. ISBN: 978-87-999627-7-8

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

Table 9. ECoC Funding Sources and Amounts

ECoC Aarhus 2017	Funding sources (in EUR million)
National Government	17.3 (29.75%)
ECoC City	21.4 (35%)
Region	7.9 (12.76%)
Melina Mercouri Prize	1.5 (2.42 %)
Private investments (incl. sponsorship and donations)	11.9 (19.22%)
Other	1.9 (3.07%)
Total	61.9

Sources: Ecorys (2018) *Evaluations of the 2017 European Capitals of Culture. Report for the European Commission, DG EAC*.¹⁴⁹

Resource allocation shows the importance of strategic projects, and that no budget was allocated to building new cultural infrastructures, the focus was instead activating and leveraging on existing organisations and assets:

Table 10. Main Expenditures Items

Main programme components	Budget in DKK	Budget in EUR ¹⁵⁰	Share of total programme expenditure
Projects included in the application	48.5 million	6.52 million	15%
Strategic projects	65.7 million	8.83 million	20%
Internal projects	39.2 million	5.27 million	12%
The Big 8	36.4 million	4.89 million	11%
Mega and full moon events	56.7 million	7.62 million	17%
OFFTrack2017 and micro-projects	3.9 million	0.52 million	1%
Open Call	14.7 million	1.98 million	5%
More Creative	41.1 million	5.53 million	13%
Others	23.2 million	3.12 million	6%
Total	329.4 million	44.28 million¹⁵¹	100%

¹⁴⁹ Note: slightly different figures are presented in the rethinkIMPACTS 2017, final evaluation report. This is likely due to the inclusion of budgets for legacy actions in the city's evaluation report.

¹⁵⁰ Conversion used the average exchange rate for 2017 (EUR 1 = DKK 7.4386), sourced from the European Central Bank. Conversion rounded up to two decimals.

¹⁵¹ While not specified in the final evaluation report, we assume the gap between programme expenses and the total budget (EUR 17.6 million) included evaluation budget (DKK 10 million, so €1.34 million), the remaining budget being roughly equally split between staff costs and communication budget. The modest staff costs are mainly due to the importance of detached staff from different local authorities.

Source: rethinkIMPACTS 2017, final evaluation report

Analysis of the ECoC immediate and longer-term impacts and legacy

Aarhus 2017 had a broad range of impacts, some of them with lasting effects. This section sets out the main impacts and analyses the most prominent legacy effects of Aarhus 2017.

According to the Aarhus 2017 Foundation's figures, the European Capital of Culture programme attracted 628 events in 2017, with a total of 3.3 million visits.¹⁵² The four mega events and the 12 full moon events were the central highlights of 2017 both in terms of programme budget (17%) and attendance (41% or 1.3 million).

Economic direct effects

The economic effects of Aarhus 2017 on behalf on the Aarhus 2017 Foundation are significant, and it was estimated that the ECoC created 1,403 jobs in the private sector, and 562 jobs in the cultural sector, and generated an increased turnover of DKK 1,185 million (EUR 159.3 million) in the private sector, and the return on public investments in the ECoC was estimated to reach 1:3.¹⁵³ However it is worth noting that the ECoC programme did not have a heavy focus on cultural and creative businesses, despite the importance of the sector in Aarhus and in the wider region, including Filmby Aarhus, one of the main clusters in Denmark for audiovisual companies. No particular training or capacity-building, networking or other forms of support services were developed alongside the ECoC cultural programme, and the economic impacts are rather linked to ticket sales for cultural performances or museum entry fees.

The impacts in terms of European dimension

Aarhus2017 had a **clear strategy to develop European partnerships** and international collaborations: 108 projects under the European Capital of Culture umbrella were international co-productions, and 162 projects involved some sort of international collaboration (e.g. guest performers, exhibitions, residencies). A few important learning points emerge from the evaluation's findings on the European and international dimensions: 1) the role of the second artistic director and her network really strengthened the capacity to develop partnerships, although she joined the Aarhus foundation only in 2014; 2) the collaboration between local and international artists did not come out as strongly as expected, partly due to the longer-term planning of some of the larger events (designed for the bid in 2012) that meant that major projects were already well underway in their preparations when international collaborations started gaining traction.¹⁵⁴

Importantly, Aarhus has pursued other leading European initiatives, including for instance its participation in the EU Mission for Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities¹⁵⁵, or by applying to the European Capital and Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism in 2023, building on the legacy of the ECoC 2017 in terms of cultural tourism.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Aarhus 2017 Foundation (2018) Welcome Future. Aarhus 2017 Foundation, April 2018. ISBN: 978-87-999627-7-8

¹⁵³ Aarhus 2017 Foundation (2018), Welcome Future. Aarhus 2017 Foundation, April 2018. ISBN: 978-87-999627-7-8

¹⁵⁴ Hans-Peter Degn et al. (2018) AARHUS 2017. BEFORE - DURING – AFTER: A research-based evaluation of the effects of the European Capital of Culture project. rethinkIMPACTS 2017 at Aarhus University. <http://www.projects.au.dk/2017>

¹⁵⁵ <https://aarhus.dk/english/go-green-with-aarhus-climate-sustainability/100-climate-neutral-cities>

¹⁵⁶ https://smart-tourism-capital.ec.europa.eu/aarhus-2023-shortlisted-city_en

At a more regional level, the Central Denmark Region and the 19 municipalities entered into an agreement in November 2017 to continue their collaboration after Aarhus 2017 under the title of 'European Region of Culture', a direct and tangible positive impact for cross-municipal cultural collaboration in the region.¹⁵⁷

Cultural impacts

Artistic quality was highly prioritised, which was reflected in a programme that achieved a generally high level of artistic quality. The final programme had a broad and interdisciplinary approach, although visual and performing arts were the most represented types of cultural events. This interdisciplinary approach was strongly encouraged by the programme team, first by encouraging collaboration across cultural institutions in Aarhus, and second by including interdisciplinary collaborations as a core criterion of the open calls for cultural projects. 91% of the projects involved a collaboration between different disciplines or cultural institutions.¹⁵⁸ A great emphasis was also placed on accessibility of the programme and the diversification of audiences, notably by:

- Providing a majority of free events.
- Offering a wide geographical spread in Aarhus but also in the wider region.
- Developing events and projects outside the traditional cultural institutions.

52% of all Aarhus 2017 events were free (with a 50% goal set out in the bid book).¹⁵⁹ The free events had an important effect in terms of widening participation towards younger audiences (30% vs 18% for paid events) and populations with a lower educational attainment level (42% vs 32% for paid events).¹⁶⁰

Culture as a cornerstone of cooperation and strategic positioning

An important outcome of Aarhus 2017 was to put Aarhus and the rest of the region on the map and significantly strengthen their cultural image at local, regional and national levels, whilst the results at European level are less conclusive. Aarhus 2017 laid the foundation for a longer-term, broader interest in Aarhus and the rest of the Central Denmark Region in the future.¹⁶¹

A major impact of Aarhus, and probably one of the most lasting effects of the ECoC is the increased prominence of culture in the city's strategic priorities and the wider region. 75% of both Aarhus city and Central Denmark council politicians found that Aarhus 2017 had an important effect for a greater prioritisation of culture at city and regional levels.¹⁶² Several of the municipalities' new cultural policies in the region have become broader and culture is much more mainstreamed across other policy areas after Aarhus2017, including notably in environmental and urban planning policies.

In particular, a great level of collaboration across municipal departments is noticed, potentially as an effect of having detached staff for the Aarhus2017 foundation from diverse

¹⁵⁷ Hans-Peter Degn et al. (2018) AARHUS 2017. BEFORE - DURING – AFTER: A research-based evaluation of the effects of the European Capital of Culture project. rethinkIMPACTS 2017 at Aarhus University.

¹⁵⁸ Aarhus 2017 Foundation (2018), Welcome Future. Aarhus 2017 Foundation, April 2018. ISBN: 978-87-999627-7-8

¹⁵⁹ Louise Ejgod Hansen, Hans-Peter Degn (2022) No Impact on Cultural Participation? An analysis of the objective to increase and widen cultural participation in the European Capital of Culture Aarhus 2017. In *The Failures of Public Art and Participation*. Routledge, 2022.

¹⁶⁰ Hans-Peter Degn et al. (2018) AARHUS 2017. BEFORE - DURING – AFTER: A research-based evaluation of the effects of the European Capital of Culture project. rethinkIMPACTS 2017 at Aarhus University.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

city departments. This resulted in the inception of some cross-cutting projects, including the projects 'Rethink Urban Habitats', connecting culture, urban design and biodiversity,¹⁶³ or 'Den Gode Galskab' ('sane madness'), connecting theatre, music with the social department of the municipality.¹⁶⁴

This is further elaborated on follow-up cultural strategies for Aarhus, acknowledging that culture is welfare, that it goes even beyond connecting culture to other policy areas: culture is the starting point to think and elaborate initiatives for a wide array of policy areas, including urban design, social policies, economic development or health and well-being. The legacy effect is directly referred to in the 2021-2024 strategy: 'To a great extent, European Capital of Culture Aarhus 2017 was the catalyst for this.'¹⁶⁵

Lessons learnt and good practices, including key challenges before, during and after the ECoC and implications for the next iteration of the ECoC action.

This section will analyse the best practices that contributed to the success of Aarhus2017, alongside some of the challenges that hindered the initiative.

Real estate investments and iconic buildings is key for success in culture; nevertheless, decisive leaps forward can be achieved – as in Aarhus - when their establishment is no longer in focus of development goals, and attention can switch to human and societal aspects of urban development. In the case of Aarhus, several aspects are particularly noteworthy:

The citizen engagement and participatory processes shaping the ECoC year strengthened the sense of **ownership by citizens**, and the awareness by Aarhus residents of the ECoC was particularly high (93%).

- The quality of senior managers in key cultural institutions (and the ECoC staff) has been an important asset, although changes in personnel for some cultural institutions was challenging.

The governance model of Aarhus2017 involved a **multi-level cooperation mechanism**, as well as a decentralised production agency. This governance model sought to involve the Central Denmark Region and the various municipalities across the region beyond the municipality of Aarhus itself. That cooperation mechanism was largely built on **detached staff** from all local/regional authorities involved, which generated interesting results:

- Important impacts in terms of skills development for detached staff (93% reported gaining new skills through their involvement in the ECoC project).
- Legacy and integration of the ECoC within the daily practice of city staff, which means most of the ECoC staff remained actively involved in designing and delivering the legacy of Aarhus 2017.

A high level of cooperation between the local and regional authorities was also attained thanks to the involvement of both local and regional staff in the Aarhus2017 Foundation.

Besides the Aarhus 2017 Foundation, the roll-out of the cultural programme was largely handled through partnerships and **decentralised productions**. This is evaluated as an interesting model but it does run the risk of confusion regarding the division of work and responsibility between the foundation (which was a funder and steered the artistic direction

¹⁶³ <http://www.aarhus2017.dk/en/programme/festivals-and-happenings/rethink-urban-habitats/index.html>

¹⁶⁴ <http://www.aarhus2017.dk/da/program/festivaler-og-happenings/den-gode-galskab-festival/index.html>

¹⁶⁵ City of Aarhus (2021) Cultural Strategy for 2021-2024.

of the overall ECoC programme) and the content producers, as well as dissatisfaction with supervisory and reporting requirements, which were seen as an unnecessary burden, and considered by many to be out of proportion to the size of the grants.¹⁶⁶

Another essential channel of citizen engagement throughout the ECoC was **volunteering**, with 4535 volunteers – called ‘ReThinkers’ for Aarhus 2017, and the development of a legacy programme. The volunteer programme was perhaps one of the most tangible outcomes of the participatory processes leading to the ECoC year¹⁶⁷, which resulted in an important number of volunteers and high level of commitment throughout the year. The satisfaction rate from volunteers was very high as well (around 95%), and left an important legacy in two ways: 1) The ReThinkers volunteer programme is still active and running, with 2000 active members in 2024;¹⁶⁸ 2) the whole process of engaging with citizens in the preparation phase and developing a meaningful volunteering programme inspired other European Capitals of Culture to develop similar processes, such as Kaunas2022.

Conclusion

Aarhus2017 is certainly a great example of the impacts of ECoCs in a given city or even region. The model focused on engagement and partnerships and it aligned around a shared vision. The overall programme was also successfully integrated into the city’s larger cultural strategy, and culture has clearly taken a central stage across Aarhus policies. The cooperation between the city and the regional authorities is also exemplary and led to more cooperation after the ECoC.

Other tangible legacies include the volunteering programme, and the development of international partnerships. The experience of Aarhus also shows that combining international coproductions and nurturing the emergence of local artists and creative professionals require careful planning and some flexibility in the planning of larger scale events.

Interestingly, the ECoC had very little focus on infrastructures as this had been anticipated before bidding. While this means other ECoCs will often face a different context, it also implies that most of the lessons learnt focus on softer processes and are more likely to be transferable to other ECoCs.

¹⁶⁶ Hans-Peter Degn et al. (2018) AARHUS 2017. BEFORE - DURING – AFTER: A research-based evaluation of the effects of the European Capital of Culture project. rethinkIMPACTS 2017 at Aarhus University.

¹⁶⁷ Another noteworthy outcome is the citizen involvement in designing ECoC events such as DemokratiStafetten (‘The democracy relay’) and Pop-Up Kulturhus (‘Pop-up culture house’) for the full moon event Snapsting in Viborg.

¹⁶⁸ <https://www.visitaarhus.dk/frivillig>

Case Study 2: Elefsina 2023

The following case study examines the experience of Elefsina, Greece, as the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) in 2023. It has been developed as part of the first interim evaluation of the European Capitals of Culture action (2020–2033), with the goal of gathering and analysing evidence to assess the implementation of the ECoC initiative and its longer-term impacts.

The study draws on extensive desk research and incorporates insights from key stakeholders directly involved in the Eleusis2023 project, through 3 semi-structured interviews. This evidence-based approach ensures a comprehensive evaluation of how the ECoC action influenced Elefsina's cultural landscape, engaged its communities, and left an important impact at both the local and European levels.

Context, background and key features of the ECoC

Key information on the city

Elefsina, located in West Attica, roughly 20 kilometres west of Athens, albeit home to only 30,000 inhabitants, encapsulates the transformative journeys that many European cities have faced, a microcosm of Europe's complex socio-cultural and environmental transitions. Starting from a glorious past, once an ancient hub of civilisation, Elefsina holds deep mythical significance in Greek culture as the site of the Eleusinian Mysteries—ancient rites celebrating the cyclicity of life, death, and rebirth of nature governed by Demeter, the earth goddess. Traces of the ancient roots are visible in the archaeological museum and in several archaeological sites, including the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore and the Telesterion, which together constitute an important stock of cultural heritage assets. Elefsina is also the birthplace of Aeschylus the 'Father of Greek Tragedy'. In its more recent history, Elefsina has experienced important waves of immigration, witnessing rapid growth following the influx of Greek refugees from Anatolia in the 1920s, hybridising local traditions and culture after the war. In the latter half of the 20th century, it emerged as the very centre of Greek industrialisation, housing dozens of extremely polluting industries within its compact geography—two refineries, two shipyards, two steel factories, and two cement plants. By the late 1970s, the Gulf of Elefsina had become one of the Mediterranean's most polluted areas, with a one-meter-thick layer of sediment at its bottom, placing all marine life at risk of extinction¹⁶⁹. This stark juxtaposition of ancient history and heavy industry creates a visual paradox instantly perceptible to any visitor.

Therefore, like many other European regions, at the start of the 21st century, Elefsina underwent a period of rapid deindustrialisation, leaving behind numerous abandoned infrastructures, high unemployment rates, and severe environmental degradation. The global financial crisis – aggravated by the Greek economic downturn – further threatened the city's cultural landscape, and deprioritised culture in policy agendas. On one hand, for many Greeks, Elefsina's identity had become inextricably tied to industry and environmental destruction, overshadowing its ancient past and rich cultural assets. On the other hand, internationally, Elefsina remained virtually unknown, as Greece is predominantly associated with summer leisure tourism, beaches, natural beauty, and archaeological landmarks, and none of these elements was adequately promoted in Elefsina's territory.¹⁷⁰

Hence, the 2023 European Capital of Culture title provided Elefsina not only with a pivotal opportunity for moving from an image of environmental devastation to one of cultural and

¹⁶⁹ Eleusis2021 Bid book, p. 6.

¹⁷⁰ United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). (n.d.). City Profile: Elefsina. Agenda 21 for Culture. Retrieved from https://www.agenda21culture.net/sites/default/files/files/cities/content/cityprofile_elefsina.pdf

creative innovation, but Elefsina envisioned itself as a platform, a laboratory for testing new paradigms of sustainable, community-centred urban regeneration, aspiring toward a balanced growth model that fosters employment while safeguarding citizens' quality of life and natural resources, paradigms that can potentially be replicated in other territories that share elements of Elefsina's story. For Elefsina, few development alternatives existed, and the coming years will reveal whether its investment in the CCS will indeed mark a definitive turning point in the city's history. As Michelangelo Pistoletto remarked in an interview: 'Whoever saves Elefsina will save the whole world'¹⁷¹.

In response to the urgent need for new development trajectories, the ECoC initiative received strong endorsement from the local administration and became a key priority in Elefsina's long-term strategy. This commitment is grounded in the *Cultural Strategy 2016-2025* and the *Agenda 21 for Culture* ¹⁷². The administration commits to sustain the legacy of the ECoC by increasing the culture budget from 5% in 2016 to 10% for the years 2021 to 2025, while also supporting the continuation of key initiatives of the ECoC programme, such as the international festivals 'City Mysteries', 'ECO-culture', and 'Agora for Europe'. The ECoC programme is a catalyst for achieving the objectives of such Cultural Strategy 2016-2025, which include¹⁷³:

- Promoting Innovation: Fostering creativity through contemporary cultural production rooted in the city's heritage.
- Strengthening Identity and Participation: Building Elefsina's cultural identity by engaging all social groups as co-creators in community activities.
- Providing Enjoyment: Offering cultural experiences that bring enjoyment, play, and relaxation in a city which lacked stimulating opportunities for leisure time.
- Boosting Economic Impact: Encouraging job creation, skill development, and sustainable tourism growth in Elefsina.

Key features of the ECoC, in terms of programming, management, funding, processes

Eleusis2023's artistic programme, 'Mysteries of Transition', weaved together the ancient legacy of the Eleusinian Mysteries, namely the historic celebrations of Persephone running for over 2000 years in Elefsina, which celebrate the transitions of nature, with the social, environmental, and economic transitions the city is facing nowadays. The programme comprised 130 major projects, or 'mysteries,' structured along three thematic axes, each anchored by a flagship project:

People & Society¹⁷⁴: this axis focused on exploring and celebrating local cultural identity, fostering social cohesion, and encouraging cultural participation while reflecting on European values of citizenship. The flagship project, '*Mystery 29 – Elefsina, the Raw Museum*', interpreted the city itself as a living exhibition, showcasing elements that form the mosaic of Elefsina's identity, from its ancient heritage, the hybrid social fabric characterized by immigration, to the contemporary banality of a typical provincial town.

Environment¹⁷⁵: projects in this axis addressed the city's ecological challenges, promoting environmental awareness and sustainable practices in a territory significantly affected by industrial pollution. The flagship project, '*Mystery 99 THE ARK – LANDSHIP*', saw a Belgian

¹⁷² United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). (n.d.). *Agenda 21 for culture*. Retrieved from https://www.agenda21culture.net/sites/default/files/documents/multi/ag21_en.pdf

¹⁷³ *Eleusis2021 Bid book*, p. 10.

¹⁷⁴ <https://2023eleusis.eu/en/thematikoi-axones-2/anthropos-koinonia/>

¹⁷⁵ <https://2023eleusis.eu/en/thematikoi-axones-2/perivallon/>

theatre company construct a 'land ship' that journeyed across Europe, engaging citizens in various European towns on reflecting around environmental issues before settling in Elefsina as a permanent installation and symbol of ecological resilience.

Labour¹⁷⁶: this axis gathered projects reflecting on Elefsina's post-industrial transition, honouring its labour history and reimagining industrial spaces for creative purposes. The flagship project, '*Mystery 111 – Eleusis Terracotta Army*', drew inspiration from China's Terracotta Army. This large-scale art project celebrated the dignity of Elefsina's current and retired factory workers, for each of whom created a personalised clay helmet engraved with symbols representing their lives. These individual helmets formed a diffused, participatory monument to the city's workforce.

In addition to these 130 core 'mysteries', 465 smaller events took place over 346 days, involving 137 international and 192 Greek stakeholders. Notably, 30 initiatives were developed by local artists and organisations¹⁷⁷. Although 30 in-house projects might seem few compared to other ECoCs, it is very notable considering that Elefsina did not have an established art scene or a culture department within the municipality when the ECoC project started. Indeed, the virtually non-existent cultural scene forced a strong European dimension within the curation of the Eleusis2023 programme. The artistic director explains how an open call was launched gathering almost 1600 proposals from 47 countries, which is four times as many as any other city applying for the ECoC title has attracted¹⁷⁸. Of course, only 10% of the received proposals could be selected for implementation, yet, during 2023 Eleusis was a buzz with the creativity of artists and cultural professionals coming from all over Europe. Hence, the design of the artistic programme, thanks to solid communication and dissemination efforts, garnered important bottom-up participation. This process is particularly noteworthy in the case of Elefsina, given the high level of endorsement from public administration and the potential risks of control over the activities proposed.

Eleusis2023's delivery body was created as an 'anonymous society' (S.A.) by the municipality of Elefsina itself after approval by the relevant ministries of the central government. Eleusis2023 employed up to 33 people, selected through international open calls¹⁷⁹. The programme's funding structure further reflected its reliance on institutional support, with 80% of the budget provided by the Municipality of Elefsina, the Regional Unit of Attica, and the central government, supplemented only in a small part by the EU's Melina Mercouri Prize and private sponsorships. Further details on the specific budget allocations and expenditures are provided in the accompanying tables:

Table 11. ECoC funding sources and amounts

ECoC Eleusis 2023	Funding sources (in EUR million)
National Government	2.3
ECoC City	8.6
Region	8.6

¹⁷⁶ <https://2023eleusis.eu/en/thematikoi-axones-2/ergasia/>

¹⁷⁷ European Commission. (2022). *Elefsina - Third monitoring report: European Capitals of Culture 2023*. Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Unit D2. Retrieved from <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-12/ecoc2023-elefsina-third-monitoring-report.pdf>

¹⁷⁸ Marmarinos, M. (2023, July 6). Eleusis2023 and the mysteries of transition: An interview with Michail Marmarinos. EuropeNow. Retrieved from <https://www.europenowjournal.org/2023/07/06/eleusis2023-and-the-mysteries-of-transition-an-interview-with-michail-marmarinos/>

¹⁷⁹ Eleusis2021 Bidbook, p. 90.

ECoC Eleusis 2023	Funding sources (in EUR million)
EU Funds	0.8
Melina Mercouri Prize	1.5
Other cities (e.g. in the region)	0.6
In-kind support	0
Sponsorship	2.9
Donations	0
Private investments	0
Income generated by the ECoC	Figure not provided

Sources: Bid book.

Table 12. Main expenditures items

ECoC Eleusis 2023	Main expenditures (in EUR million)
Cultural programming	16.5
Cultural infrastructures	0
Communication and marketing	3.3
Administration/staff	3.8
Other	0.4

Sources: Bid book.

Although the budget line ‘infrastructure’ appears null, the ECoC had a very significant infrastructural impact on the city. The resources for the revitalisation of industrial infrastructure were gathered thanks to EU funds such as the EU Horizon-funded project ‘HeritAct’, for which Elefsina acted as a pilot location or were made possible by synergic investments by the municipality, which, as anticipated before, was greatly involved in endorsing the successful delivery of the ECoC.

Analysis of the ECoC immediate and longer-term impacts and legacy

Analysing the immediate and long-term impacts of Elefsina’s tenure as ECoC presents a significant challenge, as the title was handed over to the 2024 cities less than a year ago. Despite this, Elefsina’s strong long-term vision, embedding the ECoC within a 10-year municipal strategy and anchoring it in a bid book focused on post-industrial revitalisation, has already begun to show tangible results. These include signs of urban regeneration in infrastructures and public spaces and a significant effort on instilling a more robust cultural and creative scene.

Indeed, a central feature of Elefsina2023’s programme was a set of 11 mysteries called ‘[legacy projects](#)’, designed to create soft infrastructures that would slowly enrich the city’s cultural landscape and deepen community engagement beyond 2023. These projects encompassed the launch of some international festivals - such as the [ECO-Culture Festival](#) - which are intended to be reiterated long after 2023 to position Elefsina as a hub for sustainable development attracting global stakeholders.

Capacity-building efforts were also prominent in the legacy framework. For instance, ‘Mystery 7: In Situ – Free University’, in collaboration with the University of Patras, provided educational opportunities open to all citizens. It addressed gaps in local knowledge through two thematic areas: ‘Environment and Health’ and ‘Culture – Cultural Policy.’ This initiative aims to disseminate a body of knowledge to help residents make sense of and build upon the ECoC’s momentum in the future. Similarly, ‘Mystery 59: U(R)TOPIAS Academy of Choreography’ sought to close educational gaps in dance and choreography by creating professional development opportunities, laying the ground for a skilled artistic community that can thrive independently of the ECoC title.

Other initiatives sought to empower specific community subgroups, fostering cultural democracy and bottom-up stewardship of Elefsina’s cultural identity. For example, ‘Mystery 37: Voices of Elefsina’ led to the creation of a community radio station, while ‘Mystery 66: CultTerra’ gave life to a youth organisation that bridged the ECoC delivery body with Elefsina’s younger residents. CultTerra began as ‘Youth Labs’, a series of workshops and capacity-building programmes aimed at enhancing network management, community outreach, and project management skills among its young members. After two years of training, it developed into an independent association with its own board of directors and staff. Although it lacked a stable budget, CultTerra was granted access to a renovated space, the old railway station, which became a hub of cultural activism for the city’s youth.

Leveraging the momentum generated by Elefsina2023, CultTerra became a successful body that maximised the capillarity of the ECoC’s spillovers. Starting with extensive mapping of creative individuals of the territory, CultTerra identified over 150 people to co-create activities with, because ‘In our small community where everyone knows each other, the goal is to reconnect through artistic projects and collaborations’¹⁸⁰. CultTerra became also an advocacy hub by mapping communities whose needs were under-represented; examples include the community of skaters, for which CultTerra, after extensive requests, obtained a donation by the city to create the first skate park ‘Arkopolis’. This is now a landmark in Elefsina, where 28 cultural, social and sport events were organised during the ECoC. Other examples of often-overlooked communities include the Pakistani immigrant community, for which thematic dinners were organised, or the LGBT community, for which CultTerra organised the first pride event in town called ‘Elefsina no longer keeps secrets’. CultTerra reached more than 9000 people of the 18-30 years old audience segment with 60+ events between local artists’ exhibitions, guided tours, live music events and parties¹⁸¹. This shows the importance of creating more informal infrastructures between the official programme of the ECoC and its foundation, whose personnel was mostly from Athens, and the CultTerra’s community, more integrated in the tightly knit social fabric of Elefsina. This is now a landmark in Elefsina, where 28 cultural, social and sport events were organised during the ECoC¹⁸². Other examples of often-overlooked communities include the Pakistani immigrant community, for which thematic dinners were organised, or the LGBT community, for which CultTerra organised the first pride event in town called ‘Elefsina no longer keeps secrets’. CultTerra reached more than 9000 people of the 18-30 years old audience segment with 60+ events between local artists’ exhibitions, guided tours, live music events and parties¹⁸³. This shows the importance of creating more informal infrastructures between the official programme of the ECoC and its foundation, whose personnel was mostly from Athens, and the CultTerra’s community, more integrated in the tightly knit social fabric of Elefsina.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Information shared via consultation with stakeholders:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qGT7us_RtZnUEJhKsG2sUTLqrq824Yh3/view

¹⁸³ Ibid.

Finally, as a pilot city of Culture 21, a global framework for sustainable cultural development, Elefsina carried out a self-assessment before and after the ECoC year¹⁸⁴.

Figure 14. Elefsina's Self-Assessment as Culture 21 Pilot City



What emerges is that aspects such as 'Heritage, Diversity, and Creativity' and 'Culture and Education' demonstrated marked progress, given the investments in capacity-building and up-skilling, and thanks to the diversity and creativity of the solutions employed to re-signify the tangible cultural heritage of Elefsina such as '[Mystery 20: Performing Arts Initiator – Narrative Archaeology](#)'. What remained notably weak was the dimension of 'Culture and Environment.' The recent ecological disasters, including devastating fires and floods across Greece and particularly in the local area, have heightened awareness of the immense challenges ahead in addressing the environmental crisis. This underscores the recognition that cultural initiatives, while valuable, have limited impact unless embedded within a concrete, multi-sectoral framework for action.

Lessons learnt and good practices, including key challenges before, during and after the ECoC and implications for the next iteration of the ECoC action

This section examines the main challenges identified by interviewees in implementing the ECoC programme, alongside the successes that defined Elefsina's journey as a title-holding city. It highlights how a small town navigated the complexities of a huge programme while leveraging on engagement strategies to leave a lasting cultural legacy embedded in its social fabric.

As noted throughout this case study, Elefsina2023 was an ECoC heavily reliant on its municipality. Interviews revealed that the two-year postponement due to the Covid-19 pandemic extended the project timeline to seven years, forcing the delivery team to navigate the cyclical nature of public administration. Over this period, Elefsina saw three different mayors, and with each change, the ECoC delivery body had to reintroduce itself and realign with the new administration's priorities. Thus, interviewees expressed frustration with the lack of continuity, emphasising that municipalities bidding for the ECoC title should commit

¹⁸⁴ Christoforou, C. (2024). *Elefsina Pilot City: Final report*. United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) Committee on Culture. Available at: <http://www.agenda21culture.net/index.php/fr/>

in advance to a specific legacy plan, including financial provisions. Working under three successive mayors meant adapting to three distinct visions for the ECoC's future, which contributed to an unstable legacy plan by 2023, one year after the event. Interviewees admitted uncertainty about the future of the Elefsina2023 team and how its longevity would be ensured – whether through the establishment of a foundation or another model remained unclear.

Yet, the greatest challenge faced by Elefsina was undoubtedly the COVID-19 pandemic itself. At the joint request of the Ministry, the City of Elefsina, and the 2023 Elefsina team, and upon a proposal by the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU adopted a decision on 23 December 2020 to postpone Elefsina's ECoC year from 2021 to 2023. Rescheduling numerous events and realigning multiple stakeholders required significant sacrifices from the team. Interviewees described 'virtual meetings until 3 a.m.'¹⁸⁵ during the lockdown as part of the effort to adapt.

An interview with a senior professional from the audience development department revealed that this postponement caused audience dispersion and a loss of momentum in engagement efforts. For example, while 88% of residents in 2020 viewed Elefsina's ECoC designation as positive or very positive, this figure dropped to 77% by 2023¹⁸⁶. Physical distancing made it impossible to continue working directly in the field. However, the team responded quickly to the crisis, organising initiatives such as movie screenings from building courtyards and other 'art by distance' activities to maintain residents' connection to the ECoC programme. When pandemic restrictions finally eased and the ECoC activities were fully implemented, the public's enthusiasm was reignited. 'It was something amazing for the people', the interviewee added. 'After all that happened, people were so happy to be out and play'.¹⁸⁷

The postponement also impacted the internal organisation of the ECoC delivery body. New CEO, artistic director, and board were appointed, and the municipality eased legislative constraints around the delivery body. These changes, coupled with the newly defined operational boundaries, enabled the team to address the constraints of a global pandemic effectively.

The stakeholders interviewed from within the delivery body expressed pride in the extensive networks established throughout Elefsina's European Capital of Culture journey. 'We have finally put Elefsina on a mental European map'¹⁸⁸ the Head of Audience Development remarked, highlighting the city's integration into key cultural networks. These connections include active participation in the [Culture Next Network](#), the [UCLG](#) (United Cities and Local Governments) with the aforementioned involvement in the [Pilot Cities Project of Agenda 21 for Culture](#), as well as with Culture action Europe, for which Elefsina hosted the [Beyond the Obvious](#) annual international meeting in June 2023. Similarly, partnerships were forged with the International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts ([IETM](#)), culminating in Elefsina hosting the [2019 campus for performing art professionals](#), and with the [European Festivals Association](#), when the city welcomed the [International Atelier for Festival Managers](#) in June 2023. Elefsina's outreach extended also to the European Network for Street Arts and Contemporary Circus and the in SITU Platform for Art in Public Spaces, and many more international networks that allowed mobility and exchange of professionals. These collaborations embedded the small town into a dense, international web of cultural relationships, forming a legacy that will endure beyond the ECoC year. The impact of this

¹⁸⁵ Interview conducted by KEA on November 26th 2024

¹⁸⁶ Final Evaluation Report for Elefsina 2023, "Παραδοτέο 6: Τελική έκθεση αξιολόγησης της ELEUSIS 2023 για το 2023," Elefsina 2023 European Capital of Culture, p. 19

¹⁸⁷ Interview conducted by KEA on November 26th 2024

¹⁸⁸ Interview conducted by KEA on November 26th 2024

network-building effort is tangible: 'Now, people in Athens, and also abroad, know that Elefsina can do things, can produce. It is a brand now; it's something that gives us an opportunity to continue'¹⁸⁹ noted one stakeholder.

This success is also quantifiable: in 2023, there were 1,179 press publications referencing the ECoC, with an Advertising Value Equivalent (AVE) of €3,115,647.51, tripling Elefsina's visibility in the printed press compared to previous years. Overall, press publications about Eleusis 2023 increased by 151.92% compared to 2021, while the visibility and impact of these publications in print grew by an impressive 411.5%¹⁹⁰. Such figures underscore how a small city like Elefsina significantly enhanced its profile by successfully embedding itself in European cultural networks.

Also, in terms of presences, the resonance of Eleusis2023 expanded well above the municipal borders, while 29% of the audience were residents of the Municipality of Elefsina, 65% were residents of other municipalities of the Attica Region, 4% were residents of foreign countries and 2% were residents of other Greek Regions. The spillover was very positive for the city. The number of event visitors who stayed in the city of Elefsina during 2023 was 2,560 people, with 6,150 overnight stays in the city's hotels and short-term rentals, generating an income of 492,500 euros. Food and catering services, especially those on the city's waterfront, saw an increase of around 10% of their turnover in 2023, which was attributable to the visitors of the ECoC events, and which was estimated at around €1,2 million¹⁹¹. For a city which never attracted tourism before, let alone cultural tourism, these numbers represent a notable success.

Beyond the temporary spikes in tourism and hospitality sector revenues, citizen engagement and a sense of local 'ownership' of the ECoC were crucial impacts: 32% of the programme was dedicated to training and networking activities for artists, cultural professionals, and the general public, with an estimated 5,355 beneficiaries between 2017 and 2023¹⁹². These initiatives aimed to ensure the programme's long-term impact by aligning it with the needs of the local community through active listening and mapping. Stimulating these bottom-up processes is regarded by interviewees as one of Elefsina's greatest successes, laying the groundwork for a sustainable cultural legacy.

Finally, one of the most visible successes of Elefsina as an ECoC was the regeneration of its former industrial infrastructures, positioning the city as a pilot example for a growing trend in urban regeneration strategies. This transformation highlights how synergies between the ECoC title year, Horizon projects such as HeritACT, and various levels of government can lead to impactful outcomes. Thanks to the HeritACT Horizon EU Project both the disused municipal workers' canteen and the [old paint factory IRIS](#) became polyfunctional cultural centres, and the former soap industrial complex (also known as [Old Oil Mill Factory](#)) was restored to function as an open-air theatre venue. The [Old Railway Station](#) was given to CultTerra as youth community centre, while the [Eleourgiki](#) industrial complex was elevated to a sport centre. Also, the historic [Cine Eleusis](#) was renovated and reopened after 35 years of inactivity for the screenings organised during the ECoC, while other premises were inaugurated specifically in occasion of the title year, such as the [X-Bowling Art Centre](#), comprising 900 square meters on the waterfront, where most of the repurposed industrial buildings are located. The X-Bowling Art Centre became a symbol and a pivotal venue to host the main in-door events and together with the other infrastructural projects contributed to the regeneration of the waterside front of the city into a new cultural district. These

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Final Evaluation Report for Eleusis 2023, "Παραδοτέο 6: Τελική έκθεση αξιολόγησης της ELEUSIS 2023 για το 2023," Elefsina 2023 European Capital of Culture, p. 21

¹⁹¹ Ibid. P. 20

¹⁹² Ibid. P. 20

repurposed infrastructures exemplify the potential of industrial archaeology to meet contemporary cultural needs, setting a benchmark for similar initiatives across Europe. Beyond their functional value, these spaces symbolise Elefsina's ability to reinterpret its industrial past and reshape its identity through culture.

Conclusion

Elefsina's designation as the European Capital of Culture in 2023 is showing signs to be a transformative chapter in the city's history, it is quickly demonstrating the potential of culture-driven regeneration to address post-industrial challenges. Elefsina successfully leveraged the ECoC platform to reimagine its identity, transitioning from a symbol of environmental degradation to a nexus of international cultural relations. With over 130 major projects and 465 smaller events, Elefsina demonstrated the power of participatory approaches, integrating international expertise with local narratives to foster cultural democracy and empower underserved groups. Initiatives such as CultTerra and legacy projects like the ECO-Culture Festival underscored the importance of embedding long-term community engagement within cultural strategies.

Moreover, the city's efforts in repurposing industrial sites into vibrant cultural spaces not only enriched its urban landscape but also set a benchmark for sustainable urban regeneration practices. These achievements were complemented by capacity-building programmes that equipped residents and artists with skills to sustain the cultural momentum beyond the title year. However, challenges such as administrative turnover, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and limited progress on environmental sustainability highlight the complexities of implementing large-scale cultural programmes in smaller cities. These hurdles emphasise the need for robust legacy planning and multi-sectoral approaches to ensure enduring impacts. While the full impact of Elefsina's ECoC year will unfold in the years to come, its accomplishments already stand as a testament to the potential of culture to drive meaningful change where people may least expect it.

Case Study 3: Galway 2020

Context, background and key features of the ECoC

Key information on the city

Galway was awarded the title of European Capital of Culture 2020, together with Rijeka on 15 July 2016.¹⁹³ Galway is the fourth most populous city in the Republic of Ireland, located in the western province of Connacht. It had a population of approximately 75,529 inhabitants in 2015 when it began its bid, which has since grown to 85,910.¹⁹⁴ In 2015, 35% of the population was under 25, while nearly one in four inhabitants were non-Irish.¹⁹⁵ Moreover, 7.9% of the population was unemployed.¹⁹⁶

Often referred to as Ireland's 'cultural heart', the city provides an extensive cultural offer. The city hosts several major international events every year, such as the Galway International Arts Festival, which has been running for more than 45 years and attracts over 400,000 visitors annually¹⁹⁷. Other local festivals include the Galway Film Fleadh¹⁹⁸, and Galway Early Music Festival¹⁹⁹. Moreover, museums like the Galway City Museum showcase the city's culture, history, and archaeology. The city boasts of medieval heritage with numerous architectural landmarks, such as the Spanish Arch and Lynch's Castle. Galway County's stone forts form part of the Western Stone Forts group that has been proposed for inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Galway is one of seven designated UNESCO Cities of Film and was awarded the European Green Leaf²⁰⁰ and European Region of Gastronomy²⁰¹ titles in 2017 and 2018 respectively.

There are substantial Irish language speaking areas²⁰² in Galway County, and as a result, Irish language contributes to both the city and county's cultural depth as exemplified by venues like An Taibhdhearc, the national Irish language theatre. Street entertainment is also part of Galway's cultural offer, with streets such as Quay Street and Shop Street well-known for their performers, artists, and musicians. Traditional Irish music is also regularly performed in local pubs.

Creative industries in the Western Region of Ireland generate €534 million and make up 3.4% of employment in Galway²⁰³. According to its bid book, the city's audiovisual, television and film sector alone was worth over €72 million to the local economy and employed over

¹⁹³ The Audience Agency, (2021). Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture Evaluation Report. [Galway-2020-Monitoring-Evaluation-Report-December-2021.pdf \(galway2020.ie\)](#)

¹⁹⁴ Central Statistics Office, (2023). Census of Population 2022 – Summary Results. <https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2023pressreleases/pressstatementcensusofpopulation2022-summaryresultsgalway/>

¹⁹⁵ Galway 2020, (2016). Making Waves – Galway Application for European Capital of Culture 2020, Bid Book Two. [G2020-Bid-web.pdf \(galway2020.ie\)](#).

¹⁹⁶ WDC Insights, (2017). Galway City's Labour Market – Census 2016. <https://westerndevelopment.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/WDC-Insights-Galway-Citys-Labour-Market-Census-2016-Oct-17.pdf>

¹⁹⁷ Galway International Arts Festival, (2024). Mission. [Mission | Galway International Arts Festival \(giaf.ie\)](#)

¹⁹⁸ An international film festival founded in 1989.

¹⁹⁹ A boutique festival, founded in 1996, of Medieval, Baroque and Renaissance era music and performances.

²⁰⁰ Awarded by the European Commission to recognise and reward green transition action in small cities: [European Green Capital Award - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

²⁰¹ Awarded by the International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts and Tourism (with support of International and European institutions) for contributions to better quality of life through food: [EUROPEAN REGIONS OF GASTRONOMY \(europeanregionofgastronomy.org\)](#)

²⁰² Also called *Gaeltacht*.

²⁰³ White, Pauline, (2010). Creative industries in a rural region: *Creative West: The creative sector in the Western Region of Ireland*. [Creative-Industries-in-a-Rural-Region Creative-Industries-Journal White_2010.pdf \(nasaa-arts.org\)](#).

600 people.²⁰⁴ In 2017, enterprises in the arts, entertainment and recreation, made up 3.6% of the total enterprises in Galway²⁰⁵, and whilst 34,165 people aged 15 and over were employed in the arts, entertainment and recreation industries in 2016, this rose to 38,169 in 2022²⁰⁶

Despite this cultural richness, Galway County faced significant social challenges in the years leading up to and since its ECoC bid. This includes rural depopulation, inadequate infrastructure, economic decline, and economic disparities particularly between rural and urban areas. The Galway 2020 ECoC programme aspired to respond to these issues and a Cultural Strategy for 2016-2025²⁰⁷ was developed as part of the city's bid. The Strategy contains seven strategic aims which focus on the role of culture in fostering social inclusion, protecting heritage, and driving economic growth.

The Strategy and Galway 2020 programme aimed to build complementarities with the ECoC programme feeding into the Strategy's objectives²⁰⁸. This three-phase strategy was key to the success of Galway's ECoC bid.

Key features of the ECoC, in terms of programming, management, funding, processes

Galway 2020 was scheduled to run from February 2020 to February 2021 under the banner of 'Making Waves'. However, after a six-month interruption due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the European Commission made the decision to extend the ECoC year until April 2021. Structured around three key themes of 'Migration, Landscape and Language', the project delivered 1,285 events and activities connecting local, regional and European communities.²⁰⁹ Notable in-person events included theatrical productions such as Druid Gregory and Óró, the MONUMENT and Aerial/Sparks exhibitions, and the Hope it Rains | Soineann nó Doineann workshops. Several international artistic collaborations and performances also allowed for engagement with the European dimension of ECoC. Nevertheless, the impacts of this dimension were perceived to be limited. This was mainly attributed to the pandemic and the subsequent inability of European citizens to visit Galway during the ECoC year. Whilst The Audience Agency's 2021 population survey did indicate a high correlation between in-person attendance at Galway 2020 and attachment to Europe, the significance of Galway's ECoC status in this finding was questioned, as the notion of European identity was found to be more affected by current events such as Brexit and the US elections.²¹⁰

Table 13. ECoC funding sources and amounts

ECoC Galway 2020	Funding sources (in EUR million)
National Government	14

²⁰⁴ Galway 2020, (2016). Making Waves – Galway Application for European Capital of Culture 2020, Bid Book Two. [G2020-Bid-web.pdf \(galway2020.ie\)](#).

²⁰⁵ WDC Insights, (2017). Profile of enterprise in Galway 2017. [Profile-of-Enterprise-in-Galway-2017.pdf](#)

²⁰⁶ Central Statistic Office, Ireland (2022). [Employment, Occupation, Industry and Commuting Census of Population 2022 - Summary Results - Central Statistics Office](#)

²⁰⁷ The Strategy, 'Everybody Matters: A cultural sustainability strategy framework for Galway 20216-2025' can be found here: https://www.galwaycity.ie/uploads/downloads/publications/corporate_services/Galway_City_cultural_strategy.pdf

²⁰⁸ Galway 2020, (2016). Making Waves – Galway Application for European Capital of Culture 2020, Bid Book Two. [G2020-Bid-web.pdf \(galway2020.ie\)](#).

²⁰⁹ The Audience Agency, (2021). Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture Evaluation Report. [Galway-2020-Monitoring-Evaluation-Report-December-2021.pdf \(galway2020.ie\)](#)

²¹⁰ The Audience Agency, (2021). Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture Evaluation Report. [Galway-2020-Monitoring-Evaluation-Report-December-2021.pdf \(galway2020.ie\)](#)

ECoC Galway 2020	Funding sources (in EUR million)
ECoC City Council	3.7
County Council	2.9
EU Funds (Melina Mercouri prize)	1.5
Private investments	1.1
Other	0.5

Sources: Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture Evaluation Report & Financial Monitoring Report

Table 14. Main expenditure fields

ECoC Galway 2020	Main expenditures (in EUR million)
Cultural programming	15
Programme management	0.8
Promotion and marketing	1.9
Staff support costs	3.4
Office and finance costs	1.3
Professional services	0.4

Sources: Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture Evaluation Report & Financial Monitoring Report

The Galway ECoC project was managed by Galway Cultural Development and Activity Company CLG, then known as Galway 2020 and presently trading as the Galway Culture Company. This company was set up during the bid process with the objective to carry out the organisation, promotion and sustainable development of cultural activities that benefit Galway and the wider community. Its board consisted of volunteers with a range of skills and experience, including ex officio members such as the CEOs and Lord Mayor/Chair of Galway City and County Councils, and a nominee of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. Total employee numbers were highest in 2019, with 26 people involved in the management of Galway 2020. Following Covid-19, over half of the staff were made redundant and this number was further reduced after the ECoC year.

During the first bid development phase, 1,200 attendees from a range of local, national and international artists, creatives, organisations and residents were engaged through over 300 meetings, discussions and presentations, as well as artform, project and EU-specific workshops. The final bid submission reflected this broad participatory process and involved 320 project partners, 58 cultural organisations, 35 artists, 10 local authorities and 8 funding agencies.

Despite the active engagement of the European Commission throughout the terms of support, one interviewee mentioned that the EC could better manage communication and provide support to develop the different skills needed throughout the phases of the selection process to strengthen the success of future ECoCs.

Following designation, Galway developed relations at various scales by hosting international delegations from dozens of embassies, institutions, universities, cultural organisations and agencies to discuss the city's ECoC model and exchange ideas. In addition, Galway, Aarhus and Valletta launched the Wave Makers volunteer programme,

which allowed for exchange visits to the closing ceremonies of ECoCs Plovdiv, Aarhus and Matera.

Analysis of the ECoC immediate and longer-term impacts and legacy

Galway 2020 aimed to develop Galway's cultural capacity through cultural programmes, skills development and governance of the cultural sector, co-operation with other sectors and the improvement of cultural infrastructure. The activities carried out throughout the programme to achieve these goals had longer term impacts on the community. Various cultural assets provide a legacy to the ECoC programme including the artistic works from 'Aerial Sparks and Symphonic Waves', a new publication of Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill poems in translation and the Monument exhibition at the Galway City Museum which now includes eight artistic commissions as part of the permanent collection. The legacy of ECoC Galway is not only embodied in the various art and cultural projects but also through digital assets including websites documenting the projects, photo archives and films showed throughout the Galway 2020 as well as video seminars such as the virtual production carried out by the Northern Peripheries' Galway Stories project, now rebranded as Ardán which continue to foster talent in the audio-visual industry²¹¹ and continue to offer hybrid digital and physical experiences.

Although the legacy framework is still underway, the Galway Culture Company continues to address key action and policy frameworks alongside the Galway City Council such as the New Directions – Galway City Council's Strategic Plan for the Arts 2021 – 2026²¹², the Galway County Council's Arts Plan 2020-2024²¹³ and the Everybody Matters a Cultural Sustainability Strategy Framework for Galway 2016-2025²¹⁴ which continue to guide Galway City Council's investment in the arts and culture post Galway 2020. Additionally, a Performance Delivery Agreement between the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media and the Galway Culture Company ensures the Legacy Programme of the ECoC 2020 in Galway²¹⁵. The agreement outlined the governance of the Galway Culture Company composed of key stakeholders from Galway and the wider region local authority, cultural organisations, and the enterprise and education sector. Within this agreement, the Department stated they would provide up to 1 million euros in grant funding to Galway Culture Company for the delivery of the Legacy Framework. Additionally, an interviewee highlighted that the legacy programme shows a high degree of coherence in the sustainability programme of Galway as the city actively applies to Creative Europe funds which perhaps would not have been possible if Galway had not hosted ECoC 2020. At a national level, ECoC encourages cities to develop a more consistent approach to cultural funding and raises political awareness about the potential impacts of culture.

It is important to note, due to the COVID-19 pandemic there were no large-scale public events, very few visitors to Galway and therefore little opportunity to assess the impact on the local economy. Although the international reach of the programme was limited due to the reduction of international tourism, Galway's profile as a cultural destination continued to increase as it featured in a new list by Lonely Planet as one of the 20 most incredible places to visit in Ireland.

²¹¹ [Ardán](#), previously the Galway Film Centre

²¹² Galway City Council, (2022). New Directions – Strategic Plan for the Arts. [GCC_new-directions_Arts-Plan.pdf](#)

²¹³ Galway City Council, (2022). Galway County Council Arts Plan 2020-2024. [Galway-County-Arts-Plan-2020-2024.pdf](#)

²¹⁴ Galway City Council, (2021). Everybody Matters A Cultural Sustainability Strategy Framework for Galway 2016 – 2025. [Layout 1](#)

²¹⁵ Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, (2023). Performance Delivery Agreement. [Signed-PDA-Galway-Culture-Company-Legacy.pdf](#)

Despite the lack of international data, at a national and local level the ECoC programme brought fulfilment. The population survey carried out in 2021, showed that there were high levels of pride that the European Capital of Culture was held in Galway with 83% of nationals stating that they ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ with the statement ‘I am proud that the European Capital of Culture was held in Galway’²¹⁶. Findings from the 2021 National Arts Engagement Survey²¹⁷ showed that Galway residents valued arts at a slightly higher level compared to the national average. Within Galway itself the strength of feeling that ‘the arts make for a richer and more meaningful life’ increased by 6% between 2019 and 2021 and the Galway residents that agreed that ‘the arts locally help give my county or region a distinctive identity’ increased by 9% since 2019.

Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals who were culturally engaged in Galway expressed positive opinions towards the continuation of the re-worked programme of the cultural sector with 74% respondents who ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that ‘the continuation [of the programme] has a role to play in the economic and social recovery of Galway through the Covid-19 pandemic’²¹⁸. As the Galway 2020 programmes moved to a primarily digital delivery, visits to ‘digital event’ pages increased with the filmed version of *Savage Beauty* attracting 43,396 visits to the site compared to the 3,832 tickets booked by audiences who planned to see it in person²¹⁹. These results showcase the perseverance of the programme and staff in light of the pandemic.

Lessons learnt and good practices, including key challenges before, during and after the ECoC and implications for the next iteration of the ECoC action

The key challenges faced throughout the implementation of Galway 2020 include:

- **The COVID-19 pandemic:** The pandemic forced the programme to re-scope the work in response to restrictions whilst making efforts to continue the delivery of the Galway 2020 activities and plans laid out in the application phase.
- **Challenges in communication:** Cultural Partners were disappointed at the level of funding given to them and the lack of communication from the central team²²⁰. Many felt uninformed about the progress of Galway 2020 and their role within it, especially during 2017 and 2018, when changes in leadership personnel led to a loss of the early excitement a delay in implementation. Other local partnerships, including business and tourism organisations were also affected.
- **Infrastructure:** Many felt that infrastructure in different guises was missed within Galway 2020²²¹. The need for combined spaces which could be used in different ways such as artists’ workshops, rehearsal spaces or media studios were mentioned as a needed improvement.

Despite the challenges faced throughout the programme several positive outcomes and learning opportunities arose. The Covid-19 pandemic enforced collaboration with other sectors to build skills in digital collaboration. In fact, Galway 2020’s response to the pandemic was seen as positive by the community and the cultural sector with 77% stating that they ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that ‘the continuation demonstrates the resilience of our cultural organisations and communities’²²². This showcases the importance and

²¹⁶ The Audience Agency, (2021). Population Survey 2021.

²¹⁷ Arts Council, (2023). Arts Insight 2023: The National Arts Engagement Survey. [B&A](#)

²¹⁸ The Audience Agency, (2021). Cultural Engagers Survey.

²¹⁹ The Audience Agency, (2021). Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture Evaluation Report. [Galway-2020-Monitoring-Evaluation-Report-December-2021.pdf \(galway2020.ie\)](#)

²²⁰ The Audience Agency, (2021). Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture Evaluation Report. [Galway-2020-Monitoring-Evaluation-Report-December-2021.pdf \(galway2020.ie\)](#)

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² The Audience Agency, (2020). Cultural Engagers Survey

perseverance of Galway 2020 in fostering Galway as a cultural hub, shining a light on the different communities, arts and culture found in Galway and the surrounding landscape, despite the disruptions of Covid-19. After addressing necessary changes, Galway 2020 established successful projects which incorporated the impacts of the pandemic as showcased by Galway Moves²²³ which explored questions such as 'How can we connect in times of social distancing?' through choreography and dance, overcoming initial challenges and adapting projects to not only overcome but also incorporate the impacts of a global pandemic.

Covid-19 further accounted for the re-start of the programme in the summer of 2020 with a focus on Galway 2020 collaboration to develop and support the delivery of the Cultural Partner's projects, reinvigorating the sense of belief and ownership by the organisations towards a greater cultural capacity.

Following the end of Galway 2020, volunteers, also known as Wave Makers, stated that their expectations were largely met and that they were able to help in the success of the programme whilst also learning about their connection to Europe with 97% agreeing that 'I felt I was able to do something for the Galway community' and 85% agreeing that 'I learnt more about Europe and Galway's European cultural connections'²²⁴. Many volunteers pledged to continuing to volunteer either as a Wave Maker or within a cultural or community organisation, showcasing the community and cultural impact of the programme on not only attendees but also the staff. Today, the Wave Make programme²²⁵ is still active in assisting cultural projects and organisations in Galway as well as facilitating collaborative projects and volunteer exchanges with other capitals of culture to maintain a strong European network.

The Galway City Development Plan 2023 – 2029²²⁶ aimed to address the importance of infrastructure as the Council established a partnership with the Local Community and Economic Plan (LECP) to support and facilitate key infrastructure and actions that encourages the expansion of the city's culture, arts and creative industries to ensure that it contributes to social inclusion, prosperity and quality of life to meet the growing needs of the Galway.

Looking ahead, Galway provides a successful example of the implementation of cultural activity in urban and rural settings which can be shared with future ECoCs as it carried out activities in both the city and county in efforts to involve the wider region. It provided a connection between urban and rural communities through the digital online initiatives and through programmes such as Small Towns Big Ideas, designed to celebrate the diversity of Galway in both urban and rural settings. is no longer active, but all materials are available in the Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture archives²²⁷.

Conclusion

Despite the challenges faced by the COVID-19 pandemic which shifted Galway 2020 primarily online, the programme was successful in addressing its cultural programmes under the key themes, 'Migration, Landscape and Language' whilst incorporating the unique

²²³ Galway Moves (2021). Galway Dance Project and Dansnest. [Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture Galway Moves - Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture](#)

²²⁴ The Audience Agency, (2021). Wave Makers Final Survey

²²⁵ [Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture Volunteering - Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture](#)

²²⁶ Galway City Council, (2022). Draft Galway City Development Plan 2023 – 2029 Chapter 7: Community and Culture. [Chapter 7: Community and Culture | Galway City Council Online Consultation Portal](#) and [Local Economic and Community Plan | Galway City Council](#)

²²⁷ [Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture Small Towns Big Ideas - Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture](#)

aspects of the rural areas and the cultural heritage of Galway. Despite the inability to analyse the economic boost of the ECoC programme due to limited national and international travel, it is clear that individuals and staff were satisfied with the programme with 52% extremely satisfied (score of 10) with 94% rating it 7-10 for the overall experience of Galway 2020 by audiences and participants²²⁸. The legacy of Galway lives on through the archives and tangible and intangible projects of the programme, reminding the community of the importance of culture. Additionally, the Galway Culture Company continues to play a vital role in applying the lessons learned throughout the programme by advising the Galway City Council on action and policy frameworks to expand the work of ECoC through projects such as the New Directions – Galway City Council's Strategic Plan for the Arts 2021 – 2026 post the COVID-19 pandemic.

²²⁸ The Audience Agency, (2021). Audience and Participant Survey.

Case Study 4: Kaunas 2022

The following case study examines the experience of Kaunas, Lithuania, as the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) in 2022. It has been developed as part of the first interim evaluation of the European Capitals of Culture action (2020–2033), with the goal of gathering and analysing evidence to assess the implementation of the ECoC initiative and its longer-term impacts.

The study draws on extensive desk research and incorporates insights from key stakeholders directly involved in the Kaunas 2022 project, through semi-structured interviews. This evidence-based approach ensures a comprehensive evaluation of how the ECoC action influenced Kaunas' cultural landscape, engaged its communities, and garnered significant impacts at both the local and European levels.

Context, background and key features of the ECoC

Key information on the city

Kaunas, located in south-central Lithuania, is the second-largest city in the country and holds a significant place in the nation's historical and cultural narrative, particularly due to its role as the temporary capital during the interwar period. Indeed, the title 'Kaunas 2022: From Temporary to Contemporary' references this seemingly irretrievable glorious past, to which Kaunasians nostalgically tends to look back at²²⁹. Kaunas boasts not only stunning natural landscapes but also a rich built heritage, particularly its interesting interwar modernist architecture, which gained significant recognition through the European Capital of Culture programme, culminating in its inclusion as a European Heritage Label site and on the [UNESCO World Heritage list](#). Alongside this modernist legacy, the city offers a layered history dating back to the Middle Ages, featuring landmarks such as the 14th-century Kaunas Castle, the baroque Pažaislis Monastery, as well as 29 museums and 13 theatres. Contemporary cultural events, like the Kaunas Biennial, a contemporary art festival which involved more than 1400 artists across its 27-year history, further enrich the city's cultural landscape.

Yet, socio-economically, Kaunas is recovering from post-industrial issues. The Soviet occupation had placed a focus on scientific education and industry-related curricula rather than humanities and artistic studies and modern cultural forms were hampered. The regime re-oriented the city towards purely industrial and mercantile interests, stifling its cultural vibrance, thus the Kaunasian population tended to retreat into private spaces and disconnected from public life. Even today, over 30 years into democracy, there is a lingering reluctance to actively take part in decision-making processes; only 31% of young adults voted in the 2017 mayoral elections²³⁰, making it a challenging territory to engage in participatory, co-creative practices, especially those linked to culture.

Additionally, after the Soviet occupation, the city faced significant population decline. Between 1996 and 2020, the population shrank by 30% to 119.000 people²³¹. The exodus particularly affected²³² the youth, Kaunas struggles to retain its skilled graduates. This inability to keep young talent has led to an aging cultural workforce, limiting innovation and sectoral growth. This issue is recognised as a major threat in the [Kaunas City Cultural](#)

²²⁹ Kaunas 2022 (2023) Body Of Evidence p. 18

²³⁰ Kaunas 2022 (2016) Bidding Book. p. 7

²³¹ https://geodata.lt/kauno-miesto-savivaldybes-gyventoju-skaicius/#google_vignette
Lithuania Tribune. (n.d.). The shrinking city: Kaunas faces up to depopulation. Retrieved November 25, 2024, from: <https://lithuaniatribune.com/the-shrinking-city-kaunas-faces-up-to-depopulation/>

²³² Ibid. P. 6

[Strategy \(2017–2027\)](#), which was jointly developed by the municipality's Culture Department and the ECoC bidding team in 2016.

In this cultural strategy, a vision for Kaunas as a 'City of Inclusive Culture, Contemporary Art and Innovative Design' was defined. Consequentially, the whole ECoC programme was designed in synergy with the strategy, whose shared goals included developing the cultural sector's skills in audience development and trans-sectorial collaborations, creating a new appreciation around the modernist heritage, reactivating collective memory through intergenerational dialogue, and fostering a more decentralised and participatory cultural offer²³³. The ECoC programme's alignment with the city strategy was crucial for Kaunas to finally stop looking back nostalgically at the years of Kaunas as the 'temporary capital' of Lithuania and becoming instead a capital again: a forward-looking contemporary capital of culture. Kaunas urgently needed to cast a new light on its own cultural identity—first by re-establishing its internal imaginary and freeing itself from any sense of fictional or imagined insignificance – then, on a national and international level, to create new pathways for sustainable tourism, building on its revitalised cultural offer and presence.

Key features of the ECoC, in terms of programming, management, funding, processes

The ECoC delivery body, known as 'Kaunas 2022', was a temporary public institution specifically established to manage the ECoC programme by the former artistic director and project manager of the Kaunas Biennial and gradually evolved into a more structured organisation, eventually involving the city's major cultural leaders and municipal authorities. At its peak, the institution employed 93 staff members and mobilised 1,500 volunteers, with a total of 19,089 professionals contributing to the programme's²³⁴. Moreover, as emerged from the focus group, in Kaunas the external experts also played a crucial role in the early stages, particularly in assessing project feasibility and developing the strategic bid book. Although Kaunas 2022 operated independently of the municipality, the latter remained²³⁵. Upon the project's completion, the organisation was dissolved; however, a strong and informal network of cultural activists continues to remain active on the territory.

One of the unique features of Kaunas ECoC was its innovative storytelling, centred around the creation of the [Mythical Beast of Kaunas](#), a symbolic character that served as a recurring motif throughout the programme, which unfolded in three acts: **Confusion**, **Confluence**, and **Contract**. According to this creative narrative, the Kaunas Beast had been dormant for many years, representing the city's unresolved wounds, troubled history, and collective amnesia (**Confusion**). The ECoC aimed to reawaken the Beast, which could only be confronted through the collective effort of coming together as a collaborative, inclusive, and participatory community (**Confluence**). In the final act, Kaunasians symbolically 'made peace' with the Beast by embracing their shared history, cultural identity, and actively engaging in the city's cultural transformation (**Contract**). This reconciliation signified Kaunas looking ahead to a brighter, more unified future. The narrative culminated in grand performances and festivals, where the Beast became a peaceful and integral part of the city's identity. The programme was structured as follows:

²³³ Kaunas City Municipal Council (2017) Kaunas City Cultural Strategy Up To 2027. p. 5

²³⁴ Kaunas 2022 (2023) Investigation Report p.23

²³⁵ Ibid.

CONFUSION²³⁶

The first challenge addressed was Kaunas' confusing and conflicting identity, its nostalgic tendencies, and the city's detachment from its own heritage. Two key initiatives tackled this issue:

- **Modernism for the Future:** With 402 events, this strand reactivated an emotional connection to Kaunas' modernist heritage and elevated its cultural significance at a European level, driving research and community involvement.
- **Memory Office:** Through 123 events, this initiative pushed Kaunasians to reconnect with their diverse memories, especially those linked to European values, multiethnicity, and the city's Jewish heritage, including its Holocaust legacy.

CONFLUENCE²³⁷

The second major challenge was weak cross-sectoral cooperation and insufficient collaboration between culture, education, and business. To confront the Beast, Kaunas required new skills to engage and develop audiences in an accessible and cooperative creative sector. Key projects included:

- **Tempo Academy:** Involving 2,219 cultural professionals, this strand focused on capacity-building and nurturing skills to foster innovative cultural projects beyond 2022.
- **Emerging Kaunas:** With 328 events, this initiative involved the city's youth in shaping a future for Kaunas where they would choose to live rather than leave. Youth-driven activities led to 225 lasting products and initiatives.
- **Designing Happiness:** This strand strengthened cross-sectoral collaboration in the design field, fostering design thinking in urbanism and public spaces to make Kaunas a happier place to live and an international design hub.

CONTRACT²³⁸

In the final act, to 'live happily ever after' with the Mythical Beast, the city needed to promise to overcome its intolerance, the absence of community activism and civil engagement. The **We, the People** platform, supported by trained community facilitators, led 468 events and engaged 665 local partners, enhancing community spirit through collaborative neighbourhood and courtyard activities. This effort sought to form resilient, creative communities that would endure well beyond 2022.

The challenges outlined above were not just tackled internally but also through strong European partnerships. The **Cultural Partnership** strand, consisting of 666 events and 130 unique artistic projects, involved 337 international partners, including collaboration with other ECoCs such as Tartu 2024, Wrocław 2016, Esch 2022, and Novi Sad 2022, as well as Grenoble, European Green Capital in 2022. Finally, the total budget to deliver 'Kaunas 2022: From Temporary to Contemporary' amounted to €32,884,406—a modest amount compared to many other ECoCs. Detailed budget breakdowns and resource allocations can be found in the following figures.

The budget breakdown shows a good mix of public funds and own resources: sponsorships with other cultural organisations plus donations by private and own income represent

²³⁶ Kaunas 2022 (2022) Programme Guide

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

together more than half of the amount invested by the national Government. Additionally, while the delivery body itself has not directly received EU funding apart from the Melina Mercouri Prize, by the time of the last monitoring progress report in 2021, local cultural organisations had secured a total of €908,079 through other EU funding schemes, such as Creative Europe, for projects like [Magic Carpets](#).

Table 15. ECoC Funding Sources and Amounts

ECoC Kaunas 2022	Funding sources (in EUR million)
National Government	10
ECoC City	11.6
Region	3.6
EU Funds	-
Melina Mercouri Prize	1.5
Other cities (e.g. in the region)	0
In-kind support	0
Sponsorship	2.2
Other	0.9
Private investments	2.2
Income generated by the ECoC	0.8

Source: [Investigation Report Kaunas 2022](#)

Resource allocation shows that no budget was allocated to building new cultural infrastructures, the focus was instead on finding new ways of exploiting existing infrastructure through community-based activities:

Table 16. Main Expenditures Items

ECoC	Main expenditures (in EUR million)
Cultural programming	21.9
Cultural infrastructures	-
Communication and marketing	5.2
Administration/staff	1.5
Other (international relations, bid book preparation, project continuity)	3.4

Source: [Investigation Report Kaunas 2022](#)

Analysis of the ECoC immediate and longer-term impacts and legacy

One of the core pillars in Kaunas' bid book was to ensure the establishment of long-term cultural, social, and economic impacts. Together with the municipality, efforts have been made to extend cultural initiatives born from the ECoC beyond 2022. Although the Kaunas

2022 team has dispersed and the institution that managed the project has dissolved, the expertise accumulated during the process continues to circulate within the Lithuanian cultural sector. This has already led to a spillover effect in the form of new creative organisations and ongoing event initiatives from Kaunas 2022. In many smaller cities hosting the ECoC, the legacy structure involves transitioning the delivery body into an NGO to ensure the continuation of cultural services. However, as the CEO of Kaunas2022 explains in the Body of Evidence, Kaunas decided not to retain its delivery body because 'there were already over 60 active cultural organisations and festivals operating in Kaunas and Kaunas District, so there was no need to add another institution to the list'²³⁹. Instead, the continuation of many festivals and activities was handed over to Kaunas 2022's cultural partners. For example, the [CityTelling Festival](#) is now managed by the Kaunas City Museum, while [Fluxus Labs](#), the Courtyard Festival, and the Fluxus Festival were transferred to the Kaunas Artists' House. The [CulturEUkraine](#) centre has been entrusted to Kaunas Biennial, and the [Contemporary Neighbourhoods](#) programme has been distributed among Kaunas District's cultural centres. The innovative [Nemuno7](#), a dredger turned into a cultural garden, is now managed by the Kaunas District Tourism and Business Information Centre.

Indeed, Kaunas 2022's major contribution lay in its extensive capacity-building programme to the local cultural and creative sector, which fostered collaboration in place of competitiveness within the city's cultural landscape. An interview with one of Kaunas 2022 coordinators confirmed that by bringing various cultural operators closer together and strengthening the cultural network, the programme paved the way for existing organisations to take on the responsibility of maintaining the momentum built in 2022²⁴⁰. 'A shared vision, newly found common denominators, and continuity after the end of the European Capital of Culture title year – these are some of Kaunas 2022's major outcomes and gifts to all cultural organisations' summarises effectively the chairman of the Lithuanian Museum Association, in the Body of Evidence published by Kaunas 2022.²⁴¹

As one of the most recent ECoCs, evaluating the long-term impacts of Kaunas 2022 presents some challenges. Cultural shifts, particularly in terms of self-perceived identity and the city's cultural positioning, take time to unfold. **Economic impacts** are equally challenging to assess within such a short timeframe. Although positive economic trends were noted, such as a 7% increase in overall employment in Kaunas District between 2021 and 2022²⁴², it remains difficult to attribute these improvements directly to the ECoC, especially given the external influences of the post-pandemic recovery and wider economic aids and interventions.

At first glance, the **impressive cultural programme** of Kaunas 2022 included 192 exhibitions, 97 festivals, 187 concerts, and 155 performances, drawing in 2.4 million visitors. This effort resulted in 21 films, 48 publications, and 156 public art installations²⁴³, creating an immediate and tangible legacy. However, alongside these outputs, the overarching objectives were to enrich residents' sense of identity and collective memory, to shed a new light on Kaunas' unique interwar heritage, to reposition the city on the national and European cultural scene, to foster openness and participation in civil society, to increase civic engagement, and to enhance the competitiveness of the cultural sector.

²³⁹ Kaunas 2022 (2023) Body of Evidence p. 295

²⁴⁰ Interview conducted on September 24th 2024

²⁴¹ Ibid. P. 289

²⁴² Kaunas 2022 (2023) Investigation Report p. 131

²⁴³ Ibid. P. 18

This section will now touch each of the above-mentioned objectives to gather and analyse the main evidence around the impact that Kaunas 2022 had, and is still having with its legacy:

First, one of Kaunas' primary objectives—emerging from Vilnius' shadow and **reclaiming its place on the European cultural mental map**—was undeniably addressed. Over 170 international journalists and 60 diplomatic delegations visited the city, major European TV broadcasters such as BBC, ARTE and RAI talked about Kaunas, and 2,800 publications featured the city's ECoC year²⁴⁴. Internationally acclaimed artists like Marina Abramović, William Kentridge, Christian Boltanski, and Yoko Ono drew global attention to Kaunas. In fact, Lithuania received a surge of global media coverage that would have otherwise been costly to achieve, with an estimated 50 million people reached through various Kaunas 2022 media outlets between 2017 and 2022, and more than 1.1 million visits on the official website²⁴⁵. Within the city, such communication efforts were remarkably effective. Only 3.2% of survey respondents were unaware of Kaunas 2022, and 49% of respondents attended at least one event. However, only 2.3% attended seven or more events²⁴⁶, indicating broad, but not extremely deep, engagement, only a restricted group of enthusiasts participated consistently throughout the whole year. Despite this, participants rated the experience highly, with 46.6% evaluating it positively and 20.4% rating it very positively²⁴⁷.

In terms of residents' emotional relationship with their city, Kaunas 2022's survey data showed that 46% of ECoC event participants felt very closely connected to Kaunas, compared to just 28% of the wider population survey respondents. The gap is also evident when considering emotional connections to Europe—26.7% of event participants felt very closely connected to Europe, compared to only 11.3% of the general population²⁴⁸. This suggests that Kaunas 2022 might have played a role in strengthening connection with both local identity and European belonging. Although tourism was not the primary focus of Kaunas 2022, the city nevertheless achieved remarkable tourism results, particularly considering the lingering effects of the pandemic and the geopolitical tensions arising from Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. In 2022, Kaunas recorded 711,994 overnight stays, matching the pre-pandemic figure of 714,851 from 2019²⁴⁹. Kaunas 2022 has most certainly helped the district's tourism industry to rapidly recover from the pandemic aftermath.

Secondly, Kaunas' architectural heritage, particularly its interwar modernist buildings, also finally received renewed global attention as strongly hoped in the bid book. Thanks to the efforts of Kaunas 2022, the city's modernist heritage (already recognised as a European Heritage Label site prior to the ECoC year) was listed by UNESCO in the World Heritage list in 2023. The symbolic value of this heritage has also been reflected in the local housing market, with property prices in Kaunas Centras, the area with the highest concentration of modernist buildings, doubling during the title-holding year²⁵⁰. The rise in housing prices is an ambiguous datum that can benefit property owners while simultaneously making it harder especially for students and lower-income inhabitants to afford housing. But most importantly, Kaunas 2022 reactivated residents' emotional attachment to their heritage,

²⁴⁴ Kaunas 2022. (2023, January 30). Culture lured tourists to Kaunas: European Capital of Culture title increased numbers of visitors and sparked media attention. <https://kaunas2022.eu/en/2023/01/30/culture-lured-tourists-to-kaunas-european-capital-of-culture-title-increased-numbers-of-visitors-and-sparked-media-attention/>

²⁴⁵ Kaunas 2022 (2023) Investigating Report p. 24

²⁴⁶ Ibid. P. 51

²⁴⁷ Ibid. P. 56

²⁴⁸ Ibid. P. 100-101

²⁴⁹ Ibid. P. 102

²⁵⁰ Ibid. P. 117

which was not often cherished and loved as it does not fit canonical standards of European historical beauty. Modernism for Future had 88.842 visitors and activated more than 500 modernist buildings, previously unnoticed, undervalued and underused, by hosting exhibitions, performances and parties. Examples include the former Kaunas Central Post Office, which served as a cultural venue hosting the international exhibition 'Modernism for the Future 360/365,' and the tour series with contemporary dance performances, 'EKSKURSAS,' which artistically illuminated spaces such as the LSMU Hospital Kaunas Clinics, the premises of the 'Pažanga' company, the house of Jurgis and Aleksandra Iljinai, and many others.²⁵¹

Modernism for the Future changed the way Kaunasians view and promote their city, making them the first advocates of their heritage. The overall city's symbolic power has been strengthened by rethinking its history in the light of today's values.

Additionally, the cultural vibrancy of Kaunas significantly increased during 2022, with notable increases in both the quantity and the international reach of cultural events. Participation soared, with institutions like the M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art seeing visitor numbers rise from 37,000 in 2017 to 104,000 in 2022²⁵². An executive from the Kaunas Artists House proudly noted in an interview that, today, tickets for new cultural events sell out remarkably fast, whereas before 2022, it was very difficult to attract audience around cultural events, even with extensive communication efforts. The interviewee identified this new 'thirst for culture' as the most significant change, attributing it to the successful shift in cultural consumption patterns introduced by the ECoC²⁵³. In parallel, many initiatives from 2022 remain active, with a virtual [legacy map](#) showcasing the various cultural traces left behind by the ECoC: 14 events/festivals, 17 sculptures, 19 installations, 32 street art pieces, 11 community spaces, and 6 exhibitions. Ongoing projects still being carried on by Kaunas 2022 partners include the [Kaunas Piano Fest](#), [Japanese Days in Kaunas](#), the [Kaunas Literature Week](#). Furthermore, the youth gathered by Emerging Kaunas is still taking care of continuing the [Audra Festival](#). Also, the Performing Arts festival [ConTempo](#) will keep on bringing music and performances to Kaunas's neighbourhoods as well as the beloved Fluxus Festival. The [International Day of Happiness](#), of which Kaunas is now official ambassador, will keep being celebrated and in Kaunas District, the community project Contemporary Neighbourhoods will continue to take place. Many other initiatives are remaining active, and they are all gathered on [Kaunas Cultural Calendar](#), which is also an output of Kaunas 2022 and keeps communicating the now integrated and nuanced cultural scene of Kaunas.

Moreover, **capacity-building and talent development** were crucial to sustain the long-term impact of Kaunas 2022's efforts and investments. Kaunas, which faced challenges in retaining its skilled graduates and deals with an aging cultural sector, significantly benefited from the Tempo Academy's training programmes. These programmes, reaching over 2,219 professionals, enhanced skills in audience development, community engagement, and cross-sector collaboration. Beyond these newly acquired competencies, the soft infrastructure created during the programme continues to foster networking through events like the Culture Breakfast and the [Kaunas Culture Fair](#). As the director of Kaunas Biennial highlights in the Body of Evidence: 'The legacy of 2022 is invisible but strongly felt within the community of cultural organizations, which are increasingly opening their doors to diverse audiences and uniting more than ever'²⁵⁴.

²⁵¹ Kaunas 2022. (2022). Kaunas – European Capital of Culture 2022: Programme Guide p.40

²⁵² Ibid. P. 146

²⁵³ Interview conducted by KEA on September 24th 2024

²⁵⁴ Kaunas 2022 (2023) Body of Evidence. p. 296

Another key point to address for Kaunas 2022 was the diffused social isolation of its residents and lack of civic engagement. 2022 brought to the cultural sector methods of working with local communities and creative practices of place-making that had hardly been used in Lithuania before. The surprising number of responses to open calls for community initiatives revealed latent social capital that simply needed a platform for expression²⁵⁵. The engagement of over 1,500 volunteers, including 107 trained team leaders, further boosted civic involvement and surprised the organisers²⁵⁶. The ‘Culturists’, as the volunteers were called, to this day remain active on the territory through a self-sustained association, continuing to support cultural events and maintain the programme’s legacy.

Another legacy of Kaunas 2022 was its own experience in the form of a wealth of resources and knowledge, including several [publications](#) such as a detailed Body of Evidence and methodological books on youth empowerment, community engagement, audience development, and volunteering. Additionally, the active monitoring tools put in place will continue to provide valuable insights into the city’s cultural landscape. These resources serve as crucial tools for knowledge-sharing, containing best practices and lessons learned across various areas, and will undoubtedly be of great benefit to future title-holding cities and delivery bodies.

Lessons learnt and good practices, including key challenges before, during and after the ECoC and implications for the next iteration of the ECoC action.

This section will highlight the best practices that contributed to the success of Kaunas 2022, alongside the significant challenges that hindered the initiative.

One unique and successful aspect of Kaunas 2022 that should be replicated in future ECoC was its engaging **storytelling approach**. As mentioned earlier, the team crafted ex novo a contemporary urban legend—the Mythical Beast of Kaunas—that created a unifying narrative throughout the whole year. This powerful metaphor highlighted the city’s challenges through ‘Confusion’, called for collaboration through ‘Confluence’, and set long-term community goals with the ‘Contract’. This creative, narrative-driven approach engaged not only children but also adults, helping them make sense of the vast and layered project. The myth lives on in Kaunas through a fairy tales’ book for children, a board game, films, and visual representations across the city, leaving an emotional legacy.

Another noteworthy practice, that could be more widely shared, was Kaunas 2022’s decision to share the title with the [broader Kaunas District](#). Tightly integrating the entire district into the ECoC programme ensured that cultural initiatives were decentralised and accessible, a core pillar of Kaunas 2022’s bid. Fifteen local municipalities within the district were actively involved, especially through the ‘Contemporary Neighbourhoods’ project. On the programme guide, the Deputy Head of the Department of Culture for Kaunas District, remarked: ‘It is precisely in the Kaunas District where the changes brought by the European Capital of Culture are most clearly felt’.

Kaunas 2022 also implemented several practices in community engagement that can serve as valuable inspiration for future European Capitals of Culture. The ‘We, the People’ programme, particularly through its subprogrammes ‘Fluxus Labs!’ and ‘Contemporary Neighbourhoods’, exemplified how to foster local ownership of cultural initiatives. The key approach was empowering residents to become co-creators, rather than passive participants, in cultural activities. One of the curators of these programmes admitted in the interview that she was very glad that Kaunas ‘invested in the people, not just in the artworks’

²⁵⁵ Kaunas 2022. (2022). Kaunas 2022: Community Programme Methodology

²⁵⁶ Kaunas 2022. (2022). Kaunas 2022: Volunteering Programme Methodology

because ‘people live after the project [...] and it is nice to now see how the communities live without the project [...] we have a different attitude towards community events [...] before it was old ladies, now you’re not shy to admit you’re going to a community meeting’²⁵⁷. This bottom-up model encouraged communities to take the lead in implementing their own ideas, which not only motivated active participation but also strengthened the sense of ownership and pride. To succeed, the project trained and distributed community facilitators, who supported and mentored local initiatives, ensuring long-term sustainability. This methodology created resilient, creative communities, with many cultural projects continuing beyond the ECoC year, reflecting a legacy of empowerment and local involvement.

The detailed methodologies behind community engagement, youth involvement, and volunteer engagement were **meticulously documented** in publications that serve as invaluable resources for future ECoC cities. These publications, including the Body of Evidence and the investing reports, stand as exemplary research outputs. The monitoring tools set in place and the rigorous methodologies adopted in these reports must be recognised as one of Kaunas 2022 best practices that can be adopted again. However, what is missing is an ongoing observation of the CCIs size and contribution to local economy. Pre- and post-2022 data would offer valuable insights for the sake of evaluation procedures. Yet, the specific measurement metrics remain at the discretion of each ECoC. This highlights the need for standardised monitoring practices at the project level to harmonize data across European Capitals of Culture.

Additionally, a notable European dimension was demonstrated as soon as February 2022, when Russia’s military invasion of Ukraine spurred proactive action from the delivery team. In response to the war, Kaunas 2022 swiftly adapted the programme to secure funding for activities that celebrated and supported Ukrainian culture and refugees. An interviewee who served as a curator of Cultural Partnerships stated: ‘The war in Ukraine changed our plans, we quickly included projects reflecting the war situation, we wanted to involve as many Ukrainian artists as possible, to give them the opportunity to work in our country, to include them in open calls, etc.’²⁵⁸. By March 2022, the [CulturUkraine](#) centre had already opened in the Kaunas Post Office. Beyond providing shelter, the centre offered co-working spaces for Ukrainian creatives and artists, helping them find clients and integrate into the city’s cultural sector. The centre also hosted seven major - although unforeseen - events attracting 5,400 people. Moreover, the triennial of Ukrainian contemporary art, which could no longer take place in Ukraine, was hosted in Kaunas by the ECoC. These efforts not only showcased Kaunas 2022’s ability to **quickly adapt** but also reinforced its commitment to the European community, embodying solidarity and support for its neighbours in need. The war as well as the pandemic were surely major unforeseen obstacles, but the team’s agility came from thorough planning. The six-year period leading up to the ECoC year—two years of strategy development, four years of preparation, and one year of execution—allowed for agility and flexibility in responding to such unpredictable circumstances.

Yet, Kaunas 2022 had to overcome significant scepticism long before its official launch. Indeed, Lithuania’s first ECoC, Vilnius 2009, was largely undermined by the 2008 financial crisis. The project faced massive financial cuts up to 40% of the overall budget²⁵⁹ causing a domino effect of delayed events and cancellations, creating a widespread disillusion that Kaunas 2022 was doomed to follow the same path. This lingering cynicism, captured by the diffused motto that ‘Vilnius Didn’t Succeed, Neither Will You’²⁶⁰, created a strong

²⁵⁷ Interview conducted by KEA on 24th September 2024

²⁵⁸ Interview conducted by KEA on 8th October 2024

²⁵⁹ McCoshan, A., Rampton, J., Mozuraityte, N., & McAteer, N. (2010). Ex-post evaluation of 2009 European Capitals of Culture: Final report to DG Education and Culture of the European Commission. ECOTEC Research & Consulting.

²⁶⁰ Kaunas 2022 (2023) Body of Evidence. p. 21

psychological burden for the Kaunas team, often lamented in the Body of Evidence. The pessimism worsened in 2017 when Kaunas lost the bid for the Lithuanian Capital of Culture title to Klaipėda²⁶¹. This defeat cast further doubts on Kaunas' ability to manage a project as ambitious as the European Capital of Culture, forcing the team to work even harder to prove its critics wrong. Ironically, this loss served as a critical learning experience, strengthening the team's willingness to succeed on the European stage.

One lingering challenge, however, was that such scepticism was mostly diffused among public authorities. Due to the lack of strong support from Kaunas municipality, the ECoC operated with one of the smallest budgets for a title-holding city since 2013, forcing the team to highly engage the local business community to raise additional funds. Despite the challenges, they managed to secure €2,242,262—nearly 7% of the overall budget—from the private sector, outperforming 12 previous ECoCs in percentage of private fundraising. Nevertheless, the small budget reflected the low political interest, its disenchantment and the lack of trust in the cultural sector. The failure to renovate a single piece of cultural infrastructure in time for the title year symbolised the municipality's disengagement²⁶². Interestingly, the absence of political pressure allowed Kaunas 2022 to operate more freely, without being tied to the political agendas of local or central Government. This independence enabled the team to execute their vision with creativity and flexibility. Perhaps, as some Kaunas 2022 team members suggested in the investigation report, the lack of political interference was one of the factors behind Kaunas 2022's success. An issue that remains open for debate is whether no attention is preferable to overbearing attention. On this point, one of Kaunas 2022 coordinators highlighted during the interview that, as a curator, they greatly valued the creative freedom that came with being free from municipal pressures, particularly when designing community programmes requiring a degree of unpredictability, randomness, and spontaneity. This flexibility would stand in contrast to the more rigid municipal structures, which demand every budget line to be meticulously accounted for. The key lesson learned is that public administration bodies and programme curators must share a common vision of culture in order to find a balance between disengagement and overbearing political control.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in terms of effectiveness, the spectrum and quality of Kaunas 2022's cultural output received a positive reception and engagement from the local community. The overall programme was also successfully integrated into the city's larger cultural strategy as the two were co-designed and it is already showing clear signs of a living legacy. Therefore, although two years is a short timeframe to draw definite conclusions, there are positive signs of a long-term sustainability of the intervention. The initiative helped the residents re-think the identity of their own city and re-discover its neglected heritage by exercising the recollection of a fragmented memory. Simultaneously, it successfully boosted Kaunas' profile on a national and international scale thanks to the involvement of globally recognised artists and the recent UNESCO recognitions. The ECoC also effectively strengthened the capacity of Kaunas' creative and cultural sector thanks to the Tempo Academy and its subprogrammes, most notably bringing together previously isolated stakeholders into shared soft infrastructures which are expected to benefit the city's cultural fabric in the long run.

Finally, while the project faced scepticism stemming from Vilnius' ECoC failure and limited municipal support, Kaunas 2022's ability to generate private-sector funding and creating sense of ownership from the bottom were key to its success. These elements showcase the

²⁶¹ Ibid. P. 25

²⁶² Kaunas 2022 (2023) Investigation Report. p.179

potential of the ECoC initiative to stimulate urban and cultural revitalization, even under constrained political or social circumstances. Kaunas' journey offers valuable lessons for future ECoCs emphasising how identifying clear and idiosyncratic needs of the territory, creating a shared vision and actively co-creating with an engaged community are essential ingredients for project-making with lasting impact.

Case Study 5: Leeuwarden 2018

This short case study is focused on the experience of Leeuwarden in the Netherlands which was the European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) in 2018. It has been developed as part of the first interim evaluation of the European Capitals of Culture action (2020–2033), with the goal of gathering and analysing evidence to assess the implementation of the ECoC initiative and its longer-term impacts.

The study draws on desk research and incorporates insights from key stakeholders directly involved in the Leeuwarden ECoC.

Context, background and key features of the ECoC

Located in the northwest of the Netherlands, Leeuwarden has a population of 100,000 and is found in the region of Friesland, which has a total population of 646,000. The city of Leeuwarden and the Friesland region as a whole is relatively well served in terms of cultural infrastructure and activities, particularly considering its population size. The city has the impressive Fries Museum that opened in 2013 (with a construction cost of €18 million), the Prinsessehof National Museum of Ceramics (the only national museum in the region) as well as a series of smaller galleries, exhibition areas and performance areas. In terms of its cultural history, the artist M.C Escher was born in Leeuwarden, and his work formed an important part of the ECoC programme while the artist Lawrence Alma-Tadema was also born a short distance from the city.

‘Iepen Mienskip’ (Open Community) was the central motto of Leeuwarden ECoC 2018 cultural programme. In the bid-book, ‘Mienskip+’ was described as *‘[a] Frisian word for a process that is synonymous locally with an instinctive action-driven, bottom-up organised form of solidarity [... and] is derived from times when the struggle against water led people to join forces, sharing talents with the goal of building terms and dykes for the common good’*. The mienskip approach dominated the development work of the ECoC in Leeuwarden and the eventual content of the cultural programme. Out of the 800 projects found in the cultural programme, over 700 were in the ‘open programme’, which was the part that dealt with the bottom-up mienskip approach. This open programme and its associated 700 projects were mainly designed and delivered by local people with guidance and support from the ECoC Foundation (LF2018). The mienskip projects emerged from ideas and the efforts of local people and were often led by amateur cultural artists or simply people who wanted to ‘try’ culture out or promote a social message through the vehicle of culture. As such, the cultural programme focussed on exploring citizen participation and understanding how culture can unite people to bring together their talents to address common challenges and think about solutions for the challenges of the future.

The budget for the Leeuwarden ECoC is set out below.

Table 17. Leeuwarden ECoC budget – Bid book vs actual

Bid book versus realisation	€
Operating Expenditure	Actual
Programme expenditure	84.7m
Promotion and marketing	12.2m
Wages, overhead, administration	7.5m
Other reserve	0.1m

Bid book versus realisation	€
Operating Expenditure	Actual
Total	104.6m

Source: LF2018 Foundation

Analysis of the ECoC immediate and longer-term impacts and legacy

Unlike some ECoC, Leeuwarden undertook comparatively solid research to understand the impact of the ECoC on a range of issues²⁶³. The research looked at 32 key performance indicators (KPIs), which linked directly and indirectly to the work of the ECoC, encompassing a range of issues including culture, employment and youth. Useful results of this research that helped understand the influence of the ECoC included:

- 4 million visited the city in 2018 and there was a 5% increase in visitor numbers each year between 2015-2023,
- €79 million of income generated through visitors,
- 90% of visitors to the city stated they will return after 2018,
- 60% of children below the Dutch poverty line participated in ECoC events,
- 25% participation in ECoC activities from groups in society that traditionally have little affinity to culture,
- 64% of local population with low educational attainment visited/ took part in key cultural ECoC activities,
- Levels of low participation in culture (i.e. people who rarely visited a cultural venue/ activity) for people on low incomes fell from 63% to 54% after the ECoC year,
- 30% increase in visits to museums, theatres, concerts, art exhibitions and literature events between 2016-2023,
- 30, 000 volunteers involved in events, including a core group of 1,500 volunteers supporting regularly,
- 60% of citizens say the ECoC developed more pride, joy, social cohesion and optimism for the people by 2019.

Some of the above indicators usefully included a baseline (pre vs post ECoC) including participation in culture, visitor numbers and levels of general city pride/ social cohesion. The research is also helpful as it shows that the ECoC in Leeuwarden targeted lower income people and those with lower education attainment who traditionally do not consume culture. The results of this aspect show that cultural participation not only saw an increase but that numbers rose in harder to reach groups who traditionally do not benefit from the consumption of culture. An important driver in this highlighted by stakeholders was the bottom-up and grass-roots ethos of the ECoC highlighted earlier. This community-led approach gave local people more ownership, belonging and responsibility to the ECoC which in turn increased the likelihood of them participating in 'their' year.

Another aspect worth highlighting were the legacy arrangements linked to the Leeuwarden ECoC. An organisation called Arcadia²⁶⁴ was set up soon after their ECoC year in early 2019. Arcadia was and still is focussed on organising and implementing a 100-day cultural programme every three years post the ECoC (2022, 2025 and 2028) with each cultural programme having a budget of around €5-10 million (coming from public and private

²⁶³ See full report: <https://assets.plaece.nl/kuma-friesland/uploads/media/5c8a6c2d209c4/bijlage-slotmeting-lf2018-engels.pdf>

²⁶⁴ https://arcadia.frl/?gad_source=1&gclid=EAlaIqObChMI3pHgyvbcwMV05ODbX01IA0JEAAYASAAEgLLU_D_BwE

sources). For example, the 2022 cultural programme consisted of a mix of international and national cultural operators, and many had their origins in cultural activity that took place in their 2018 ECoC year. The 2022 edition took place across the province of Fryslân (where Leeuwarden is located) from May to August 2022 and was created by Dutch and international artists linked to theatre, dance, singing, photography, lectures, discussions, walks, visual arts, literature and poetry. The organisation's promotion material described the 2022 cultural activity to include *'a forest wandering through the streets, dramas on the cliffs of Fryslân, artworks in the park, dancers in abandoned hangars, and music on the mudflats. Sometimes grand and thrilling, sometimes small and intimate. Many of the events were free'*. Part of Arcadia's focus is on supporting grass roots development in culture, which again was a key area promoted in the original ECoC year with a strong foundation on assisting local people to be both the consumers and producers of cultural activity linked to their ECoC.

Lessons learnt and good practices, including key challenges before, during and after the ECoC and implications for the next iteration of the ECoC action

Key lessons from the Leeuwarden example include:

- Consider a bottom-up approach to the ECoC design and delivery, ensuring that the local population both produce and consume culture so that the ECoC is done with city residents rather than to host them. This helps raise the profile of the ECoC, encourages higher levels of participation among residents in 'their' ECoC and also generally encourages a sense of pride, ownership and positivity in the ECoC. This will also increase the likelihood of a longer-term participation in culture once the ECoC year has finished.
- Target harder to reach and not just those who would have consumed culture anyway. Leeuwarden was determined to deliver a cultural programme that helped capture the imagination of all residents and not just those already visiting cultural venues and activities. This makes the additionality of the programme stronger and helps broaden the reach of culture in a way that would not have taken place without the existence of the ECoC.
- Consider setting up a legacy organisation to run cultural ECoC type activities and 'events' post the ECoC rather than it being consumed into wider cultural structures of the city/ region. This gives a specific role to an organisation/ set of people to continue the ECoC legacy and have a remit to design and develop a distinct cultural programme (in the instance of Leeuwarden lasting 100 days and taking place every 2-3 years).
- Ensure research is undertaken to both understand but also highlight the impact of the ECoC. This helps to assess the broad benefits that the ECoC year had but also helps demonstrate (where relevant) impacts to assist in the future debate on the value which investments in culture bring.

Case Study 6: Matera 2019

This case study is focused on the experience of Matera, Italy, as the 2019 European Capitals of Culture (ECoC). It has been developed as part of the first interim evaluation of the European Capitals of Culture action (2020–2033), with the goal of gathering and analysing evidence to assess the implementation of the ECoC initiative and its longer-term impacts.

The study draws on extensive desk research and incorporates insights from key stakeholders directly involved in the Matera 2019 project, through semi-structured interviews. This evidence-based approach ensures a comprehensive evaluation of how the ECoC action influenced Matera's cultural landscape, engaged its communities, and garnered significant impacts at both the local and European levels.

Context, background and key features of the ECoC

Key information on the city

Matera is a city of approximately 60,000 inhabitants located in the Basilicata region of Southern Italy. It is the capital of the Province of Matera and is also known as the 'Città Sotterranea' (The Underground City). Today, Matera is known worldwide for its historical centre-'I Sassi'- composed of two districts (Sasso Caveoso and Sasso Barisano) with ancient cave dwellings inhabited since the Palaeolithic period. In 1993, *I Sassi* was awarded World Heritage Site status by UNESCO, representing 'an outstanding example of rock-cut settlement, adapted perfectly to its geomorphological setting and ecosystem', and 'an outstanding example of an architectural ensemble and landscape illustrating a number of significant stages in human history'²⁶⁵.

The Province of Matera is a largely rural area, and agriculture has represented the main economic activity for many centuries. Today, Matera is characterised by a diversified economic sector including the traditional agricultural sector, the handcraft and research sectors,²⁶⁶ and the hospitality sector (hotel and restaurant), which alone employed 9.5% of the working population in 2021.²⁶⁷ Most of the ancient centre has been restored and the caves now host hotels, B&Bs, restaurants, cafes as well as cultural spaces such as theatres and museums. These activities transformed Matera into a regional capital for leisure and culture and a key destination for visitors.

Matera was officially designated as European Capital of Culture for the year 2019²⁶⁸.

Key features of the ECoC, in terms of programming, management, funding, processes

The Matera Foundation submitted its ECoC application to highlight the importance and need for cultural renovation processes in Matera as well as in Southern Italy during a period of economic and social decline. The main motto of Matera 2019 was 'Open Future', and each project and activity included in the cultural programme embraced the local dimension (Matera and Basilicata), the Southern dimension (addressing the cultural dimension of

²⁶⁵ UNESCO World Heritage List. The Sassi and the Park of the Rupestrian Churches of Matera. Accessed from: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/670>

²⁶⁶ European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Pavlova, A., Mobilio, L., Goffredo, S. and Fox, T., Ex-post evaluation of the 2019 European capitals of culture – Final report, Pavlova, A.(editor), Mobilio, L.(editor), Goffredo, S.(editor) and Fox, T.(editor), Publications Office, 2020, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/30822>

²⁶⁷ Statistiche economiche, Comune di MATERA and Eurostat [bd_hgnace_r]

²⁶⁸ Council Decision (EU) 2015/809 of 19 May 2015 designating the European Capitals of Culture for the year 2019 in Bulgaria and Italy.

Italy's *meridione* as a whole) and the European dimension (engaging cultural operators on a pan-European scale).

The cultural programme was organised around five thematic lines:

- **Ancient futures**, with projects exploring the relationship between nature and landscape.
- **Continuity and disruptions**, focused on understanding how to collectively give shape to our cities and find beauty in the spaces inhabited daily.
- **Utopias and dystopias** included models that challenged assumptions through games and sports aimed at changing attitudes.
- **Roots and routes**, focused on mobility that brings together European citizens.
- **Reflection and connection**, with projects related to storytelling and narratives aimed at re-examining identity and citizenship.

Under these five themes, two infrastructural projects were implemented:

- **I-DEA**²⁶⁹ (Institute of Demo-Ethno-Anthropological Archive), aimed to digitize the existing archives of the Basilicata region and make them publicly available. Today, I-DEA is still active and accessible to the public.
- **Open Design School**²⁷⁰, the first European design school founded on the principles of open culture with the goal of transforming Matera and Basilicata into an area of radical innovation in the arts, science and technologies. Today, the Open Design School model has been implemented into new projects such as the Basilicata Digital Academy²⁷¹.

In addition, a large number of events were also organised, such as four large thematic exhibitions (*Ars Excavandi* exhibition, *Re-reading Renaissance* exhibition, *Anthropocene Observatory* exhibition and *Poetry of primes* exhibition), 40 international meetings and summer schools and 62 original productions. The *Ars Excavandi* exhibition, organised under the Utopias and Dystopias strand, provided a contemporary look at the history and culture of subterranean architecture from the past, present and future.

Within the cultural programme, there was a focus on the direct involvement of citizens in the development and implementation of cultural projects and activities. The ultimate goal of the programme was to make Matera a European co-creation capital. Projects such as **Silent Academy**²⁷², **Dalle scuole per le scuole** (From schools for schools) and **Patrimonio in gioco** (Heritage in play) provide examples of initiatives created to involve citizens, including migrants, students or young people in becoming ambassadors and protagonists of culture. Citizens were also included in delivering cultural projects and were invited to workshops and trainings on subjects linked to project management and implementation. The development of these participatory tools enforced local citizens' feelings of ownership and provided them with opportunities to participate in new experiences. Ultimately, the co-creation process, involving several groups of stakeholders, was a pervasive and impactful experiment that strongly characterised Matera 2019.

The European dimension was also addressed as the programme promoted cultural diversity, dialogue and mutual understanding, and involved a large number of international artists, project managers and partner associations. Over 1 000 international mobility

²⁶⁹ [I-DEA | MATERA 2019 OPEN DATA PLATFORM \(mat2019.it\)](https://mat2019.it/); I-DEA (mat2019.it)

²⁷⁰ [OPEN DESIGN SCHOOL | MATERA 2019 OPEN DATA PLATFORM \(mat2019.it\)](https://mat2019.it/)

²⁷¹ [Airfare – Basilicata Digital Academy](https://mat2019.it/)

²⁷² Il Sicomoro. Official website. Accessed from: <http://ilsicomoro.net/progetti/silent-academy/>

programmes were carried out with 55 different countries, as well as 15 debates involving international artists focusing on urban regeneration, cultural engagement and productions. Some of the key activities implemented to develop the European dimension include **'Materidio'**, a series of concerts and events featuring international artists, **'UnMonastery'**, creating links between skilled individuals across Europe, and **'Matera Meets Berlin'** establishing contacts between local cultural operators and German artists. Additionally, the two 2019 ECoC cities, Matera and Plovdiv (Bulgaria), cooperated on communication efforts by holding joint presentations and promoting each other's cultural activities, offered a volunteer exchange programme and developed multiple joint events.

In terms of governance and funding, the Matera-Basilicata Foundation 2019 was in charge of the governance of the Matera ECoC. The Foundation team consisted of individuals from several European countries as well as from local and regional stakeholders. The involvement of local professionals and authorities through open calls allowed citizens and local community organisations to submit project ideas ensuring a strong sense of ownership of the development of Matera 2019 at a local level.²⁷³

The total finalised budget for the delivery of the ECoC was €54.8 million. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the overall budget by sources of funding. Additionally, Table 3 offers a breakdown of the main expenditures.

It should be noted that the overall expenditure for administration costs was significantly higher than initially foreseen, while fewer resources were allocated to other areas, in particular the programme expenditure, and the marketing and communication budget.

Table 18. ECoC funding sources and amounts

ECoC Matera	Funding sources (in EUR million)
National Government	38.2
Regional	12.2
EU Funds	1.6
Melina Mercouri Prize	1.5
Private investments	2.1
Other	0.7

Source: Matera 2019 Foundation

Table 19. Main expenditure items

ECoC Matera	Main expenditures (in EUR million)
Programme expenditure	34.8
Advertising and public relations	9
Salaries, overheads, administration	8.8

²⁷³ European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Pavlova, A., Mobilio, L., Goffredo, S. and Fox, T., *Ex-post evaluation of the 2019 European capitals of culture – Final report*, Pavlova, A.(editor), Mobilio, L.(editor), Goffredo, S.(editor) and Fox, T.(editor), Publications Office, 2020, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/30822>

ECoC Matera	Main expenditures (in EUR million)
Legacy	2.2

Source: Matera 2019 Foundation

Analysis of the ECoC immediate and longer-term impacts and legacy

Hosting the ECoC has led to a **strengthening of the local cultural sector** both in terms of cultural infrastructure and the skills, capacity or governance of the cultural sector within the city. The renovation of the scenic Cava del Sole²⁷⁴, provides a good example of the successful efforts of the Foundation to allocate additional funding to the restoration and repurposing of a venue and its transformation into a multifunctional space for cultural and creative activities. Today, the Cava is still used for events and artistic performances, providing unparalleled cultural experiences amid stunning scenery. Additionally, through the 'Build-up' activities, the programme invested in cultural operators with the aim of developing and strengthening new skills and international partnerships.

The **international reach** of Matera 2019 is showcased by a survey conducted among 2,866 respondents, whereby most of the respondents considered Matera far more international in 2019 compared to prior to hosting the title²⁷⁵. A survey conducted among 1,743 tourists in 2019 shows that for almost 70% of the respondents, Matera hosting the ECoC impacted on their decision to visit the city.²⁷⁶ Therefore, the international exposure given to Matera by hosting the ECoC 2019 appears to have led to a stronger increase in international tourism, with a compounded annual growth rate close to or above 20%²⁷⁷. An interviewee, however, mentioned that the political divisions within the region had hindered the potential of ECoC rather than enabling it. Instead, there has been a lack of focus on expanding the cultural activities started by Matera 2019 and has supported the increase of 'hit and run tourism', whereby tourists, on average, spend no more than 2.5 days in Matera. As shown in Figure 15, the number of arrivals and presences in Matera sharply declined in 2020 as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic that severely impacted international and national tourism. Hence it is not possible to accurately analyse the tourism impact of the programme immediately following 2019. However, since then, both domestic and foreign tourism have shown signs of recovery reaching pre-pandemic levels already in 2023. In particular, foreign tourism constantly increased, surpassing 2019 figures, possibly suggesting a positive impact of ECoC on the international presence of Matera.

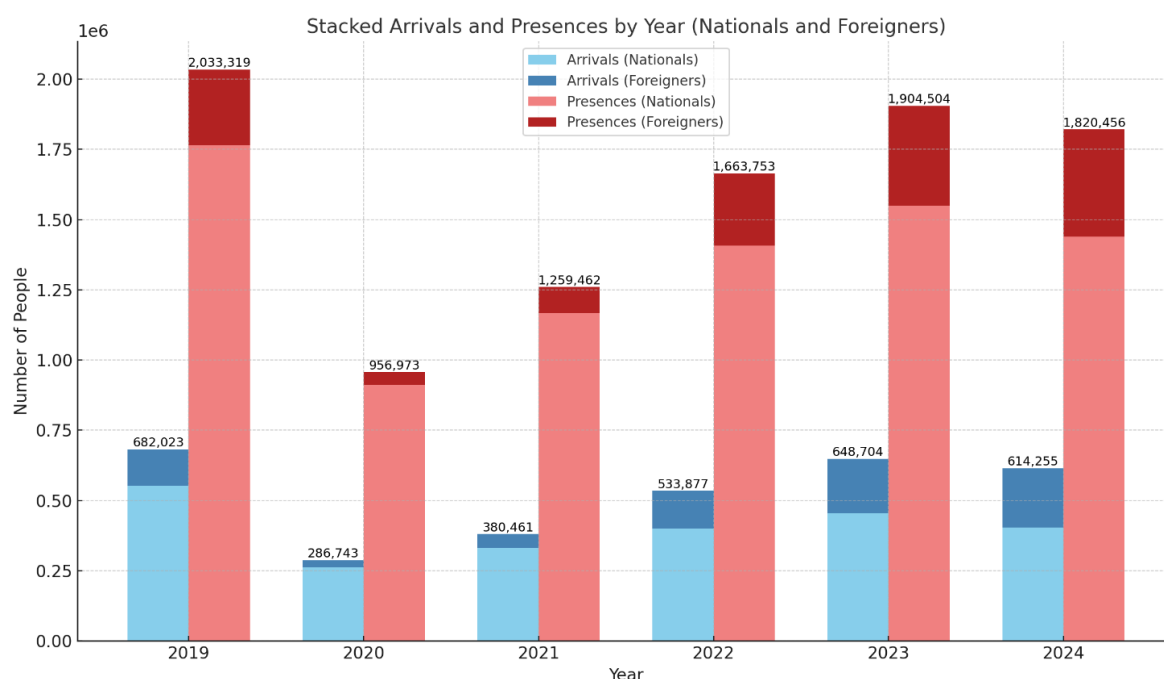
²⁷⁴ [CAVA DEL SOLE | MATERA 2019 OPEN DATA PLATFORM \(matera-basilicata2019.it\)](https://matera-basilicata2019.it)

²⁷⁵ European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Pavlova, A., Mobilio, L., Goffredo, S. and Fox, T., Ex-post evaluation of the 2019 European capitals of culture – Final report, Pavlova, A.(editor), Mobilio, L.(editor), Goffredo, S.(editor) and Fox, T.(editor), Publications Office, 2020, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/30822>

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ [THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF MATERA 2019 Foreword and Executive Summary CityO REV 31.05.2021](#)

Figure 15. Number of arrivals and presences in Matera by year (2019-2024)



Source: Basilicata Dati Statistici, <https://www.aptbasilicata.it/dati-statistici/05.03.pdf>

The legacy of Matera 2019 is reflected in the **continued efforts of renovation and cultural change** of the city and local community. Some 3 million EUR, including the Melina Mercouri Prize, had been allocated to the legacy and to ensure that the Foundation could carry on its activities for two years after the ECoC year. Though with a smaller team, the Foundation became a **co-creation platform**, ensuring the continuity of the processes and activities started by Matera 2019. However, the planned legacy activities of Matera 2019 were greatly impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak and the associated lockdown, meaning that most of the activities planned for 2020 took place in 2021.

One interviewee highlighted how the Matera 2019 Foundation expanded its scope since the end of the title year scaling up its action at the regional level. Furthermore, some resources have been allocated to building international networks. The Foundation remains active today, supporting the development of new projects and events, such as **La Giornata Europea del Vicinato**²⁷⁸ (European neighbour's day), held on May 31, 2024, featuring several activities throughout the city, celebrating the community.

Following the end of Matera 2019, a **Cultural Manifesto of the citizens of Matera** was created by local citizens stating the intent to continue cultural renovation beyond the ECoC year. Projects implemented through the ECoC programme also have their own legacy with initiatives such as the **Open Design School** continuing their work and hosting several events and workshops in 2020. While today, the Open Design School is no longer active, its model has been adapted and regenerated into the Basilicata Digital Academy (BAD). Similarly to the Open Design School, BAD aims to foster a network of innovation in the cultural and creative sector through the digital transition. An interviewee stated that Matera's engagement with ECoC had a high impact on the cultural offer because of the number of cultural organisations that spread due to the programme and their significant survival rate.

²⁷⁸ [La giornata europea del vicinato 2024 \(matera-basilicata2019.it\)](https://www.aptbasilicata.it/dati-statistici/05.03.pdf)

Lessons learnt and good practices, including key challenges before, during and after the ECoC and implications for the next iteration of the ECoC action

The key challenges faced throughout the implementation of Matera 2019 include:

- **International partnerships and collaborations:** In the application phase, the city and region initially suffered from a lack of international connections and capacity to attract international cultural operators and establish international partnerships.
- **Organisational challenges:** There was a widespread impression among organisations implementing the cultural programme that the programme was too ambitious and that fewer events would have improved the overall quality of the cultural offer.
- **Cultural infrastructure:** The lack of available cultural infrastructure was one of the key challenges faced in the development and implementation of Matera 2019. The city lacked spaces and structures that could host larger events. To cope with this, the Foundation mapped available sites in the city and the region, listing about 400 venues and spaces that could be used for cultural events.
- **Political instability:** The frequent administration changes at national, regional and local levels contributed to delays in the preparation and implementation of the Matera 2019 cultural programme. As noted by the interviewees, political differences within the region hindered the potential of ECoC. Thus, moving forward separating regional and local funding from the political cycle could prevent difficulties in obtaining and implementing funds

Despite the challenges faced throughout the programme several positive outcomes and learning opportunities arose from the project. Overall, the Matera 2019 cultural programme provided citizens with the opportunity to experience a diverse cultural offer with more than 1 300 events, 65% of which were completely free²⁷⁹. The diversity of the events offered is reflected in the responses to the participants' survey, where the majority reported satisfaction with the content, quality and originality of the cultural programme (64%)²⁸⁰. However, despite the positive feedback from survey respondents and interviewed stakeholders on the cultural impact of the ECoC, a few stakeholders did highlight that the cultural programme was more targeted at an older audience and that greater efforts should have been made to involve youth, thus enhancing the overall cultural impact of the initiative.

The communication campaign of Matera contributed to increasing the local, national and international awareness of the city and its cultural initiatives. The city's communication strategy encompassed both digital and traditional media. Through its social media presence, Matera 2019 reached about 150,000 followers and its hashtags were used more than 250,000 times. On traditional media, Matera 2019 and its cultural programme were discussed in almost 58,000 articles in national and international newspapers. Collaborations and partnerships also proved successful as the one with Euronews, whose *GoMatera* specials reached approximately 10 million people in Italy and beyond.²⁸¹

Looking ahead, one interviewee mentioned that investing in long-term initiatives and developing long-term plans would further ensure the legacy of ECoC. When asked about the EU added value of the programme and the lessons learnt, the interviewee acknowledged the improvements in the capacity of the local cultural sector and the still active Matera 2019 Foundation to apply for and manage EU funding related to culture.

²⁷⁹ eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021SC0232

²⁸⁰ <https://www.matera-basilicata2019.it/en/report-2019/the-survey-on-the-perception.html>

²⁸¹ Eurostat, Arrivals at tourist accommodation establishments by NUTS 2 regions: [Statistics](#) | [Eurostat](#)

Conclusion

Overall, the Matera 2019 implementation was successful in addressing many of its goals. The participation and involvement of citizens and the effective recruitment of volunteers were fundamental in the realisation of the cultural programme. Additionally, the Matera communication campaign strongly contributed to increasing the international visibility of the city and its cultural initiatives during 2019 by using digital and traditional media platforms. The legacy of Matera lives on through the work of the Foundation and initiatives such as the Basilicata Digital Academy (BAD) and the I-DEA project. Local cultural organisations also play a vital role in sustaining this legacy, applying the lessons learned from the programme to develop new skills, foster cross-border collaborations and expand the cultural network.

Case Study 7: Novi Sad 2022

The following case study examines the experience of Novi Sad, Serbia, as the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) in 2022. It has been developed as part of the first interim evaluation of the European Capitals of Culture action (2020–2033), with the goal of gathering and analysing evidence to assess the implementation of the ECoC initiative and its longer-term impacts.

The study draws on extensive desk research and incorporates insights from key stakeholders directly involved in the Novi Sad project, through semi-structured interviews. This evidence-based approach ensures a comprehensive evaluation of how the ECoC action influenced Novi Sad's cultural landscape, engaged its communities, and garnered significant impacts at both the local and European levels.

Context, background and key features of the ECoC

Key information on the city

Novi Sad is the second largest city in Serbia after the capital-city Belgrade and is the capital of the autonomous province of Vojvodina. The city is the economic centre of the province and an important economic hub in the country, notably in terms of agriculture, insurance and finance, and energy.²⁸² Whilst the city suffered from an important deindustrialisation process in the 1990s, with the closing of large factories such as *Novkabel* (electric cable industry) or *Pobeda* (metal industry) the economic development of the city is now on the rise, driven by important public investments and the IT sector. Together with Belgrade, the city is home to a large and dynamic start-up ecosystem.²⁸³

Novi Sad is the capital of one of Serbia's most ethnically diverse regions, which has been home to groups such as Hungarians, Croats, Slovaks, and Romanians over the centuries. Today it is a multicultural city of around 370,000 people (450,000 across the metropolitan area). Novi Sad has been the Serbian capital of culture as from the 18th century, and several leading cultural institutions were established in the city throughout the years, notably the Serbian National Theatre, founded in 1861, or Matica Srpska, the oldest library in Serbia.²⁸⁴

The city is also home to the iconic EXIT Festival, one of the largest music festivals in Europe. Once a modest festival with a few bands that started in 2000, EXIT currently welcomes more than 200,000 young people from 60 countries in the iconic location of Novi Sad's Petrovaradin Fortress for an impressive international line-up, including headliners such as Pet Shop Boys, Guns N' Roses, Franz Ferdinand, David Guetta, Snoop Dogg, Wu-Tang Clan, Kraftwerk, Charlotte de Witte, or Paul Kalkbrenner.²⁸⁵

Beyond the EXIT festival, important cultural events include the Sterijino pozorje theatre festival, the International Novi Sad Literature Festival, or the Novi Sad Jazz Festival.²⁸⁶

Overseeing the city on top of a hill, the Petrovaradin Fortress and its clock tower dates to the 17th and 18th centuries. The old district of the city is found across the Danube river,

²⁸² Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (2023) Municipalities and regions of the Republic of Serbia <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2023/PdfE/G202313050.pdf>

²⁸³ Start-up Genome (2025) Global Startup Ecosystem Report: focus on Belgrade and Novi Sad.

²⁸⁴ Novi Sad (2015) Novi Sad European Capital of Culture: Candidate city. Bid book, November 2015

²⁸⁵ <https://www.exitfest.org/en/about-us>

²⁸⁶ <https://novisad.travel/en/about-novi-sad/>

with Stari Grad, and important heritage sites such as the Gothic Revival Name of Mary Church and the neo-Renaissance City Hall.²⁸⁷

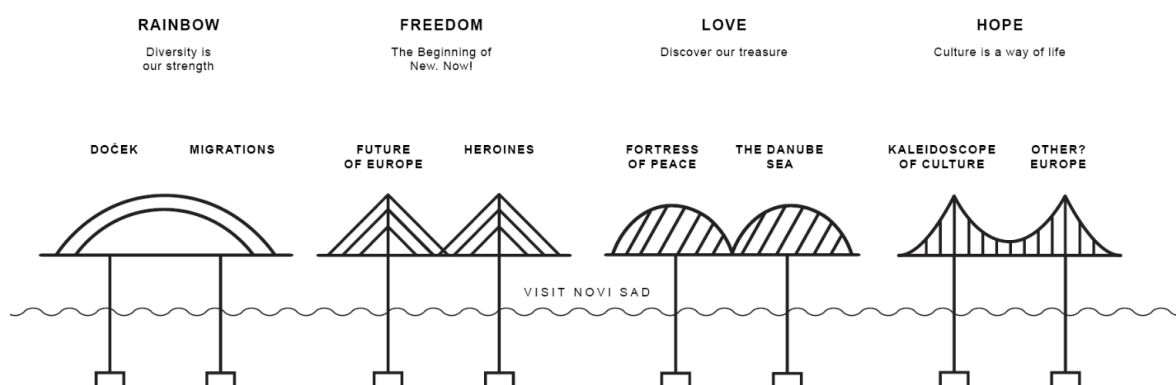
Novi Sad has positioned itself as an international city and successfully applied to important titles: the city was the European Youth Capital in 2019 and the European Capital of Culture in 2022, and Novi Sad became a UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts in 2023, showing the efforts of the city to place itself on the international map.

Key features of the ECoC, in terms of programming, management, funding, processes

Novi Sad was designated as Serbia's first European Capital of Culture in January 2017. Initially planned for 2021, the title was postponed to 2022 as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁸⁸

The ECoC programme was inspired by the slogan 'for new bridges,' which embodies the idea of building new bridges of cooperation and exchange between artists and organisations from Novi Sad and Serbia, and the European cultural scene (see also the figure below). Four programmes 'Bridges' were established, each symbolically named after Novi Sad's bridges, i.e., values that the city wished to promote in the context of European integration, as well as beliefs that it aspired to share with all Europeans: freedom, rainbow, hope, and love. Every bridge had two programme arches, aiming to explore the contemporary social context of the city and its creativity in light of current reflexions on the European and world cultural scene. As a result, the 'Rainbow Bridge' focused on migration and peace policies, the 'Love Bridge' celebrated the city's multiculturalism, the 'Freedom Bridge' advocated for a better position for women and increased youth activism, and the 'Hope Bridge' aspired toward decentralisation and strengthening human and space resources. These bridges were each defined within specific timeframes in order to communicate their ideas, context, and messages, with activities leading up to the ECoC 2022.²⁸⁹

Figure 16. Visual representation of four programmes 'Bridges'



Source: Novi Sad 2022 Foundation

These bridges underpinned the cultural programming of the ECoC including major activities such as:

²⁸⁷ <https://novisad.rs/eng/novi-sad-today>

²⁸⁸ <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/news/2022-european-capitals-culture>

²⁸⁹ <https://docekn.rs/31-12-2023/>

Doček (€3 million): Doček (New Year) demonstrates the interculturality of Novi Sad, with two different New Years: one celebrated according to the 'new' Gregorian calendar, on 31st December, and the other set to the 'old' Julian calendar, on 13th January. The Doček events looked at dualism, tradition and contemporaneity, time and energy, with a unique audio and visual experience for New Year's Eves in Novi Sad. This was followed up in 2023 with Doček 2023 and Doček 7531 in Novi Sad connecting two measures of time, as well as visual art and music, raising the capacities of the local art scene while celebrating the uniqueness of the European Capital of Culture 2022's diversity.²⁹⁰

Future of Europe (€1.3 million): Children and young artists were encouraged to shape a better future for Europe through culture and the arts. This included projects around alternative models of education (The School of Future), encouragement to critical thinking about social topics (The Flags of Future), modern reading of traditional narratives (The Fairy Tales of Future) and other topics.²⁹¹

Kaleidoscope of Culture (€2.8 million) was a key part of the 2022 programme, but it is also a longer-term project that started in 2018 and is one of the main legacy projects from the European Capital of Culture. It is a multifocal and cross-sectorial project, focusing on the culture of togetherness. The project connects artists, cultural institutions, non-governmental organisations, citizens, and tourists, through a 5-week event taking place across Novi Sad (e.g. visual arts week, architecture week).²⁹²

Other highlights of the programme included Heroines (Freedom Bridge), Migrations (Rainbow Bridge), Fortress of Peace (Love Bridge), The Danube Sea (Love Bridge), and Other? Europe (Hope Bridge).

The ECoC foresaw an important urban regeneration dimension, by using industrial heritage for cultural purposes through the 'Culture Station' project, with 12 cultural centres across the city and through the development of Liman, Novi Sad's Creative District.²⁹³

A core component of the ECoC project was also to strengthen the capacity of local cultural institutions. This materialised in particular with Project 33, run by the City Administration for Culture and the UNESCO Department at the University of Arts in Belgrade. The project provided a 12-month-long capacity-building programme to equip all cultural institutions in Novi Sad with five-year-long strategic plans.²⁹⁴

In terms of resources, the cultural budget went up from 4.84% of the total city budget to around 10% per year as from 2019, reflecting the importance of culture for the city. Novi Sad also made important investments to revitalise industrial areas, including the above-mentioned 12 cultural stations. The budget of the ECoC reflect the commitment of the city, but also of other institutional partners and especially the national government.

Table 20. ECoC funding sources and amounts

ECoC Novi Sad 2022	Funding sources (in EUR million)
National Government	9.68

²⁹⁰ Novi Sad 2022 Foundation (2024) Novi Sad 2022 European Capital of Culture: final evaluation report. <https://novisad2022.rs/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/DOWNLOAD-HERE.pdf>

²⁹¹ <https://novisad2022.rs/en/>

²⁹² <https://novisad2022.rs/en/>

²⁹³ Novi Sad (2015) Novi Sad European Capital of Culture: Candidate city. Bid book, November 2015

²⁹⁴ Monitoring report II

ECoC Novi Sad 2022	Funding sources (in EUR million)
ECoC City Council	12.16
Vojvodina Autonomous Province	4.25
EU-funded projects	3.29
Melina Mercouri prize	1.5
Sponsors/Other	2.3

Sources: Novi Sad 2022 European Capital of Culture Evaluation Report

Table 21. Main expenditure fields

ECoC Novi Sad 2022	Main expenditures (in EUR million)
Cultural programming main events	13.36
Cultural programming - others	7.46
Programme management	3.8
Promotion and marketing	3.92

Sources: Novi Sad 2022 European Capital of Culture Evaluation Report

Analysis of the ECoC immediate and longer-term impacts and legacy

Novi Sad 2022 set out with ambitious goals for the city, with an international cultural programme and urban regeneration projects across the whole city. Despite the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, it seems the ECoC did achieve important impacts. This section analyses some of the main impacts of Novi Sad 2022, focusing on cultural participation and tourism, urban regeneration, European and international cooperation, as well as the connection between the 2019 Youth Capital and the ECoC year.

Cultural participation and tourism

Novi Sad 2022 had important concerns about the tourism potential of the ECoC after COVID-19, particularly in light of uncertainties around border openings and the shift of tourism towards more local or cross-border trips. In response, the municipality shifted its marketing efforts to promote local and regional tourism, addressing these concerns and adapting to the evolving situation.²⁹⁵

According to the evaluation of the ECoC, Novi Sad did achieve important results. The number of participants in various events during both the preparatory years and the title year of ECoC steadily increased, peaking in 2022 with 1.5 million participants across all activities of the cultural programme. This marked a remarkable success compared to just 13,000 cultural programme visitors in 2017. The number of accessible programmes also saw significant growth, reaching 675 in 2022, up from only 23 in 2017. Additionally, the

²⁹⁵ Bianchini, Simjanovska et al. (2022) Reflections on aspects of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on European Capitals of culture. Sibelius Academy Research Report Publications: 24

decentralisation of events (notably across the 12 cultural stations of the city) helped make them more accessible to people living in areas farther from the city centre.²⁹⁶

Urban regeneration

The transformation of derelict industrial buildings into 12 cultural stations (cultural centres) is another important legacy of the ECoC. The most significant regeneration project was Novi Sad's Creative District (Liman), located near the University of Novi Sad campus on the banks of the Danube. The Liman Creative District became home to one of Novi Sad's new cultural stations: the Liman Cultural Station (The Centre of Youth Creativity). This space serves as a 'one-stop' youth centre, managed by youth organisations for young people and an important space for the city's creative community. Several former tool-making factories spanning over 11,000 square meters and once known as the Chinese Quarter turned into a hub of contemporary culture and creativity. After years of disuse, the area has been transformed into a thriving district that not only fosters creativity but also preserves its industrial and architectural heritage.²⁹⁷

The district was a hotspot of the ECoC programme and still hosts a variety of cultural events, such as *Female Thread*, an international tapestry exhibition, and *Drawings Travel through Time*, which showcases children's drawings from the Centre for Art Education of Children and Youth of Vojvodina. It is also home to numerous artists' studios and cultural organisations, including the French Institute in Serbia, located in the former 'Petar Drapšin' factory, and Fabrika, the Student Cultural Centre of Novi Sad, which focuses on musical, artistic, and cultural programmes.²⁹⁸

European and international cooperation

Novi Sad had set out an ambitious goal of including **European and International cooperation** for 95% of its projects.²⁹⁹ While this level of cooperation was not reached, the ECoC did help to strengthen international exchanges and partnerships. It is worth noting here that international cooperation was quite heavily affected by COVID-19. Travel restrictions played a role, but most importantly shifting the title year to 2022 meant the new programming dates were no longer suitable for some of the existing partners. It also meant that Novi Sad held the title during the same year as Esch-sur-Alzette (Luxembourg) and Kaunas (Lithuania), rather than Timișoara (Romania) and Elefsina (Greece), as planned before the pandemic.³⁰⁰

Despite this, the growth in two-way exchanges and visits between local and international artists is demonstrated by data from 2015, when only 13% of the local scene—both institutional and non-institutional—collaborated with foreign partners. By the time Novi Sad held the ECoC title, this cooperation had expanded dramatically, with the local scene working with nearly 300 foreign partners across 45 countries. In the year of the title alone, around 1,700 foreign artists collaborated with representatives of the local scene, including both institutional and non-institutional entities. This increase was supported by over 40 open calls for artist exchanges, inviting foreign artists to visit Novi Sad and offering local artists

²⁹⁶ Novi Sad 2022 Foundation (2024) Novi Sad 2022 European Capital of Culture: final evaluation report. <https://novisad2022.rs/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/DOWNLOAD-HERE.pdf>

²⁹⁷ Novi Sad 2022 Foundation (2024) Novi Sad 2022 European Capital of Culture: final evaluation report. <https://novisad2022.rs/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/DOWNLOAD-HERE.pdf>

²⁹⁸ Novi Sad 2022 Foundation (2024) Novi Sad 2022 European Capital of Culture: final evaluation report. <https://novisad2022.rs/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/DOWNLOAD-HERE.pdf>

²⁹⁹ ECOC Expert Panel (2019) Novi Sad European Capital of Culture 2021. Second Monitoring Meeting. Report by the ECOC Expert Panel. Timișoara, June 2019

³⁰⁰ Bianchini, Simjanovska et al. (2022) Reflections on aspects of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on European Capitals of culture. Sibelius Academy Research Report Publications: 24

opportunities to travel abroad through Artist in Residence programmes. Additionally, the *Kizuna* project established direct links between the local and Japanese art scenes, further strengthening international connections.³⁰¹

Connecting the European Youth Capital and the European Capital of Culture

Novi Sad was not only a European Capital of Culture in 2022, but also European Youth Capital in 2019, which further encouraged networking and support among organisations in the youth sector. The 2019 European Youth Capital also had an important cultural component (e.g. through the 2019 edition of the Kaleidoscope of culture). The 'European Youth Engagement Network – EYE-Net' project is a good example of this connection between youth and culture, focusing on young people and their participation in artistic, educational, and social activities through cooperation, exchange of experiences, and organisation of theatre plays.³⁰² The importance of youth is also reflected in the fact that 1) an important legacy project of the ECoC project is the Youth Centre, which opened in the Creative District; and 2) the ECoC attracted an important number of volunteers; a significant part of them focused of course on culture (48.4% of the 855 volunteers), but also on youth activities (21.7%). Many of the ECoC volunteers were alumni of the Youth Capital project or played a mentor role for the new volunteers.³⁰³ This dynamic myriad of youth organisations was reflected in the 'Future of Europe' Programme Arch, which included almost 90 youth events, resulted in an increased number of exchange programmes, youth organisations, and young individuals who participate in European exchanges and educational activities abroad.³⁰⁴

Lessons learnt and good practices, including key challenges before, during and after the ECoC and implications for the next iteration of the ECoC action

The key challenges faced throughout the implementation of Novi Sad 2022 are notably linked to the **COVID-19 pandemic**:³⁰⁵

Novi Sad faced a 50% budget cut in 2021, due to reallocation of funding at the national level to finance the construction of COVID-19 hospitals, and these funding cuts slowed down the development of the construction projects for Novi Sad 2022. The Foundation and the other authorities involved in the ECoC project worked together to overcome the issue, and the ECoC team highlighted they were supported in different ways and seen as a project of national importance. For instance, the ECoC cultural events during the pandemic and during the ECoC year were streamed or broadcast through regional and national media partners.³⁰⁶

The ECoC also focused on mitigating the economic impact of COVID-19 on the local arts scene. To support this, four open calls were launched at the end of 2020, leading to the largest-ever investment in the local cultural sector. 60% of the funds were directed towards

³⁰¹ Novi Sad 2022 Foundation (2024) Novi Sad 2022 European Capital of Culture: final evaluation report. <https://novisad2022.rs/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/DOWNLOAD-HERE.pdf>

³⁰² Interviews, and Novi Sad 2022 Foundation (2024) Novi Sad 2022 European Capital of Culture: final evaluation report. <https://novisad2022.rs/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/DOWNLOAD-HERE.pdf>

³⁰³ Interviews, and Novi Sad 2022 Foundation (2024) Novi Sad 2022 European Capital of Culture: final evaluation report. <https://novisad2022.rs/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/DOWNLOAD-HERE.pdf>

³⁰⁴ Interviews, and Novi Sad 2022 Foundation (2024) Novi Sad 2022 European Capital of Culture: final evaluation report. <https://novisad2022.rs/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/DOWNLOAD-HERE.pdf>

³⁰⁵ https://culture.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/ecoc2021-novisad-monitoring_en.pdf

³⁰⁶ Bianchini, Simjanovska et al. (2022) Reflections on aspects of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on European Capitals of culture. Sibelius Academy Research Report Publications: 24

independent, non-institutional organisations, helping to sustain the city's arts community during a challenging period.³⁰⁷

The overall **capacity building** towards cultural organisations across the city is an important development that enabled cultural operators to develop a 5-year strategic plan, and participants to the programme rated highly their participation to the programme.³⁰⁸ This had important benefits to larger cultural institutions, but the impact on the independent art scene of the city seems to be less important as these long-term strategic blueprints are arguably less relevant for these smaller organisations, especially with the vast impacts of COVID-19 pandemic.³⁰⁹

The ECoC team emphasised the **strong political support** at all levels for the ECoC and its legacy. This cooperation continued beyond the title year, guided by an existing long-term strategic plan. There is also a clear commitment to maintaining the international partnerships formed through European projects. In terms of the ECoC legacy, two long-term platforms (Kaleidoscope and Doček), had already secured financial backing for 2023 and 2024 ahead of the ECoC, ensuring their continuation after the title year.³¹⁰

Additionally, the **infrastructure developments** linked to the ECoC are playing a key role in the legacy, with platforms like cultural stations and the creative district expected to persist and evolve beyond 2022. New investments and public funding are expected to support these infrastructural projects, especially those that were not completed by the end of the title year. Before the ECoC year, a political decision had already been made for the foundation to remain active after 2022, ensuring the maintenance of new spaces and the continuity of long-term projects. However, the long-term sustainability of these infrastructures is not a given: while the current budget allocation for culture remains high (around 10% of the municipality budget), sustaining the current levels of cultural programming will require a strong political commitment or a strategy to diversify the revenue sources of these relatively new cultural institutions.³¹¹

Finally, one legacy of the ECoC is the development of a similar national competition in Serbia. Following the example of the concept of the European Capital of Culture, the project 'National Capital of Culture' was launched, and Čačak took the first title in 2023, followed by Užice in 2024 and Zrenjanin was designated for 2025. The title seems to raise interest across Serbian municipalities, with 12 bidding cities for the 2024 title and 8 for 2025.³¹²

Conclusion

Despite the challenges faced by the COVID-19 pandemic, which seriously impacted the planning of the ECoC programme, Novi Sad 2022 produced important effects on the development of the cultural offering of the city and contributed to culture-driven urban regeneration across different areas of the city, reinforcing a decentralisation process of cultural programming and breathing new cultural life across the whole territory of the city.

³⁰⁷ ECOC Expert Panel (2019) Novi Sad European Capital of Culture 2021. Second Monitoring Meeting. Report by the ECOC Expert Panel. Timisoara, June 2019

³⁰⁸ Novi Sad 2022 Foundation (2024) Novi Sad 2022 European Capital of Culture: final evaluation report. <https://novisad2022.rs/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/DOWNLOAD-HERE.pdf>

³⁰⁹ Interview

³¹⁰ ECOC Expert Panel (2019) Novi Sad European Capital of Culture 2021. Second Monitoring Meeting. Report by the ECOC Expert Panel. Timisoara, June 2019

Bianchini, Simjanovska et al. (2022) Reflections on aspects of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on European Capitals of culture. Sibelius Academy Research Report Publications: 24

³¹¹ Interview.

³¹² <http://mduls.gov.rs/en/announcements/uzice-officially-declared-national-capital-of-culture-for-2024/>

It also supported European and international connections, although the initial goal of embedding European cooperation across almost all projects was not reached. The legacy of the ECoC was also anticipated, with new editions for two of the landmark ECoC projects: Kaleidoscope and Doček. The sustainability of the new cultural stations and the legacy projects do require important financial commitments for the city. It seems that political support is still robust, but the long-term resilience of new cultural organisations and its connexions with the independent cultural scene requires attention over the mid-term.

Case Study 8: Wrocław 2016

The following case study examines the experience of Wrocław, Poland, as the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) in 2016. It has been developed as part of the first interim evaluation of the European Capitals of Culture action (2020–2033), with the goal of gathering and analysing evidence to assess the implementation of the ECoC initiative and its longer-term impacts.

The study draws on extensive desk research and incorporates insights from key stakeholders directly involved in the Wrocław project, through semi-structured interviews. This evidence-based approach ensures a comprehensive evaluation of how the ECoC action influenced Wrocław's cultural landscape, engaged its communities, and garnered significant impacts at both the local and European levels.

Context, background and key features of the ECoC

Key information on the city

Wrocław has been characterised by cultural exchange for centuries³¹³. Located in southwestern Poland along the Oder River, is the fourth-largest city in the country and a significant cultural and economic hub. Known historically as Breslau, Wrocław's identity has been shaped by a diverse array of cultural influences, having been governed at various times by Polish, Bohemian, Austrian, Prussian, and German authorities before becoming part of Poland after World War II. This multifaceted past earned Wrocław the title '**The meeting place**', reflecting its role as a melting pot of cultures and ideas.

With a population of 641,607, Wrocław is a prominent academic centre, hosting 22 higher education institutions and more than 140,000 students. The city's economy has increasingly pivoted towards new technologies and innovation. It stands out as the only Polish city included in the group of Smart City leaders³¹⁴, recognised for its advancements in public services and the development of cutting-edge technologies.

The city is renowned for its architectural heritage, featuring a blend of Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque styles, particularly evident in its Market Square and the iconic Gothic Old Town Hall. Wrocław is also famous for its Oder River islands and over 100 bridges, earning it the nickname '**Venice of the North**'. Key landmarks include the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist and the Centennial Hall, which is listed as a [UNESCO World Heritage site](#). Cultural life in Wrocław is vibrant, with major institutions such as the National Museum, the Opera House, and the Wrocław Contemporary Museum enriching the city's cultural landscape. The city also hosts renowned festivals like the International Theatre Festival Dialog, the Wroclavia Cantans International Music Festival, and the Wrocław Film Festival. In recognition of its literary achievements, Wrocław was named [UNESCO World Book Capital in 2016](#) and [City of Literature in 2019](#).

Key features of the ECoC, in terms of programming, management, funding, processes

The European Capital of Culture 2016 in Wrocław was implemented by the IMPART 2016 Festival Office ('Impart'), a dedicated cultural institution established through the unification of 'Wrocław 2016' – responsible for the ECoC application – and the 'IMPART Art Centre', a cultural management organisation with production resources. This merger, decided by the Wrocław City Council in July 2012, created a public cultural institution directly supervised

³¹³ Kubicki, Paweł, Bożena Gierat-Bieroń, and Joanna Orzechowska-Waślawska (2020). The European Capital of Culture 2016 effect: How the ECOC competition changed Polish cities.

³¹⁴ https://obs.agenda21culture.net/sites/default/files/2022-03/Wroclaw_EN.pdf

by the Mayor of Wrocław, ensuring oversight while maintaining operational independence. IMPART collaborated closely with the City of Wrocław and local bodies, including the Department for City Promotion and Tourism, to develop the cultural programme and oversee associated communication and marketing activities. It also organised consultation meetings to engage cultural operators, inform the public, and encourage dialogue.

During its preparatory and delivery phases, the ECoC programme relied extensively on partnerships with local, regional, and international stakeholders. Strategic collaborations with cultural institutions, grassroots organisations, and creative industries played a pivotal role in achieving its objectives. The slogan for Wrocław 2016 reflected the intention *‘to create spaces within which to restore the presence of beauty in public life and daily habits’*. The programme emphasised exploring the city’s architectural heritage, promoting social cohesion, and fostering civic responsibility through cultural participation. These efforts were structured across four thematic stages, each highlighting distinct geographical and cultural dimensions:

- The **Wrocław stage**: Engaged directly with the city’s inhabitants, encouraging dialogue and participation in cultural activities to strengthen civic identity.
- The **Lower Silesia stage**: Promoted regional participation by involving neighbouring communities in collaborative projects, highlighting the cultural diversity of the region.
- The **Polish stage**: Served as a platform for national artistic collaborations, fostering connections between Wrocław and cultural actors across Poland.
- The **European and World stage**: Showcased international partnerships and collaborations, positioning Wrocław as a significant player in European and global culture.

The Wrocław 2016 European Capital of Culture programme received substantial financial support from both public and private sources. Almost 40% of the total funding came from the municipal budget, with additional contributions from the national government, including a significant allocation from the Ministry of Culture. The programme also benefited from the Melina Mercouri Prize awarded by the European Commission.

The total budget for Wrocław 2016 amounted to approximately €86.4 million. Key funding sources included the City of Wrocław (40% of the total), national government contributions (36.7%), and private sponsorships (6.2%). Notably, income generated by the ECoC, including ticket sales, also provided a significant portion of the financial resources, contributing 7.3% of the total income.

Table 22. ECoC funding sources and amounts

ECoC 2016	Funding sources (in EUR million)
National Government	31.67
ECoC City	34.38
Region	0.63
EU Funds	0.39
Melina Mercouri Prize	1.5
Other cities (e.g. in the region)	0
In-kind support	1.65
Sponsorship	5.33

ECoC 2016	Funding sources (in EUR million)
Ticket sales	6.31
Merchandise	0.16
Income generated by the ECoC ³¹⁵	4.25

Sources: [Ex-post evaluation of the 2016 European capitals of culture](#)

The main expenditure items for the Wrocław 2016 ECoC programme included cultural programming (€40.98 million), cultural infrastructure development (€20.29 million), and communication and marketing efforts (€13.95 million). Administration and staffing costs were also significant, totalling €7.48 million. In addition, €3.69 million was allocated to various other activities, such as international relations and the preparation of the bid book.

Table 23. Main expenditures items

ECoC 2016	Main expenditures (in EUR million)
Cultural programming	40.98
Cultural infrastructures ³¹⁶	20.29
Communication and marketing	13.95
Administration/staff	7.48
Other	3.69

Sources: [Ex-post evaluation of the 2016 European capitals of culture](#)

The ECoC delivery body in Wrocław was the main organisation managing the programme, working closely with local authorities, cultural organisations, and civil society groups. The collaborative efforts were aimed at fostering civic engagement and participation in cultural activities, ensuring that the ECoC programme was deeply embedded within the community. Notable processes included participatory initiatives that encouraged local residents to take part in cultural events, alongside cooperation with other European cities and cultural institutions to strengthen international ties.

Analysis of the ECoC immediate and longer-term impacts and legacy

The European Capital of Culture programme aims to deliver both immediate cultural benefits and long-lasting transformations for the cities involved. For Wrocław, the ECoC year proved to be a transformative moment for its cultural and urban identity.

Sustaining cultural momentum

In terms of **legacy**, Wrocław's strategic plans aimed to ensure that the cultural momentum generated during 2016 would be sustained beyond the event itself. The transition following the event highlighted a deliberate effort to sustain and expand the city's cultural initiatives. In part, a central pillar of the ECoC 2016 governance framework, continued operating retaining much of its staff and avoiding the turnover often seen in other ECoC cities. It remained pivotal in coordinating cultural activities, fostering international collaborations, advancing audience development, and supporting capacity-building within the cultural and

³¹⁵ Sale of rights, assets, etc

³¹⁶ Operations, equipment, overheads, administration, etc.

creative industries. Many activities initiated during the ECoC year continued, alongside plans for new projects. Significant initiatives, such as the artist residency programme³¹⁷ and the micro-grants scheme (MikroGRANTY³¹⁸), are still in place today and evolved, as outlined in section 3 below. The micro-grants programme, which gained substantial interest during the ECoC year, was particularly impactful, fostering creative engagement and local cultural activities. According to a survey conducted among participants³¹⁹, the micro-grants have been recognised for significantly boosting civic engagement, with 90.5% of respondents expressing strong support for its continuation.

Similarly, several exhibitions, festivals, and projects—like the ‘Wrocław – Backyard Door’ initiative, now renamed ‘Neighbouring’³²⁰—have continued and evolve beyond the ECoC year. Originally aimed at revitalising underused spaces and fostering a stronger sense of community in the city's neighbourhoods, the initiative has grown into a broader cultural platform that brings together local residents, artists, and cultural institutions. However, projects like ‘Wrocław – Backyard Door’ and the above-mentioned MikroGRANTY also revealed the significant time and effort required to engage local residents. While many participated, some were initially reluctant or resistant to becoming involved. Wrocław's experience underscored that citizen engagement demands sustained, tailored support and decentralised, locally-sensitive approaches to foster genuine involvement, ensuring long-term success beyond the ECoC year.

In the years following the ECoC year, Wrocław committed to reinforcing cultural tourism and strengthening its role as a regional cultural hub by integrating cultural activities into the broader urban development strategy. As such, a key aspect of the legacy was the **establishment of lasting physical and social cultural structures** which became integral to the city's broader urban development strategy. Substantial investments enhanced the city's cultural venues, including the renovation of key sites such as the Capitol Music Theatre and the University of Wrocław's new library. New cultural institutions were also established, such as the National Forum of Music, which has since become a major cultural landmark³²¹. Additionally, art installations and temporary exhibitions brought vibrancy to public spaces during the ECoC year, such as the ‘Flow Quartet’ performance series and large-scale street art projects.

Despite these achievements, some interviewees noted disparities in post-ECoC resource allocation. While flagship institutions like the National Forum of Music flourished, smaller cultural venues struggled to attract similar levels of attention and funding post-ECoC, raising concerns about the equitable distribution of cultural resources and the focus on the sustainability of smaller initiatives.

Cultural tourism and international visibility

The evaluation of the impact of Wrocław 2016 (Fox and Rampton, 2017³²²) revealed a number of measurable outcomes. First and foremost, the cultural tourism sector saw a noticeable increase during 2016, with a significant rise in both domestic and international

³¹⁷ <https://wrocenter.pl/en/pobyty-rezydencyjne/>

³¹⁸ <https://instytutkultury.pl/mikrogranty/>

³¹⁹ Dolińska. K. (red.), 2017. Raport „mikroGRANTY ESK 2016” Edycja 2016.

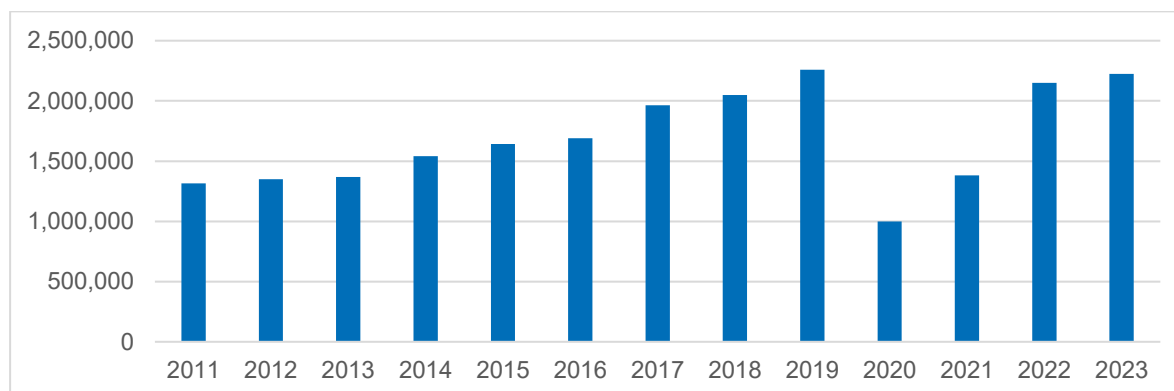
³²⁰ <https://strefakultury.pl/en/neighbouring/about/>

³²¹ Gierat-Bieroń, B., Orzechowska-Waślawska, J., & Kubicki, P. (2020). The European Capital of Culture 2016 effect: How the ECOC competition changed Polish cities. Studies in European Integration, State and Society (Vol. 9).

³²² European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Fox, T. and Rampton, J., Ex-post evaluation of the 2016 European capitals of culture – Final report, Publications Office, 2017

visitors to the city³²³. According to the Wrocław 2016 evaluation reports, the number of tourists visiting the city before and during the ECoC was higher than in previous years, with a lasting effect on the city's reputation as a must-visit cultural destination. As shown in Figure 1, nights spent in tourist accommodations in Wrocław grew consistently from 1,315,990 in 2011 to 2,258,982 in 2019, reflecting the city's growing appeal as a tourist destination until COVID-19. Tourism levels have since grown back to pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 17. Nights spent at tourist accommodation establishments in Wrocław



Source: Eurostat (urb_ctour and tour_occ_nin3, Statistics Poland)

More specifically, during the ECoC year, culture became a driver of tourism, with an additional 50,000 international tourists staying in Wrocław's hotels compared to 2015³²⁴. Such outcomes demonstrate the potential of ECoC initiatives to enhance a city's cultural and economic profile. However, the long-term impacts of cultural tourism are difficult to assess in light of the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has significantly affected cultural attendance and participation (Bianchini and Simjanovska 2022³²⁵).

The positive effect on the **city's international profile** was another significant tangible outcome. Wrocław's global visibility was enhanced, with increased media coverage and international partnerships. Wrocław's cultural outreach was further strengthened by being named **UNESCO World Book Capital in 2016 and City of Literature in 2019**. These accolades, alongside its ECoC activities, allowed Wrocław to present its diverse cultural heritage and to establish lasting connections with other European cities and global cultural leaders. This heightened international presence has been a cornerstone of the city's cultural strategy, reinforcing its image as a hub for creativity and innovation.

Impact on the Cultural and Creative Industries

A survey conducted among firms in the Cultural and Creative Industries by the University of Wrocław (Banaszak et al., 2017³²⁶) shortly after Wrocław's ECoC year revealed a generally positive perception of the impact of ECoC. The majority of respondents recognised ECoC's strong impact on the development of culture in the city (73%) and fostering new artistic projects (68%). Increased demand for cultural goods and services (61%) and higher expenditure on culture and entertainment (60%) were also highlighted as

³²³ BEELINE Research and Consulting for Wrocław City Hall (2017), Study of Tourism in Wrocław (Badanie ruchu turystycznego we Wrocławiu)

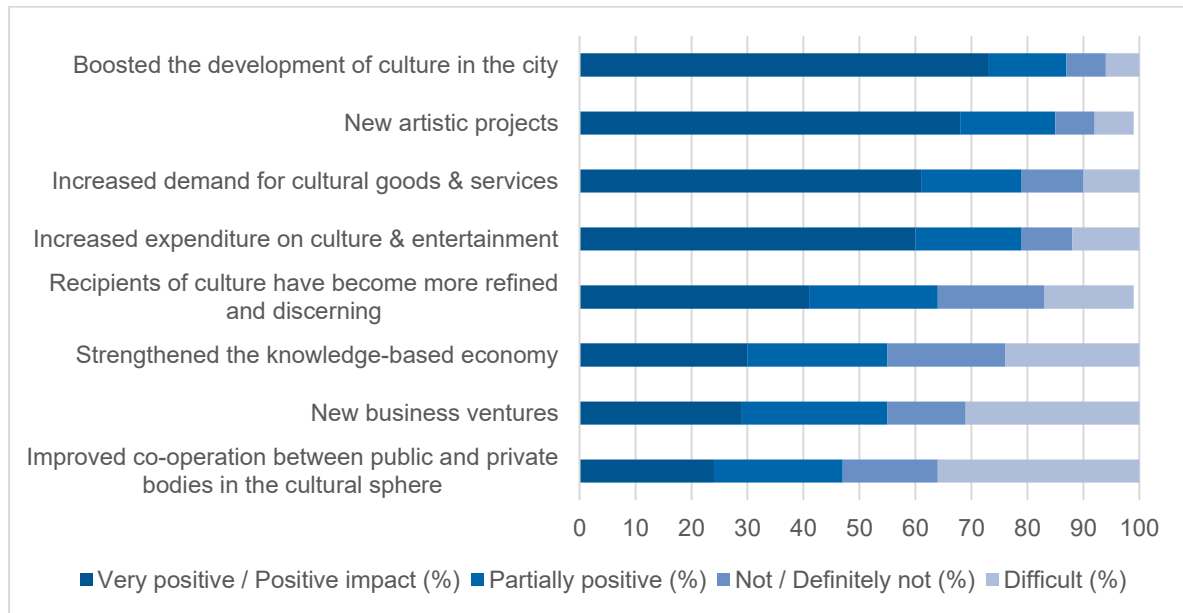
³²⁴ https://wroclaw.stat.gov.pl/download/gfx/wroclaw/pl/defaultaktualnosci/745/1/6/1/informacja_sygnalna_turysyka_2017.pdf

³²⁵ Bianchini, Franco, and Violeta Simjanovska (Eds.) (2022.). Reflections on aspects of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on European Capitals of Culture. Sibelius Academy Research Report Publications

³²⁶ Banaszak E., Błaszczak M., Kajdanek K., Pluta J. (2017). *Terra (in)cognita. The European Cultural of Culture from the Perspective of Wrocław Cultural Institutions*

significant outcomes of holding the title. However, perceived impacts were less pronounced in areas such as improving cooperation between public and private bodies (24%) and fostering new business ventures (29%). While 41% of respondents believed the ECoC refined cultural recipients, 19% disagreed, pointing to mixed opinions in this regard.

Figure 18. Opinion of firms in the cultural and creative industries regarding the impacts of the ECoC

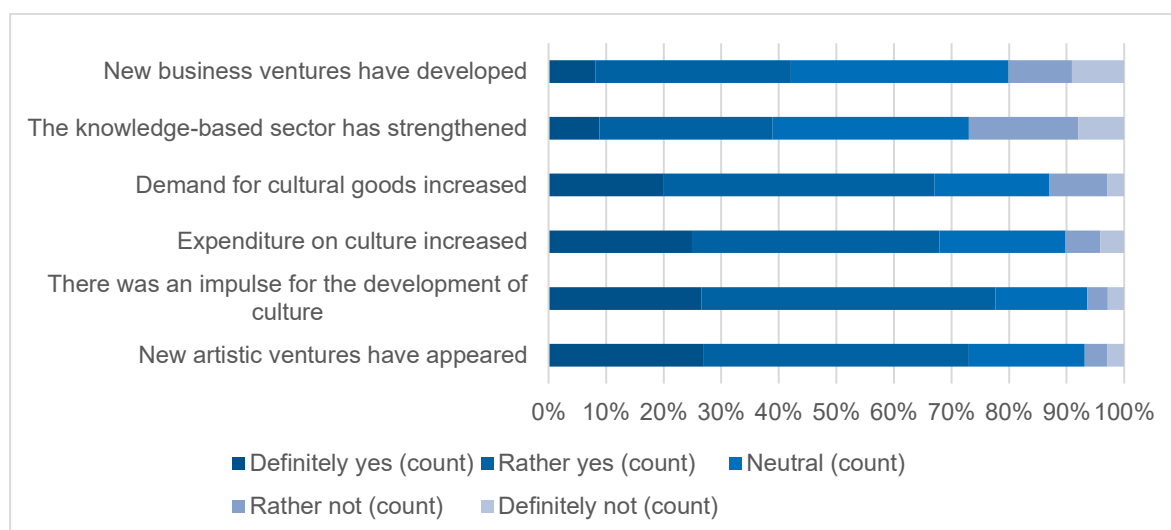


Source: [Banaszak et al., 2017](#).

More recent research based on citizen surveys³²⁷ suggests that the positive effects of the ECoC have persisted. Respondents highlighted ongoing advancements in Wrocław's artistic and cultural landscape, including new artistic ventures, increased cultural spending, and sustained demand for cultural goods and services. Many citizens also observed a trend among audiences of preferring less accessible cultural activities, indicating a more developed and mature cultural environment in the city.

³²⁷ Błaszczyk, Mateusz, and Dawid Krysiński (2023). *European Capital of Culture and creative industries: Real impact or unproven belief? The case of Wrocław. City, Culture and Society*, 35.

Figure 19. Assessment of ECoC's impact on culture development of Wrocław



Source: [Błaszczuk and Krynski, 2023](#).

A boost for regional development

Stakeholder consultations conducted in the context of this study highlighted that the ECoC title had a profound impact not only on Wrocław's cultural and economic landscape but also on the broader Lower Silesian region. Stakeholders highlighted that the designation acted as a **catalyst for regional development** by fostering greater collaboration between local and regional authorities and enhancing the visibility of the region's cultural and economic potential. One of the most notable outcomes was the impetus it provided for advancing regional strategies, such as the *Development Strategy of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship 2020*³²⁸. The ECoC title underscored the importance of integrating cultural dimensions into broader development plans, leading to increased investment in cultural infrastructure, tourism, and creative industries across the region.

Lessons learnt and good practices, including key challenges before, during and after the ECoC and implications for the next iteration of the ECoC action (2-2.5 pages)

This section highlights the best practices that contributed to the success of Wrocław 2016, alongside the challenges faced. The analysis draws on evaluation reports, academic studies, and interviews with stakeholders to identify practices that can guide future ECoCs and address potential challenges in implementing the programme.

Best-practices include:

1. Citizen engagement and local ownership

One of the key areas where the ECoC year had a lasting impact was in the cultural education and involvement of local residents through various programmes, supported by the – still ongoing - micro-grants scheme (MikroGRANTY). This initiative empowered residents to propose and implement cultural projects, diversifying the programme's offerings and fostering grassroots cultural innovation. Despite the relatively low budget of approximately PLN 5,000 (around €1,200) per project, the scheme began with a pilot edition

³²⁸ Available here:

https://umwd.dolnyslask.pl/fileadmin/user_upload/Rozwoj_regionalny/SRWD/SRWD_2020_wersja_ang..pdf

in 2014 and grew significantly, resulting in over 100 implemented projects by the end of the ECoC year: 12 in 2014, 50 in 2015, and 53 in 2016. Most of the applicants were individuals, but participation was also open to informal groups, NGOs, and other organisations. Tailored outreach and collaboration with local players further encouraged active involvement and co-creation in cultural projects. Evidence ³²⁹ shows that the scheme involved 5,176 participants and drew an audience of 25,742. Participants highlighted the programme's role in fostering social integration (16.5%), facilitating free access to cultural events (13.8%), and creating opportunities for personal development (6.4%). Furthermore, the programme has allowed for a deeper connection between citizens and the local authorities, with 39.2% of respondents noting that it was mainly the residents of Wrocław who benefited, although the city's authorities gained in terms of positive public perception and community engagement. As one respondent put it, *'these small initiatives empower people to contribute to their city and feel that they can make a difference.'* ³³⁰

Building on this success, the MikroGRANTY scheme expanded its scope beyond the provision of funding to include initiatives aiming to enhance community involvement and capacity-building. In 2017, two new initiatives³³¹ were introduced: Mikroagora, a meeting for past grant recipients to exchange ideas and collaborate, and the Microgrant Academy, a series of workshops designed to support new coordinators, animators, and activists. In 2018, the Microgrants Workshops were also introduced continuing to provide targeted training for local leaders and community activists on effectively planning and implementing social initiatives. These efforts aimed to decentralise cultural projects, enhance local capacity, and build a strong network of community-driven cultural activity in Wrocław. Overall, the initiative has supported more than 200 projects since its inception, fostering widespread community participation and innovation.

Another notable example was the revitalisation of Wrocław's historic backyards through artistic interventions. The *Backyard Door* initiative, then evolved into the still existing *'Neighbouring'* initiative, facilitated 32 projects across 42 backyards artists during the ECoC year. These projects involved 60 artists collaborating with residents on activities such as, for instance, filming a joint movie, creating communal art installations, and hosting local theatre performances. These efforts attracted nearly 4,500 participants, fostering stronger local connections. Consulted stakeholders highlighted that such initiatives enhanced social cohesion and embedded culture into everyday life.

2. Strong political leadership and effective governance

Strong political leadership, particularly from the Mayor, was pivotal³³². The Mayor prioritised cultural development, enabling a high-quality ECoC application, significant financial resources, and smooth governance. Acting as a figurehead locally, nationally, and internationally, the Mayor elevated Wrocław's cultural and political profile. Moreover, effective governance further underpinned the city's success. The central management entity, IMPART, facilitated collaboration among local authorities, cultural organisations, and private actors. Retaining experienced staff post-ECoC and focusing on capacity-building ensured continuity and bolstered the cultural sector.

3. High-quality and inclusive cultural programming

³²⁹ Dolińska. K. (red.), 2017. Raport „mikroGRANTY ESK 2016” Edycja 2016.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ More info available at: <https://strefakultury.pl/en/microgrants/about/>

³³² European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Fox, T. and Rampton, J., Ex-post evaluation of the 2016 European capitals of culture – Final report, Publications Office, 2017

The ECoC 2016 featured a wide range of high-quality cultural events, blending traditional and contemporary art forms. Flagship events like the 'Flow' multimedia performance, and the International Theatre Festival received widespread acclaim. The city's programming balanced large-scale spectacles with smaller, community-focused projects, ensuring broad appeal and engagement.

The **key challenges** faced throughout the implementation of Wrocław 2016 include:

1. Delayed financial commitment from the National Government

Although national funding was eventually secured, delays caused disruptions in planning, communication, and programme implementation. Earlier commitments could have facilitated better preparation, co-financing, and promotion of events.

2. Time and effort needed to engage local citizens in the creative process

Projects like '*Backyard Door*' and MikroGRANTY, although successful, required significant time and effort to engage residents. Wrocław's experience underscored that citizen engagement requires sustained, tailored support, and decentralised approaches meeting local needs and sensitivity to foster genuine involvement.

3. Developing an evaluation strategy at an early stage

Although an evaluation strategy was eventually put in place through the University of Wrocław, it began relatively late, at the end of 2015. Establishing baseline data earlier would have allowed for a more comprehensive assessment and better tracking of the programme's evolution and long-term impacts³³³.

From these challenges and successes, several **lessons can be drawn for future ECoCs**:

1. Regional integration is key

A key lesson from Wrocław's ECoC 2016 is the significant role that regional integration plays in maximising the impact of the title. The ECoC designation not only benefited Wrocław but also catalysed development across the broader Lower Silesian region. By fostering collaboration between local and regional authorities, the ECoC title helped enhance the region's cultural and economic visibility.

2. Prioritise political support

Strong local leadership is critical for ECoC's success. Political leadership and stability ensure that ECoC initiatives align with long-term development goals and secure the necessary resources for implementation. This commitment facilitated the submission of an ambitious proposal, secured substantial financial resources, and established streamlined governance structures. The Mayor's leadership also ensured cross-departmental coordination within the city, contributing to the programme's successful implementation and alignment with long-term urban development objectives.

3. Continuity in cultural governance

The continued operation of IMPART, the authority responsible for delivering the ECoC programme, played a critical role in maintaining momentum after the event. By retaining

³³³ European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Fox, T. and Rampton, J., Ex-post evaluation of the 2016 European capitals of culture – Final report, Publications Office, 2017

staff and focusing on long-term projects such as artist residencies and the 'Neighbouring' initiative, Wrocław ensured that the cultural capital accrued during 2016 was not lost. Additionally, the city's focus on integrating cultural initiatives into its broader urban development strategy fostered a more sustainable cultural ecosystem.

4. Community engagement enhances legacy

Active citizen participation was critical in ensuring that cultural initiatives became embedded in everyday life. The ECoC programme's success demonstrated how grassroots involvement, such as through micro-grants and community-based projects, can strengthen social cohesion and extend the programme's impact beyond the year of designation. Following 2016, the micro-grants scheme evolved to include initiatives like Mikroagora and the Microgrant Academy, which have further empowered local leaders and activists. These initiatives continue to build on the legacy of ECoC by fostering collaboration, decentralisation, and the development of community-driven cultural projects.

Conclusion

The case study of Wrocław highlights the profound impact of the initiative on the city's cultural, economic, and social landscape. The programme played a key role in enhancing Wrocław's cultural infrastructure, boosting tourism, and elevating its global profile as a hub of creativity and innovation. During the ECoC year, Wrocław attracted significant cultural participation, with approximately 5.2 million people attending events throughout the year. More than 170,000 individuals took part in projects, including 50,000 children and young people³³⁴.

Key lessons from the Wrocław experience include the essential role of **strong political leadership**, which ensured effective governance and coordination, raising the city's cultural and political visibility. **Regional integration** was also vital, amplifying the programme's impact across the broader Lower Silesian region. Furthermore, the **continuity of cultural governance**, through the retention of experienced staff and IMPART's ongoing operations, ensured long-term cultural development through several initiatives.

However, challenges such as delays in national funding and the significant effort required to engage citizens highlight the need for better planning, early commitment, and tailored approaches to community involvement. Despite these challenges, Wrocław's experience offers valuable insights for future ECoC cities, showing how cultural programmes can be embedded into long-term local and regional urban strategies to foster lasting change.

³³⁴ Ibid.

Annex 5: Methodological annex

Work Package I – Inception

The Inception phase consisted in five tasks, including a Kick-off meeting (Task 1), Scoping Interviews (Task 2), Initial Desk Research (Task 3), method fine-tuning (Task 4) and the Inception Report and meeting (Task 5).

The **Kick-off meeting** for the study took place between the contractor and DG EAC in Brussels on 13 March 2024. The finalised minutes were provided to the DG EAC on 02 April 2024.

As part of the Inception phase, a total of **six scoping interviews** were conducted with key stakeholders, which served to inform and refine the methodology for the study.

In addition, the consortium team undertook **initial desk research** (Task 3) and developed a comprehensive review table to allow for the Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) to be carried out efficiently and effectively. A template was also developed for the statistical data mapping to compile and analyse the parameters, strengths and limitations of statistical data of past ECoC from the different available sources and, in particular, previous evaluations undertaken.

The study team **refined methodology, intervention logic, evaluation framework and draft data collection tools** (Task 4) in light of the results of the scoping interviews, REA and the feedback provided by the client during the kick-off meeting and in writing.

The **Inception Report** (Task 5) was submitted on 12 April 2024 and was approved on 16 May 2024, following the reception of comments from DG EAC and the **Inception meeting** (Task 5) held on 07 May 2024. The minutes of the Inception meeting were sent to DG EAC by the contractor on 16 May 2024.

Work Package II – Data collection

Work Package II consisted of four major tasks aimed at collecting relevant data, identifying and reviewing potential data gaps, and engaging with all relevant stakeholder groups through a range of consultation activities.

Task 6: Data matrix

A data matrix was developed to compile quantitative and qualitative, primary and secondary data aligned to the evaluation framework. Its purpose was to collect monitoring and evaluation data from ECoC titleholders in a systematic and comprehensive way to support other work packages. The complete matrix consists of data from ECoCs from 2013 to 2022, covering the years for which evaluation reports are available.

To complete the table, ECoC ex-post evaluations and city evaluations were used. In total, **60 key indicators** were included, with corresponding data from each city (where it was available) added to the tool accordingly. Each indicator was then arranged in accordance with the relevant evaluation questions they related to. It should be noted that the majority of data compiled related to the Effectiveness and Efficiency evaluation questions, given the more quantitative nature of these evaluation criteria. Less was found on Coherence, Relevance, and EU added value.

Task 7: Desk research

Task 7.1: Literature review (REA)

A literature review was performed first through initial desk research, which aimed to gather extensive secondary data from previous studies and evaluations linked to the ECoC action at the EU and Member State level. During this phase, **199 documents** were retrieved, encompassing various categories:

- background documents, including legislation and programme documentation;
- European-level evaluations, studies and reports (ECoC years 2013-2019);
- official evaluations of ECoC and reports (ECoC years 2013-2019);
- pre-selection, selection and monitoring documents produced by the ECoC expert panel (ECoC years 2020-2029);
- title-holding cities' evaluations, strategies and databases;
- academic literature;
- additional publications produced by relevant stakeholders, such as the University Network of the European ECoC (UNECC) outputs, the CECCUT outputs and the legacy from the ECoC capacity-building project taking place between October 2019 and May 2022.

A comprehensive **literature review table** (in Annex 7) encompasses the documents retrieved, the date and language of publication, a summary of their content, useful keywords to easily identify the main topics covered, and an idea of their relevance (low; medium; high) for the purposes of the evaluation. An in-depth analysis of the documents was then performed to populate the data matrix and extract key findings in relation to each evaluation questions. A summary note was also developed to capture the main findings on these key questions.

Task 7.2: Statistical data mapping

A data mapping exercise was conducted to identify the widest possible set of publicly available quantitative datasets to contribute to the evaluation process. This was aimed at contextualising and complementing the findings of the literature review and stakeholder consultations. Quantitative datasets were identified for a range of indicators related to the cultural sector. These included data sources such as:

- Eurostat statistics at the city level and above (including Gross Value-Added figures, cultural engagement and cultural employment),
- OECD regions and cities data (around improvements to cultural infrastructure),
- The Cultural and Creative Cities monitor (primarily focused on cultural engagement), and
- European Social Surveys.

These datasets were assessed for their quality. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were established, with requirements for the data to be available at the city or region level and for the data to be aligned with ECoC objectives. Some additional desirable criteria included availability of the data across many – if not most – cities across Europe and for the data to be available over a sufficient timescale.

Despite wide-ranging data sources, many of these sources were either incomplete or did not cover the required period to be useful for this evaluation. Geographical scale was also a limiting factor with many data sources not at a low enough granularity to provide valuable insight. Datasets at the city level were ideal for this analysis, with NUTS 2 and 3 both sufficient but less useful. Some datasets were, however, only available at the national level. The primary output of this task is listed in Annex 8, which presents the relevant datasets compiled into a table complete with corresponding ECoC operational objective, coverage, time covered, and a summary assessment of the data quality.

Task 8: Consultation activities

Task 8.2: Interviews

Under this task, the study team carried out in-depth, semi-structured **interviews with key stakeholder groups involved in the ECoC action** at the European, national and local levels. The following categories of stakeholders were targeted as part of the consultation strategy:

- **EU-level stakeholders**, including:
 - EU-level policymakers;
 - EU-level cultural networks directly or indirectly involved in the ECoC action and/or the cultural sector.
- **National-level stakeholders**, including:
 - Key stakeholders from title-holding cities for the period 2013-2019 (local cultural organisations or networks and/or local authorities involved in the management and delivery of ECoC³³⁵);
 - National level public authorities involved in the management and delivery of the ECoC³³⁶, based on a final sample of countries agreed upon between DG EAC and the contractor at Inception stage³³⁷.

Dedicated interview guides were designed for EU-level stakeholders, national public authorities, and city-level stakeholders for the ECoC 2013-2019 and approved by the Commission in the Inception phase.

Some 64 interviews have been conducted and transcribed by the study team and were used to inform the findings for the evaluation questions as part of this report. This means a total of **64 interviews have been conducted** from an agreed target of 59. A comprehensive overview of the number and type of stakeholders consulted to date is available in Table 24 below.

Table 24. Overview of EU-level interviews conducted

Stakeholder type	EU-level policymakers	EU-level cultural networks
Number of interviews conducted	7	5
Total (<i>Target: up to 10 interviews</i>)	12	

Source: Ecorys, 2024.

³³⁵ E.g. representatives of the (former) ECoC Foundations, relevant representatives of local City Councils or administrations.

³³⁶ E.g. relevant representatives of the national Ministries of Culture or of the relevant managing authorities for the ECoC competition

³³⁷ The final sample included 21 countries: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden, as well as Norway.

Table 25. Overview of national-level interviews conducted

Stakeholder type	National level public authorities	City-level stakeholders (ECoC 2013-2019)	
		Organisation managing the ECoC	Civil society organisations/cultural organisations
Number of interviews conducted	19	21	12* ³³⁸
Total (<i>Target: up to 49 interviews</i>)	52		

Source: Ecorys, 2024.

A comprehensive overview of all stakeholders consulted to date is provided in Annex 6.

Challenges and mitigation measures

Some challenges were identified in reaching out to individuals who took part in the management of the ECoC during the period 2013-2019. Some individuals who held key positions in relation to the ECoC 2013-2019 (e.g. former members of the local ECoC Foundations) have left their positions or moved on to new roles in different organisations. To mitigate this issue, national experts from the study team were asked to either trace back key stakeholders' contact details (where possible), or to identify their successor(s) and/or relevant alternative contacts within the local actors (i.e. within the ECoC Foundations which are still active, or relevant members of the city councils/administrations). Similar limitations were reported in reaching out to some national-level authorities (e.g. Ministries of Culture). Some targeted national authorities declined the invitation to participate in the consultation due to lack of knowledge about the ECoC action (e.g. due to staff turnover).

Task 8.3: Public consultation

A Public Consultation was launched on 18 June 2024 and closed on 24 September 2024. A total of **60 responses** were received, of which 58 were from respondents in the EU covering 22 Member States. It is important to note that a vast majority of the respondents were individual EU citizens (38%), who may have less direct experience in implementing the ECoC action in their city. Nevertheless, 75% of respondents said they were quite or very familiar with the ECoC action and 22% of responses came from public authorities and 17% from NGOs. Also noteworthy is that nearly one in four respondents had no or little familiarity with the ECoC selection process, while one in three had no or little familiarity with the monitoring process. This highlights some gaps in terms of respondents' understanding of the areas covered by this study. Nevertheless, our other consultation activities, notably the focus groups with the panel experts and the numerous interviews with national public authorities and local organisations managing the ECoC serve to bridge these gaps by providing the views of experts on these topics.

A summary of the responses is provided in Annex 3.

³³⁸ Please note that some former ECoC Foundations 2013-2019 (organisations managing the ECoC) have evolved into cultural civil society organisations over time. This was the case for two of them, which have thus been counted both as 'organisations managing the ECoC' and as 'civil society organisations' in the table.

Task 8.4: Online Focus Groups

A series of **six focus groups** were organised, with four in the first half of July 2024, and two at the end of August 2024, with the following breakdown of participants:

- three focus groups were organised with national and European expert panel members, for a total of 21 participants;
- three focus groups with cities, two with ECoCs, and one with preselected cities, with a total of 19 participants (12 ECoC representatives and 7 from preselected cities).

A summary report was produced after each focus group, which fed into the body of evidence analysed for this final report. Overall, participation was lower from preselected cities due to difficulties in securing relevant participants from this category of stakeholder. To compensate for this, interviews with the CultureNEXT, a network bringing together cities that were not selected to become ECoC, were conducted.

Task 9: Case studies

The case studies aim at capturing more in-depth insights around the impacts of selected ECoCs and deep-diving into specific themes of the evaluation. The case studies were selected in consultation with the client during the Inception phase of the project. The selection includes the following eight cities:

1. **Aarhus**
2. **Elefsina**
3. **Galway**
4. **Kaunas**
5. **Leeuwarden**
6. **Matera**
7. **Novi Sad**
8. **Wrocław**

The case studies are provided in Annex 4.

Case study drafting guidelines and templates were developed to ensure consistency between the case studies, and additional interviews were carried out for each of the case studies.

Work Package III – Impact Evaluation

This WP encompassed the analysis and triangulation of all data collected to answer the evaluation questions (Tasks 10.1 and 10.2) and conduct the contribution analysis (Task 10.3).

In particular, Task 10.3 aimed to test three hypotheses to facilitate the exploration of the contribution pathway between the ECoC initiative and the defined impact area:

- (Intermediate) Hypothesis 1 (H1): In preparing for and becoming an ECoC, title cities implement activities to raise funds and invest in the city's cultural and tourism infrastructure;
- (Intermediate) Hypothesis 2 (H2): In preparing for and becoming an ECoC, title cities increase the volume, diversity and quality of cultural activities and events using ECoC-related funding to invest in organisations or projects producing cultural activities or events;
- (Main) Hypothesis 3 (H3): Through the increased investment in the city's cultural and tourist infrastructure, activities and events, employment opportunities in areas related to culture and tourism improve in title cities.

Work Package IV – Key issues for a possible successor

This WP encompassed the identification of key challenges and issues to be considered for the future of the action (Task 11) and the implementation of a dissemination workshop. The dissemination workshop saw 20 attendees including expert panel members, ECoC representatives, independent researchers, European networks of cities and representatives of European institutions.

Annex 6: List of stakeholders consulted for interviews

	Stakeholder organisations consulted	Number of interviews conducted
EU-level stakeholders		Target: 10 interviews Achieved: 12 interviews
Polymakers	European Commission (JRC; DG NEAR) Council of the European Union European Parliament Committee of the Regions European External action Service	7 interviews
EU-level organisations and networks	University Network of European European Capitals of Culture (UNeECC) European Network of Cultural Centres European Union National Institutes of Culture (EUNIC) Culture action Europe Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research / CECCUT Project ('Capitales européennes de la Culture et Cohésion Urbaine Transfrontalière')	5 interviews
National level stakeholders		Target: 49 interviews Achieved: 52 interviews
<i>City-level interviews (ECoC 2013-2019)</i>		Total: 27
Marseille (FR)	Provence Tourisme Marseille Tourism, Leisure and Convention Bureau Friche la Belle de Mai	3 interviews
Košice (SK)	Creative Industry Košice (CIKE) Tabacka	2 interviews
Riga (LT)	Riga 2014 Foundation	1 interview
Umeå (SE)	Umeå municipality Umeå Art Gallery (Umeå Konsthall)	2 interviews
Mons (BE)	Foundation Mons 2025 (former Foundation Mons 2015) Mons museums network ('Pôle muséal de la Ville de Mons')	2 interviews
Plzeň (CZ)	Plzeň city administration	2 interviews

	Stakeholder organisations consulted	Number of interviews conducted
	DEPO 2015 (former Plzeň 2015 Foundation)	
San Sebastián (ES)	San Sebastián City Council Donostia Kultura	2 interviews
Wrocław (PL)	Department of City Promotion and Tourism of the City Hall of Wrocław National Forum of Music	2 interviews
Aarhus (DK)	Former Aarhus Foundation	1 interview
Paphos (CY)	Former Paphos 2017 Foundation	2 interviews
Leeuwarden (NL)	Leeuwarden municipality Arcadia	2 interviews
Valetta (MT)	Valetta Cultural Agency Malta Tourism Authority	2 interviews
Matera (IT)	Fondazione Matera 2019 La Scaletta	2 interviews
Plovdiv (BG)	Plovdiv 2019 Foundation Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts 'Prof. Asen Diamandiev'	2 interviews
<i>City-level interviews (ECoC 2022-2023)</i>		Total: 6
Novi Sad (RS)	Association Kulturanova	1 interview
Kaunas (LT)	Kaunas 2022 Lithuanian Council for Culture	2 interviews
Elefsina (EL)	Elefsina 2023 Youth ECoC Association CultTerra	3 interviews
<i>National public authorities' interviews</i>		Total: 19
Austria	Ministry of Culture	1 interview
Belgium	Ministère de la Communauté française; Department Cultuur; Jeugd and media	1 interview
Croatia	Ministry of Culture	1 interview
Cyprus	Ministry of Culture	1 interview

	Stakeholder organisations consulted	Number of interviews conducted
Estonia	Ministry of Culture and Permanent Representation in Brussels	1 interview
Finland	Ministry of Culture	1 interview
France	Ministry of Culture	1 interview
Greece	Ministry of Culture	1 interview
Hungary	Permanent Representation in Brussels	1 interview
Ireland	Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport, and Media	1 interview
Luxembourg	Ministry of Culture	1 interview
Lithuania	Ministry of Culture	1 interview
Norway	Ministry of Culture and Bodo representatives	1 interview
Poland	Ministry of Culture	1 interview
Portugal	Cultural Strategy, Planning, and Evaluation Office (GEPAC)	1 interview
Romania	Romanian Cultural Institute in Brussels	1 interview
Slovakia	Ministry of Culture	1 interview
Slovenia	Ministry of Culture	1 interview
Sweden	Swedish Arts Council	1 interview

Source: Ecorys, 2024.

Annex 7: Literature Review Table

This annex is provided separately.

Annex 8: Statistical Data Mapping

This annex is provided separately.

Annex 9: Contribution analysis

Contribution hypothesis	Summary of evidence from the Data Matrix (Task 6)	Summary of evidence from the Statistical data mapping (Task 7.2)	Summary of evidence from Public Consultation (Task 8.3)	Summary of evidence from Consultation activities - Interviews (Task 8.2) and Focus groups (8.4)	Summary of evidence from Case studies (Task 9)	Overall assessment
H1: In preparing for and becoming an ECoC, title cities implement activities to raise funds and invest in the city's cultural and tourism infrastructure	The research team has identified three indicators coming from the previous ECoC evaluations, namely, the number of staff members, the investment in cultural infrastructure and the number of participants during the ECoC year. The three indicators are not fully available for all ECoCs covered by this evaluation and the time points selected for this contribution analysis. Nevertheless, they still provide an indication of the impact of the ECoC title in relation to Hypothesis 1. Number of staff members: This indicator shows a steady increase in the number of people allocated to work on ECoC over the year leading to the title year. The indicator shows however high fluctuations between the title year and the years before and after. Most cities (11 out of 13 cities) have	There is little to no evidence from Task 7.2 to support Hypothesis 1 due to the lack of data availability for ECoC titleholders and time points considered.	Seven questions from the Public Consultation are relevant to this hypothesis. - About 80% of the respondents (n=48) agreed on the relevance of ECoC in strengthening the cultural offer in title-holding cities through better cultural strategies at least to 'some extent'. - About 75% of the respondents (n=45) agreed at least to 'some extent' that the ECoC title contributes to enhancing the image of the city. - Around 65% of the respondents (n=39) agreed on the ECoC title supporting the long-term city regeneration. - About 63% of the respondents (n=38) agreed that ECoC strengthened the cultural sector of the title-holding cities at least to 'some extent'. - Around 60% of the respondents (n=36)	Overall, the consultation activities provide evidence that moderately supports H1. While strong examples of successful investments in cultural infrastructure linked to ECoC were provided, some challenges in securing funding emerged too. Numerous examples of investments in cultural infrastructure linked to ECoC were provided. For example, one city-level interviewee noted: 'The private investment in the event was quite good and we also received substantial EU funds from the ERDF, which were invested in culture, tourism, and heritage. Over the five years before and during the ECoC	Evidence from the case studies provides strong support for H1. Case study cities made significant investments in cultural and tourism infrastructure as part of the ECoC initiative. Key evidence supporting this assessment include: Kaunas: Renovation of existing venues and creation of new attractions in preparation for the ECoC, such as the 'Mythical Beast of Kaunas'. Matera: Substantial investments in cultural infrastructure, including the renovation of Cava del Sole	Evidence from the sources considered overall supports to a moderate to strong extent the hypothesis that in preparing for and becoming an ECoC, title cities implement activities to raise funds and invest in the city's cultural and tourism infrastructure. ECoCs report high levels of investments in cultural and tourism infrastructures in view of hosting the title. Overall, stakeholders consulted confirmed that ECoC played a central role in gathering and

Contribution hypothesis	Summary of evidence from the Data Matrix (Task 6)	Summary of evidence from the Statistical data mapping (Task 7.2)	Summary of evidence from Public Consultation (Task 8.3)	Summary of evidence from Consultation activities - Interviews (Task 8.2) and Focus groups (8.4)	Summary of evidence from Case studies (Task 9)	Overall assessment
	shown an increase in the number of staff members working during the implementation year. The Riga Foundation started with two employees increasing to 33 in the title year. In Valletta, following the award of the title the team increased from the original two staff members to six, to then increase again to 40 staff members. In Galway the staff has tripled from 2017 to 2020, and San Sebastián increased twelve times the number of staff members working for ECoC, from 5 in 2014 to 61 in 2016. Also, Kaunas has employed 143 staff members, of which 91 worked in 2022, which accounted for 64% of the total workforce. Investment in cultural infrastructure: This indicator shows that,		responded that ECoC supported the allocation of private and public funding to the development of cultural infrastructures in the title-holding cities at least to 'some extent'. - Around 70% (n=22) of the respondents agreed that the results achieved during the title year would have not been possible without ECoC. However, only 22% (n=7) believe the results would have not been possible to a 'moderate extent'. - Four respondents believed there were positive effects for the city in bidding for ECoC, whilst three indicated that even not being selected had some benefits. The Public Consultation results overall support Hypothesis 1; however, the low number of respondents is a strong limitation of this data. For this reason, the evidence is	year, this investment led to the opening of five new museums, the restoration of the belfry, the renovation of the historical centre, and the development of new facilities such as a tourism office and a congress centre.' (Interview 21). Another interviewee stated: 'Around €70 million were invested in infrastructure, and an additional €30 million in soft activities. These efforts required significant coordination.' (Interview 40). However, there were challenges associated with investing in cultural and tourism infrastructure as well, such as securing private investment. One interview highlighted: 'One challenge for the city was to secure a	and establishment of I-DEA and Open Design School. Novi Sad: Significant investments including transforming industrial buildings into cultural centres. Wrocław: Significant infrastructure investments like the Capitol Music Theatre renovation and National Forum of Music establishment It is also worth noting that the evidence was weak to moderate in other case studies, such as Galway and Elefsina. In these cities, some evidence of investment in cultural and tourism infrastructure was	allocating these investments. The large number of participants in ECoC events and the stronger international presence of title cities are also conducive to increased investments in the capacity of the city to host tourists and offer the required services.

Contribution hypothesis	Summary of evidence from the Data Matrix (Task 6)	Summary of evidence from the Statistical data mapping (Task 7.2)	Summary of evidence from Public Consultation (Task 8.3)	Summary of evidence from Consultation activities - Interviews (Task 8.2) and Focus groups (8.4)	Summary of evidence from Case studies (Task 9)	Overall assessment
	on average, investment in cultural infrastructure is 13 times higher than the ECoCs budget (data available for nine ECoCs). Number of participants during the ECoC year: Although not directly linked to tourism infrastructure, this indicator can be considered a proxy suggesting that cities had to invest in and develop sufficient infrastructures to manage, provide services and accommodate the large number of participants in ECoC activities. Overall, evidence from Task 6 suggests a positive impact of ECoC on the city's cultural and tourism infrastructure. However, the lack of data for a number of cities and the indirect nature of some of the indicators		considered to provide weak to moderate support for H1.	private investor. To my knowledge, they didn't do this. This is something for cities that are not capitals to keep in mind that securing funding is not always so easy.' (Interview 43). Additionally, some infrastructure investments may have been part of broader urban development plans unrelated to the ECoC initiative. Overall, the balance between strong examples of investment in cultural and tourism infrastructure related to the ECoC initiative and challenges in securing funding led to the consultation activities being assessed as providing moderate evidence supporting H1.	identified, although the direct link to ECoC preparation and implementation was less clear. However, the presence of strong evidence across a number of case studies overall indicates strong support for H1.	

Contribution hypothesis	Summary of evidence from the Data Matrix (Task 6)	Summary of evidence from the Statistical data mapping (Task 7.2)	Summary of evidence from Public Consultation (Task 8.3)	Summary of evidence from Consultation activities - Interviews (Task 8.2) and Focus groups (8.4)	Summary of evidence from Case studies (Task 9)	Overall assessment
	suggest categorising this evidence as moderate .					
H2: In preparing for and becoming an ECoC, title cities increase the volume, diversity and quality of cultural activities and events using ECoC-related funding to invest in organisations or projects producing cultural activities or events	The research team has identified four indicators relevant to Hypothesis 2, namely: the budget spent on cultural programming, the number of events organised during the ECoC timeframe, the average level of attendance at cultural events prior to ECoC and the number of cross-border partnerships established. - Budget spent on cultural programming: Out of the 18 titleholders analysed, only five invested less than 50% of their budget on cultural programming, whilst the other 13 committed more than 60% of their budget on cultural programming. - Number of events organised during the ECoC timeframe: Data consistently shows that the number of activities and events tends to	There is little to no evidence from Task 7.2 to support Hypothesis 2 due to the lack of data availability for ECoC titleholders and time points considered. .	Five questions from the Public Consultation are relevant to this hypothesis. 77% of the respondents (n=46) responded that ECoC encouraged the implementation of a large number of cultural activities with a strong European dimension at least to 'some extent'; 65% of the respondents (n=39) believe that the action supported the increase in access to and participation in culture by traditional and non-traditional audience at least to 'some extent'; - Approximately 64% of the respondents (n=38) believe that ECoC expanded long-term the cultural offers of the cities to at least a 'moderate extent'; - Approximately 67% of the respondents (n=40) of the Public Consultation indicated some level of complementarity with	The assessment of consultation activities found strong evidence supporting H2, indicating that the ECoC initiative contributed to the increased volume, diversity, and quality of cultural activities and events in title cities. For instance, one interview with a national authority reported: 'ECoC created new offers of cultural activities. In setting up a Community Hub, it raised the profile of the city and the number of visitors, organizing more than 800 projects.' (Interview 16). Another interview highlighted the success in Wrocław: 'ECoC in Wrocław can be considered a	The evidence from the case studies provides strong support for H2, illustrating with specific examples that the ECoC initiative significantly contributed to the increased the volume, diversity, and quality of cultural activities and events. Key evidence provided by case studies include: Kaunas: Evidence of increased cultural activities, such as the 'Tempo Academy' and 'Designing Happiness'. Matera: The city hosted over 1,300 events, significantly increasing cultural offerings.	Evidence from across the evaluation tasks provide strong support for H2, in that the ECoC initiative contributes to the volume, diversity, and quality of cultural activities and events. ECoCs committed a substantial portion of their budget to cultural events and activities, and multiple evidence sources indicated that there were substantial increases in cultural activities and events held linked to the ECoC. The evidence also indicated that these events and activities had a strong European

Contribution hypothesis	Summary of evidence from the Data Matrix (Task 6)	Summary of evidence from the Statistical data mapping (Task 7.2)	Summary of evidence from Public Consultation (Task 8.3)	Summary of evidence from Consultation activities - Interviews (Task 8.2) and Focus groups (8.4)	Summary of evidence from Case studies (Task 9)	Overall assessment
	increase in the years leading to and during the ECoC year, in terms of both quantity and diversity. Notably, San Sebastián and Kaunas each hosted more than 3,000 events (3,475 in San Sebastián only in 2016 and 4,514 between 2017 and 2022 in Kaunas). A survey conducted in Esch-Sur-Alzette reported that 88% of the respondents agreed the ECoC improved the region's cultural offer. • Average level of attendance at cultural events prior to ECoC: In addition, 11 out of the 18 titleholders analysed here reported a general increase in the average attendance at cultural events prior to ECoC. In particular, Plovdiv reported an increase		other EU initiatives, 63% (n=38) reported national initiatives at least complementary. It is however worth mentioning that 17% of the respondents did not believe that ECoC had a strong impact on social inclusion, providing to some extent some evidence refuting hypothesis 2. The Public Consultation results overall support Hypothesis 2; however, the low number of respondents is a strong limitation to the strength of the evidence. For this reason, evidence is considered weak to moderate.	success with around 2000 events, 100 ECoC-related presentations abroad, 2000 volunteers, 170,000 people involved in the preparation of ECoC-related events, and more than 5 million tourists.' (<i>Interview 39</i>). However, some interviews noted negative impacts, such as the loss of grassroots cultural spaces: 'Unfortunately, there have been no positive impacts. On the contrary, over these eight years, the city has 'lost' most grassroots cultural spaces and venues, both self-managed and cooperative (many have closed down).' (<i>Interview 41</i>). Taken together, the evidence from the consultation	• Novi Sad: Evidence of a substantial increase in activities, such as the 'Kaleidoscope of Culture' project. • Wrocław: Events such as the 'Flow' performance and International Theatre Festival indicate an increase in the offering of cultural activities and events. The evidence with respect to Galway was moderate; while there was evidence of some increase in the provision of cultural events and activities, the diversity and quality of these events was less clear. However,	dimension and served to increase access to and participation in culture.

Contribution hypothesis	Summary of evidence from the Data Matrix (Task 6)	Summary of evidence from the Statistical data mapping (Task 7.2)	Summary of evidence from Public Consultation (Task 8.3)	Summary of evidence from Consultation activities - Interviews (Task 8.2) and Focus groups (8.4)	Summary of evidence from Case studies (Task 9)	Overall assessment
	in the share of those who often visit cultural events from 27% in 2017 to 44% in 2019. Number of cross-border partnerships established: The ECoC title seems to have had a positive effect on the number of cross-country collaborations and partnerships for the 13 titleholders for which sufficient data is available. For instance, Leeuwarden and San Sebastián respectively reported 1,600 and 834 cross-border collaborations. Kaunas also developed 1,663 partnerships with international institutions. Evidence from Task 6 suggests that, during the preparation phase, the title cities have increased the volume, diversity and quality of cultural activities and overall committed a large			activities supporting H2 is strong, given the substantial increase in cultural activities and events despite some noted negative impacts.	Galway ECoC was heavily impacted by Covid-19 pandemic, reducing the reliability of this case. Overall, the evidence across the case studies provides strong support for H2.	

Contribution hypothesis	Summary of evidence from the Data Matrix (Task 6)	Summary of evidence from the Statistical data mapping (Task 7.2)	Summary of evidence from Public Consultation (Task 8.3)	Summary of evidence from Consultation activities - Interviews (Task 8.2) and Focus groups (8.4)	Summary of evidence from Case studies (Task 9)	Overall assessment
	share of the ECoC budget to cultural programming. The evidence from the first two indicators (the budget spent on cultural programming and the number of events organised during the ECoC) is rich in details and number of observations. Evidence for the attendance at cultural events and the number of cross-border collaborations is reported less clearly, so the effect is somewhat weaker. However, it is still positive. Overall, data suggests a positive contribution of the ECoC action to Hypothesis 2, the evidence strength is assessed as moderate to strong.					
H3: Through the increased investment in the city's cultural and tourist infrastructure, activities and events, employment opportunities	The research team has little to no evidence from Task 6 to support the hypothesis that employment opportunities in areas related to culture and tourism improve in title cities as a result of increased investment in the city's cultural and tourist	There was weak evidence supporting H3 from Task 7.2. A detailed assessment of statistical indicators was undertaken to assess whether quantitative data	Four questions from the Public Consultation provided evidence for Hypothesis 3 with varying degrees of relevance in relation to the hypothesis. 63% of the respondents (n=36) believed that ECoC strengthened the cultural sector in the	The evidence from the consultation activities moderately supports H3 , with some indication that the ECoC initiative contributed to improved employment opportunities in the cultural and tourism	The evidence from the case studies provides moderate support for H3 . Some case study cities showed evidence of substantial improvements in employment opportunities related	The evidence from across the evaluation tasks supporting H3 is categorised as moderate , in that employment opportunities in areas related to culture and tourism improve in

Contribution hypothesis	Summary of evidence from the Data Matrix (Task 6)	Summary of evidence from the Statistical data mapping (Task 7.2)	Summary of evidence from Public Consultation (Task 8.3)	Summary of evidence from Consultation activities - Interviews (Task 8.2) and Focus groups (8.4)	Summary of evidence from Case studies (Task 9)	Overall assessment
in areas related to culture and tourism improve in title cities	infrastructure, activities and events. Evidence around the human resources allocated to work on ECoC was provided for 18 titleholders. This data generally indicates that the resources allocated increased in the title year. For example, following the award of the title, staff hired in Valetta increased from 2 to 60 people. However, while this evidence is strong, its relevance to the hypothesis is low given that it does focus on the contribution mechanism, i.e., how employment opportunities in areas related to culture and tourism improve <i>through</i> increased investment in the city's cultural and tourist infrastructure, activities and events. On this basis, the evidence offered in support of hypothesis 3 by Task 6 is considered weak.	could be used to test H3. To provide a reliable assessment of the contribution of the ECoC initiative to relevant quantitative measures of impact, indicators would need to be available over an extended period before and after the title year across a number of cities. Only a few indicators met the above criteria and were analysed, namely: employment in arts (NUTS 2); gross value added (GVA) at basic prices for arts, entertainment and recreation	local and regional area to at least 'some extent'. 75% of the respondents (n=45) highlighted that ECoC led to an increase in the number of national and international tourists at least to 'some extent', which indirectly may have fuelled employment in areas related to culture. 60% of the respondents (n=36) also highlighted that ECoC supported the development of quality tourism to at least a 'moderate extent'. - There is also some evidence refuting the hypothesis from the Public Consultation. About 33% of the respondents (n=20) believe that ECoC supported only to a little extent the provision of training of cultural professionals, whilst 10% (n=6) believe that ECoC did not support it at all. Overall, evidence provided by the Public Consultation	sectors through increased investment in cultural and tourist infrastructure, activities, but the evidence was somewhat mixed. One national authority interview highlighted: 'Yes, the number of tourists and employment increased significantly during the European Capital of Culture year and subsequent years, which continued to develop the sector independently. Other sectors also benefited from the initiative, with Košice achieving approximately 800,000 visitors, generating an estimated €35.8 million in visitor expenditures on accommodation, food, transport, and shopping in the region. This spending directly and indirectly	to culture and tourism through increased investment in cultural infrastructure and the provision of cultural events/activities, while others show more limited evidence. Specific examples include: Aarhus: Some evidence of improvements in employment opportunities, though the direct link to ECoC investments is less clear. Kaunas: Some evidence of an increase in employment through initiatives such as the 'Tempo Academy'. Matera: Strong evidence of significant increases in employment	title cities through the increased investment in the city's cultural and tourist infrastructure, activities and events. There was some evidence to indicate that the ECoC initiative had positive direct and indirect contributions towards employment opportunities. For example, there was some evidence that the ECoC initiative contributed to an increase in domestic and international tourism, which may indirectly fuel employment in related areas. There was also some evidence from the case studies that improvement in

Contribution hypothesis	Summary of evidence from the Data Matrix (Task 6)	Summary of evidence from the Statistical data mapping (Task 7.2)	Summary of evidence from Public Consultation (Task 8.3)	Summary of evidence from Consultation activities - Interviews (Task 8.2) and Focus groups (8.4)	Summary of evidence from Case studies (Task 9)	Overall assessment
		(city), and number of nights spent in tourist accommodation (city). Analysis of the first two indicators showed no conclusive evidence of the contribution of ECoC on title cities (data was available for NUTS 2 areas, including 7 title-holding cities for employment in arts, and available for 9 cities for GVA). Indeed, these indicators are affected by a multitude of factors which, without adjusting for, could obscure any contribution of the initiative.	supports Hypothesis 3. The evidence, however, offers little insight into the impact on employment opportunities. Some of the indicators point indirectly to a positive effect on tourism and the expansion of the cultural sector, which in turn might have increased the employment in the ECoC titleholders. However, there is also some weak evidence indicating that the initiative is not relevant to the training and upskilling of cultural professionals, seemingly refuting H3. That is why, considering the limited number of questions and the presence of refuting evidence, the Public Consultation is considered as providing weak evidence supporting H3.	induced additional production across the regional economy, including household consumption totalling €167 million. Furthermore, it boosted employee incomes in the Košice region by €23.6 million and created 1,449 full-time equivalent jobs.' (<i>Interview 13</i>). Another interview affirmed: 'The ECoC title had notable socio-economic effects, particularly in terms of employment within the tourism sector.' (<i>Interview 21</i>). However, it is worth noting that broader socio-economic impacts were also noted, although these were rather vague: 'Broader socio-economic impact was negative.' (<i>Interview 33</i>).	opportunities, with clear links to the ECoC initiative. • Galway: Weak evidence with limited direct links between some improvement in employment opportunities in the sector and the ECoC initiative. • Novi Sad: Strong evidence of substantial increases in employment opportunities, supported by investments in cultural infrastructure and activities related to ECoC. • Elefsina: Moderate evidence with some increases in employment	employment opportunities was linked to ECoC-related investments. However, statistical indicators provided weak support for this hypothesis, and other evidence sources provided some refuting evidence, e.g., that ECoC had limited support for training cultural professionals, which may indirectly hinder employment opportunities.

Contribution hypothesis	Summary of evidence from the Data Matrix (Task 6)	Summary of evidence from the Statistical data mapping (Task 7.2)	Summary of evidence from Public Consultation (Task 8.3)	Summary of evidence from Consultation activities - Interviews (Task 8.2) and Focus groups (8.4)	Summary of evidence from Case studies (Task 9)	Overall assessment
		For the third indicator, however, there appears to be weak to moderate evidence of a positive contribution of ECoC on the number of nights spent in tourist accommodation establishments. From the two years prior to the event, there is an average increase of 37% in the overall number of nights spent in tourist accommodation. While the same caveat mentioned above applies here, this may indicate a heightened interest from tourists in the city as a result of the initiative.		Overall, the evidence from the consultation activities supporting H3 is moderate, with articulations of positive socio-economic outcomes providing some evidence underpinning this hypothesis.	but limited direct links to the ECoC initiative. • Wrocław: Strong evidence of significant increases in employment opportunities in the sector, supported by investments in infrastructure and activities. While strong evidence supporting H3 has been provided by some case studies (e.g., Matera, Novi Sad, Wrocław), the evidence is weak to moderate for other cities (e.g., Kaunas, Elefsina, Galway). On balance, then, the evidence from the case studies provides moderate support for H3.	

Contribution hypothesis	Summary of evidence from the Data Matrix (Task 6)	Summary of evidence from the Statistical data mapping (Task 7.2)	Summary of evidence from Public Consultation (Task 8.3)	Summary of evidence from Consultation activities - Interviews (Task 8.2) and Focus groups (8.4)	Summary of evidence from Case studies (Task 9)	Overall assessment
		Overall, the limited quantity of data, as well as the potential for confounding, constitute a strong limitation in the strength of this evidence source, which provides weak evidence supporting H3 .				

Annex 10: List of title cities and bidding cities

The table below provides an overview of the Member States that hosted or will host the ECoC for the period 2013-2030 as well as the respective title holding cities and bidding cities.

Year	Hosting country	Title city	Unsuccessful bidding cities having reached the final selection round (only for 2020 onwards under the new legal basis)
2013	France	Marseille	-
2013	Slovakia	Košice	-
2014	Latvia	Riga	-
2014	Sweden	Umeå	-
2015	Belgium	Mons	-
2015	Czech Republic	Plzeň	-
2016	Poland	Wrocław	-
2016	Spain	San Sebastián	-
2017	Cyprus	Paphos	-
2017	Denmark	Aarhus	-
2018	Netherlands	Leeuwarden	-
2018	Malta	Valletta	-
2019	Bulgaria	Plovdiv	-
2019	Italy	Matera	-
2020	Croatia	Rijeka	Dubrovnik, Osijek, Pula
2020	Ireland	Galway	Limerick, Waterford

Year	Hosting country	Title city	Unsuccessful bidding cities having reached the final selection round (only for 2020 onwards under the new legal basis)
2022 ^{Error! Bookmark not defined.}	Serbia	Novi Sad	Herceg Novi (ME)
2022	Lithuania	Kaunas	Klaipėda
2022	Luxembourg	Esch-sur-Alzette	-
2023 ³³⁹	Romania	Timișoara	Baia Mare, Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca
2023	Greece	Elefsina	Kalamata, Rhodes
2023	Hungary	Veszprém	Debrecen, Győr
2024	Estonia	Tartu	Narva
2024	Austria	Bad Ischl	Dornbirn, St. Pölten
2024	Norway	Bodø	Banja Luka (BA), Mostar (BA)
2025	Slovenia	Nova Gorica	Ljubljana, Piran, Ptuj
2025	Germany	Chemnitz	Hannover, Hildesheim, Magdeburg, Nürnberg
2026	Finland	Oulu	Tampere, Savonlinna
2026	Slovakia	Trenčín	Nitra, Žilina
2027	Latvia	Liepāja	Daugavpils, Jūrmala and Valmiera
2027	Portugal	Évora	Aveiro, Braga, Ponta Delgada

³³⁹ Originally foreseen for 2021.

Year	Hosting country	Title city	Unsuccessful bidding cities having reached the final selection round (only for 2020 onwards under the new legal basis)
2028	Czech Republic	České Budějovice (Budweis)	Broumov
2028	France	Bourges	Clermont-Ferrand, Montpellier, Rouen
2028	North Macedonia	Skopje	Budva (ME)
2029	Poland	Lublin	Bielsko–Biała, Katowice, Kołobrzeg
2029	Sweden	Kiruna	Uppsala
2030	Belgium	(TBD)	Ongoing competition (final selection in September 2025)
2030	Cyprus	(TBD)	Ongoing competition (final selection in December 2025)
2030	EFTA/EEA countries, candidate countries and potential candidate countries to EU membership	(TBD)	Ongoing competition (final selection in October 2025)



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