



Esch

European Capital of Culture 2022

Third Monitoring Meeting
Report by the European Capital of Culture Expert Panel

Virtual Meeting, October 2021

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EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Introduction

This report follows the meeting held online on 25 October 2021 between the panel and the team of Esch-sur-Alzette, one of the three European Capitals of Culture (ECOC) 2022¹. Esch was nominated as the European Capital of Culture 2022 in Luxembourg by the relevant Luxembourgish authorities on 6 December 2017 based on the recommendation included in the panel's Selection Report²; its bid book is available on the Esch 2022 website³. The first monitoring meeting took place in Timisoara on 5 June 2019⁴ and the second monitoring meeting was held online on 27 May 2020⁵. This third monitoring report is addressed to the Esch 2022 team and the local authority of the city and will be published on the European Commission's website⁶.

Attendance

The panel members:

Else Christensen-Redžepović, Suvi Innilä and Jorge Cerveira Pinto, appointed by the European Parliament 2021-2023;

Paulina Florjanowicz (Chair), Dessislava Gavrilova and Pierre Sauvageot (Rapporteur), appointed by the Council of the EU 2019-2021;

Jelle Burggraaff and Beatriz Garcia (excused), appointed by the European Commission 2020-2022;

Alin Adrian Nica, nominated by the European Committee of the Regions 2019-2021.

For Esch:

Mayor of the city of Esch-sur-Alzette and President of the ESCH2022 asbl;

General Director, ESCH2022;

Administration and Finance Director, ESCH2022;

1 The European Capitals of Culture action is governed by Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and the Council for the titles 2020 to 2023. This Decision provides for three formal monitoring meetings between designated cities and the panel under the auspices of the European Commission.

See Decision at: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2014.132.01.0001.01.ENG

² https://ec.europa.eu/culture/sites/default/files/ecoc-2022-luxembourg-selection_en.pdf

³ <https://esch2022.lu/en/>

⁴ See report at: <https://ec.europa.eu/culture/sites/default/files/ecoc-2022-esch-first-monitoring-report.pdf>

⁵ See report at: <https://ec.europa.eu/culture/sites/default/files/ecoc2022-esch-second-monitoring.pdf>

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/capitals-culture_en

Cultural Programme Director, ESCH2022;
Senior marketing manager, ESCH2022;
Head of tourism, mobility & sustainable development, ESCH2022;
Head of events & locations, ESCH2022;
Quality and impact research coordinator, ESCH2022;
Head of partnerships, ESCH2022;
PR manager, ESCH2022.

Also in attendance were staff members from the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture) as well as from the Ministry of Culture of Luxembourg.

Report from Esch 2022

Prior to the meeting, the team of ESCH2022 submitted a detailed and comprehensive written report, outlining its activities since May 2020, when the second monitoring took place. The team also submitted a video presenting the progress and state of play less than three months before the start of the ECOC year. The main points made included:

On LONG-TERM STRATEGY AND LEGACY:

The ESCH2022 team explained that together with the City of Esch and the association fr'Esch they were setting up the right conditions to implement the ten-year-long cultural strategy of the city. The Esch2022's programme aims to fulfill the five main axes set by this strategy, called "Connexions". The team is also working on the third pillar, focusing on legacy, of its "Manifesto", which lays out the key tenets of the ECOC project. Finally, the elements of all the projects with a regional aspect will be communicated to Pro-Sud, the syndicate of communes in the south of Luxembourg, in order to enable them to become sustainable, in line with the national policy.

A very large evaluation and data collection work was carried out with the local authorities and cultural organisations: in particular, an impact study related to press and social networks and a study of cultural activities and attendance in different municipalities.

Questionnaires with accompanying guidelines have been developed in consultation with project stakeholders for event activity, museums and media libraries.

Many surveys have been started in collaboration with the city of Esch-sur-Alzette, with the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (STATEC), the Living Conditions Unit (in charge of tourism studies), with Visit Luxembourg and with LISER (the Luxembourg Institute of Socio-

Economic Research). These surveys are focused on qualitative issues, on the tourist, economic, cultural and social impacts, and on the image of Esch-sur-Alzette and southern Luxembourg.

On PROGRAMME:

With a few months to go before the opening of the ECOC, everything is in place for the programme to unfold perfectly around the concept of "Remix Culture" and its 4 subheadings "Remix Art", "Remix Europe", "Remix Nature" and "Remix Yourself", and with an essential bias: to engage the public to participate actively. The programme is balanced between the local cultural scene and the high-level international scene. The open call resulted in the selection of 130 projects (2000 events) out of 600 proposed, and contracts have been or are being signed. Implementation is carried out by municipalities or by the independent sector. Several projects concern the public space and have been designed to continue in the following years. And 31 projects involve French structures from the border CCPHVA community. The programme is also based on three new third places located in industrial wastelands. Large exhibitions will be held in the Möllerei building and in Massenoire. The European dimension is very present in many projects, in particular including Kaunas and Novi Sad, the two sister ECOC cities in 2022. Finally, special attention has been given to responses to the COVID-19 epidemic.

On CAPACITY TO DELIVER:

The political and financial support of the Luxembourg and French local authorities and the Luxembourg State is there. Although the COVID-19 crisis is delaying the works on some of the planned infrastructure projects, most of them will be ready to host the ECOC year's events (Möllerei, Massenoire, Skip, Ariston, Bridderhaus, Kenschthal...).

On OUTREACH:

Participation is central to the ESCH2022 project. All the projects presented include a component of inhabitants' or spectators' involvement (Nuits de la Culture 2022, Loop, La Grande Marche, Biergerbühn, De terres rouges en terres rouges...).

There is also a strong focus on the youth programme. The Skip, a new space in Esch-Belval, will welcome young visitors and their families from February 2022 on while 50% of the general programme and projects developed are specifically designed for children and young people.

A community of 1,000 volunteers, the REMIXERS, is going to be set up while over 550 are already recruited.

The opening ceremony is entirely conceived as a participatory event.

On MANAGEMENT:

The governance of the association has been strengthened. The ESCH2022 team has not been modified and benefits from full autonomy in its missions. The budget has been maintained at a high level.

On COMMUNICATION and MARKETING:

A very broad communication and brand image strategy has been put in place using all the media (written and online press, social networks, audio-visual media, tourist guides, etc.), merchandising and institutional relays.

Discussion

During the subsequent discussion, the panel sought clarification on a number of issues and offered experience and advice. Topics discussed included the following:

The panel wanted to know what the main challenge for the team was a few months before the start of the ECOC year.

- The team mentioned the COVID-19 pandemic as the main challenge faced in recent months, with wide-range repercussions. The pandemic had many negative consequences in the preparation of the ECOC year, resulting in delays in the finalisation of infrastructure, planning difficulties, difficulties in mobilising the private sector etc. However, there were also positive aspects, as the pandemic was instrumental in accelerating the digital transition, creating new links with the public and promoting new solidarity between all the partners.

Long-term cultural strategy

The panel asked several questions about the legacy of the ECOC year and how legacy was included in the city's cultural strategy.

- Though they are not under the responsibility of ESCH2022, 28 million EUR worth of infrastructural investment in building and renovation has been made, in Esch and the surrounding Pro-Sud region in view of the ECOC year. They will ensure a visible and long-lasting legacy of the year. The team was confident that the main locations that are supposed to host ECOC related projects would be ready on time. Although there might be delays in some cases, it is already clear that the ECOC has created an exceptional dynamic in the realisation of much-needed cultural facilities in the region.

- Many elements of the programme have been designed to be sustainable and have a “second life” after 2022, and the ECOC project has developed a culture of partnerships and trust between local authorities, cultural organisations, artists and the private sector, which did not exist to such an extent beforehand and will be an important basis for shaping the future together in upcoming years. Data collection in the cultural field at local level is also a novelty and potentially an important legacy of the year. Furthermore, various toolkits have been developed for the cultural community in Esch and its surrounding region, leading to increased capacities locally, and they may also prove useful in the rest of the country.
- Another example highlighted by the team was the Business For Culture Club that is about to come into existence and is meant to bring cultural and financial partners together in 2022 and after. Finally, the new image and visitor strategy developed in the region by local partners in cooperation with national authorities, with new “touristic products” incorporating a cultural dimension such as the “Red rock trail” or the “UrbanTime Travel”, is supportive of sustainable tourism and will stay after 2022.

Cultural and artistic content

The panel asked several questions about the large number of projects that had not been selected after the open call and the frustrations this could create, the number of conventions signed with the project partners as well as on the most emblematic projects for the ECOC year, starting with the opening ceremony.

- The team reiterated the figures indicated in its previous progress report: i.e. the open call triggered a record number of 1000 applications, among which approximately 600 were fully finalised. Out of these, 130 projects were selected by the evaluating committee as meeting the quality criteria and will take place next year. There may be some frustration at not being selected, but many of those organisations whose proposals were rejected have found a place in other projects, and some organisations had submitted several projects and at least one of them was selected.
- The team admitted that not all the conventions were signed, as there had been long and detailed discussions with project partners, but it was quite confident that all contracts would be ready on time. The vast majority of project leaders or partners have already started their work.

- Finally, regarding emblematic projects, the team mentioned the flagship exhibitions organised with renowned international partners in the former industrial site of Belval transitioning into a city of science and technology. These exhibitions have the potential to attract people from beyond the borders. However, the team also underlined that priority had been given to involving citizens' participation and grassroots projects more than to reaching out to an international audience. That will be reflected in the opening ceremony (still in development), which is conceived as an artistically curated people-centred event mobilising a high number of amateurs and professionals, in line with the overall philosophy of the year's slogan "Remix".

European dimension

Several questions addressed the European dimension, the links with existing European networks (working on third places, public spaces, digitisation etc.), with the ECOC cities outside Kaunas and Novi Sad, as well as the place of Europe in image and communication.

- The team explained that the European idea was part of the DNA of Luxembourg, as it is a small country and a founding Member State of the EU, with important communities originating from various locations in Europe. Many artists and cultural organisations had existing links with cities and counterparts in Europe prior to the ECOC project. Consequently, many projects in the programme naturally weave local, regional and even European narratives together.
- The team also highlighted the excellent cooperation and many joint projects with Kaunas and Novi Sad such as a jazz festival that will unite the three ECOC-title holding cities, as well as the special connection with Linz through Ars Electronica, the main partner of one of the flagship exhibitions in Belval. There is also cooperation with Elefsina and Timisoara, as well as contacts with some bidding cities, in particular in Portugal, through the team's international relation manager.

Outreach

The panel asked about legacy from the community perspective especially in connection with a study showing social and societal challenges such as safety issues, and whether this work could join European practices in digital audience development.

- The team highlighted that from the 160 projects being developed, about half involve or address children and youth. Consequently, there

is already a solid starting point of a vast network of institutions, active citizens and artists that are concerned with the development of youth and children. As an example, there is a very good cooperation with the Ministry of Education via SCRIPT (Service de Coordination de la Recherche et de l'Innovation Pédagogiques et Technologiques) and with associations working in the field of education, such as the Up Foundation. The team intends to map all these projects and see how this network can be consolidated in the future, so these actors continue their work after ECOC 2022 is over.

- On societal issues, a citizen participation master plan targeted at project partners and municipalities is under development; it will define a strategy on how to address and work with various communities.
- Regarding the security issues, the team explained they were similar to those in many other cities across Europe and that they were under the responsibility of the national and local authorities.
- Finally, on digitisation, there is much collaboration with partners on programmes for digital access. To mention a few examples, there will be workshops and games addressing younger audiences around the theme of digital arts or the connection between arts, technology and science, as well as workshops and visits for seniors.

Management and capacity to deliver

Questions addressed the construction of new cultural spaces and potential delays and their impacts on the programme, as well as the use of European Union's funds for ESCH2022 and local organisations. In addition to infrastructure, what will be the legacy for residents, capacity building and volunteers?

- The team said they were only moderately concerned about the risk of a delay in the opening of the new venues. If some delays occur, they will be limited in time to only a few months, with no significant impact on the programme.
- There was no need for ESCH2022 of additional, European funding from ERDF or ESF.
- Beyond the investments, the main legacy of ESCH2022 will be in the image that the inhabitants will have of their region, in a new confidence in their development capacity, thanks to the strong citizen participation element in the ECOC year programme. The numerous surveys carried out as long as the man toolboxes developed for the

following years will also help to capitalise on the new professional skills that emerged during the ECOC preparatory process.

- Finally, the team informed the panel that they had currently 550 volunteers, but still aimed to mobilise 1000 during the ECOC year.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The panel was pleased with the good work done by the ESCH2022 team, which also benefits from the strong political support at local, regional and national levels and from a stable and very solid financial situation.

It was also encouraging to see how well the team had dealt with the challenge of the pandemic. The panel formulates a few recommendations for the last months of the preparatory work.

- **Recommendation 1:** The panel encourages the team to further explore the possibility to collaborate with European cultural networks (e.g. through organising expert or satellite meetings, etc.) that they do not work with yet, as this can lead to new contacts that can be useful for the legacy of the ECOC.
- **Recommendation 2:** The panel encourages the team to explore further opportunities to collaborate with cultural organisations, artists and partners from other past, future and candidate ECOCs in order to ensure that the programme covers collaborations with partners from all over Europe. Also in terms of legacy, this is an easy way to start and then keep on fostering joint projects between the cultural sector in Esch and the Pro-Sud region and other partners in Europe.
- **Recommendation 3:** The panel encourages ESCH2022 to take initiatives during the year in order to solidify the relations between the different actors of the ECOC (political leaders, civil society, cultural milieu and artists, etc.) in order to perpetuate existing - or give birth to new - common projects. Particular attention should be paid to those organisations whose projects have not been selected so that they will be part of the title-year celebrations and legacy as long as this can be done in full respect of the coherence of the Esch2022 programme.
- **Recommendation 4:** As the participation of the inhabitants is the leitmotif of the ECOC, it would be very interesting to invent participative forums so that all citizens can be involved in the follow-up of the ECOC, in the choice of investments as well as in the sustainability of the events.

- **Recommendation 5:** The panel appreciates the quality and richness of the programme and the many cultural investments implemented in view of the ECOC year. It encourages the further development of all that can give the city and the region a breath of fresh air, a soul, a vision so that the artistic dimension can make a deep impression on the minds of the inhabitants. As the opening ceremony often plays an essential role in the appropriation of the ECOC by all citizens, it is important to combine the participatory aspect with an exceptional artistic dimension.
- **Recommendation 6:** The panel encourages the implementation of new communication tools of all kinds in order to exceed the 75% awareness of the ECOC among the country's inhabitants (in 2020).

As an additional recommendation, the Panel would recommend that the relevant local authorities continue paying due attention to the security concerns expressed in the surveys conducted among the local community and take adequate measures to deal with them.

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Based on the report submitted by ESCH 2022 as well as the hearing with the team, the panel considers that the conditions regarding the payment of the Melina Mercouri Prize, as specified in Article 14 of Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council, are met. Consequently, the panel is pleased to propose to the European Commission that Esch receives the Melina Mercouri prize.

The panel would like to remind ESCH 2022 that, in line with Article 14, its marketing and communication strategy and its communication material have to clearly reflect the fact that the European Capital of Culture is a Union action, as well as that, in line with Article 16 of the same Decision, it will have to draw up its own evaluation report of the results of its ECOC year and transmit it to the European Commission by 31 December 2023.

The panel would like to thank ESCH 2022 for a very informative and interesting meeting and looks forward to a successful realisation of Esch European Capital of Culture project in 2022.

All panel members (signed)

