



Kaunas 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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Introduction

This report follows the meeting, held online on 19 October 2021 between the panel and the team of Kaunas, one of the three European Capitals of Culture (ECOC) in 2022¹. Kaunas was nominated as the European Capital of Culture 2022 by the relevant Lithuanian authorities on 20 December 2017 based on the recommendation included in the panel's Selection Report²; its bid book is available on the Kaunas 2022 website³. The first monitoring meeting was held on 20 November 2018 in Brussels⁴ and the second monitoring meeting was held online on 26 May 2020⁵. This third monitoring report is addressed to the Kaunas 2022 team and will be published on the European Commission's website⁶.

Attendance

The panel members:

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

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

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

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

For Kaunas:

Deputy Mayor of Kaunas City Municipality;

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 2033. 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-lithuania-selection-report_en.pdf

3 <https://kaunas2022.eu/en/>

4 Report at: https://ec.europa.eu/culture/sites/default/files/ecoc2022-kaunas-monitoring_en.pdf

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

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

CEO at Kaunas 2022;
Head of the Programme at Kaunas 2022;
Head of Communication and Marketing at Kaunas 2022;
Head of Administration at Kaunas 2022;
Curator at Kaunas 2022.

Also in attendance were staff members from the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture) as well as from the Lithuanian Ministry of Culture and the Permanent Representation of Lithuania to the European Union.

Report from Kaunas 2022

Prior to the meeting, the team of Kaunas 2022 (further referred to as K2022) 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 less than three months before the start of the ECOC year. The main points made included:

On PROGRAMME:

The team reported that the programme had been successfully presented in Kaunas on 22 September 2021, during a joint press event with the other two ECOCs in 2022 – Novi Sad and Esch-sur-Alzette. The dense programme of high artistic quality features 1000 events and projects: 250 performing arts events (of which 50 are premieres), 60 exhibitions and 40 international festivals etc. In the last year, additional open calls were announced, aiming at bringing further artistic ideas into the programme. The team is proud with the variety and high quality programme that they managed to put together, and expects to attract wide national and international attention.

Preparations are currently speeding up for the opening event, while scenarios are being developed for the case of a worsening COVID19 situation.

On CAPACITY BUILDING:

Huge progress was made in terms of capacity building through the whole ECOC preparation process. An example to illustrate this is the National Kaunas Drama Theatre, which, until this year, never had an international co-production, and in the 2021-2022 season alone will have five. The team believes that the aims set in terms of capacity building were achieved and that 2022 will run smoothly, offering high quality culture and much joy to audiences.

On COMMUNICATION and MARKETING:

Media partnerships are developed with the most important and large national media outlets, as well as some international ones.

During last spring and summer, a national marketing campaign was launched and reached millions – through TV and outdoor channels. The campaign already won awards nationally and internationally. The name change of the Kaunas airport to FLUXUS airport also attracted large international attention.

In November, a yearlong campaign will start, aiming at attracting people nationally and internationally.

On LEGACY:

The organisation “Kaunas 2022” will be reorganised after the successful implementation of the ECOC year. At the end of 2023, the city representatives will step out, and “Kaunas 2022” will continue to work as an NGO.

A set of open source methodologies on community work, on capacity building, voluntarism and hospitality have been developed, aiming to contribute to building the capacities of the cultural sector.

Several legacy projects were initiated in the process of the ECOC preparation: the ECOC Forum for intentional exchange, the Courtyard festival and FLUXUS festival; City-telling festival; ConTempo stage art festival, MAGENTA, Kaunas Literature week, Contemporary Neighbourhoods, etc.

An application referring to Kaunas’ modernist architecture has been submitted by the Lithuanian Government to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, whose approval is expected as early as 2022. Although not part of the ECOC project, this possible awarding will be a turning point in the city’s development, and the team is already looking for ways to incorporate it within the programme.

Financial sustainability could be achieved through the increase in the budget allotted to the city’s programme to support independent cultural projects. From 2023, the city’s annual investment to finance independent cultural initiatives would need to grow from 600.000 to 1.000.000 Euro annually.

The Lithuanian Government is also contributing to long-term development. Recently a feasibility study was made on the potential transformation of the old Kaunas Central Post office building into an international modernism centre, and the work on it will start in 2023, which shows a long-term commitment of the Government.

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 lack of time, and the burden of public procurement processes and heavy administrative procedures with 76 partnership organisations and their agreements and financing were outlined as current challenges for the K2022 team.

Long-term cultural strategy

The panel wanted to know whether there is was commitment, funding, and capacity for the database run by Kaunas Artists House, to survive in the long run. Also, what kind of impact assessment has been conducted already and what findings have been most meaningful or surprising. The panel wanted also to learn if the application of Kaunas to be put on the UNESCO World Heritage List was still seen as an important part of the ECOC legacy.

- The team answered that the database, run by Kaunas Artists House, was a monitoring tool for culture that was funded by the Municipality. It was initiated in 2018 and has been running from 2020. Cultural organisations are now used to sharing key data and K2022 related data are also incorporated. The tool is considered the most advanced and well-established culture-monitoring tool in Lithuania and it is planned (and supported) by the Municipality as a long-term tool for culture monitoring.
- The team stated that everything was in place so that they would be able to present the final evaluation of the ECOC by the end of 2023. They have just appointed their external assessment team, so they have not really conducted an impact assessment so far. They have recently begun to put surveys and focus groups together, with the aim to carry on the first impact assessment just before the opening events, in order to capture the mood 'temperature' of the city just before the start of the ECOC, and compare this with developments during 2022.
- The panel was assured that the UNESCO application procedure was in good progress and that the decision might be taken as early as next year. While not directly involved in the UNESCO application, ECOC had a role in the process. By working with the community of modernism, it promoted the value of modernist heritage. Following

an initiative of the ECOC team, a Modernism for the Future centre is to be established as well.

Cultural and artistic content

The panel wanted to know what are the long-term plans of sustaining the positive effects of the projects initiated in the ECOC process, and particularly the “Contemporary Neighbourhoods” project. Further, the panel wanted to understand how it was being ensured that a visitor arriving to Kaunas next year would encounter ECOC, regardless of the particular day of their visit.

- The team stated that the festivals established as part of the ECOC process would be taken over by other organisations. In addition, young people are being mentored as part of the “Emerging Kaunas” platform and already start to develop their own projects and organisations. The “Contemporary neighbourhood” project builds on what is already there - the ECOC team involves active locals, and supports them to develop their projects. The team in charge of the Memory Office (one of the ECOC platforms) within K2022 has also set up its own structure to ensure legacy.
- The team explained that they tried to provide a holistic experience, so that ECOC was felt everywhere – from the name of the airport, to how the city was “dressed”, up to the artistic programme and the hospitality programme. They will make sure that there is at any point an important project to see – exhibitions run all year long (William Kentridge, Marina Abramovic, Yoko Ono, etc.), and international events are scheduled on weekends when they can be approached by larger audiences, including international visitors.

European dimension

The panel wanted to hear if the ECOC team had plans to work together with European cultural networks, and in what way. Further, the panel inquired how, on a project level, the cooperation with Esch 2022 and Novi Sad 2022 had been strengthened since the last monitoring meeting. Regarding the communication strategy, the panel asked what work was being done on articulating the European dimension of the programme to the wider audiences in Kaunas and abroad, and how a deeper understanding and appreciation of the richness of the European cultural diversity was promoted by Kaunas2022.

- The team explained that the ECOC forum was the main networking event that they were engaged in. It has a very dense programme of conferences, meetings, etc., such as the Assembly of international

Design Networks gathering more than 300 international guests under the Designing Happiness platform. In addition, there will be a session of the European Cultural Parliament NGO⁷ and several further activities to focus on the Jewish heritage of the city as well as to discuss transferable methodologies for research and evaluation.

- Both Esch and Kaunas had announced open calls since the last monitoring, where collaboration projects with the other two ECOCs 2022 were made a priority. This has resulted in new international collaborative projects that could become part of the K2022 programme. In total, there is a list of around 30 collaborations, as well as projects that include all three cities. In the field of marketing and communication, three collaboration campaigns have been developed, and the joint press and media events on 22 September 2021 is an example in point.
- The team stated that the ECOC name helped in communicating the European dimension of the programme. The three grand ECOC events also contribute to the European message, as they are all based on the original bid book ideas, which are European in spirit.

Outreach

The panel wanted to know how the team was estimating the number of individuals reached by the K2022 messaging. On audience development, the panel asked if the team was putting special emphasis on exploring new ways of developing digital audiences and if it was cooperating with other European partners on this topic. Further, the panel asked about the challenges in attracting volunteers, as well as the heritage community built around the Modernism for the Future programme line.

- The team has already reached 86% of the Lithuanian population, with a 99% approval rate. They track the number of people reached by important messages, like the change of the airport name, also internationally.
- It was explained that the team constantly re-evaluated marketing and was looking for ways to keep the interest of the audience, with the help of a marketing agency. Gluk Media and other artistic groups are developing digital tools to reach out to wider audiences. The big programmes have their digital platforms with interactive maps and timelines. A game application has been developed, such as the story of the Kaunas beast and the history of Kaunas region.

⁷ <http://www.kulturparlament.com/>.

- As for volunteers, empowering and engaging young people has been a priority from the very beginning. A big success has been the approach to encourage the youngsters to develop their own programmes. The volunteers are 70% young people; special messages are now defined for those above 30 years and seniors, inviting them to volunteer.
- The heritage community created around the modernist architecture in Kaunas is very strong. There are already numerous initiatives in progress, which run on their own, apart from the ECOC project. This is a very good sign for the legacy of the ECOC. There is a long-term development plan for the city under preparation, which also includes elements allowing the preservation and renovation of this important historical architecture.

Management

The panel wanted to learn whether the team had received sufficient support in terms of management from the municipality, as in the report a need had been identified in this field. The question was also posed why less than 50% of the envisaged EU funds had been raised so far.

- The K2022 team explained that they experienced shortage of human resources and that it was now difficult to attract new professionals – especially for administration tasks – as there was only one year left until the end of the project. The team is therefore working hard, trying to cope with the workload, while maintaining a positive spirit. The cooperation with the city and the county is going very well.
- The EU funding figure describes only the funds raised by the ECOC office, but many partners have successfully fundraised, so the total of EU funds attracted is even higher than the 2 million Euro initially targeted. As for the other sources of public funding, they are in line with the original projections.

Capacity to deliver

The panel questioned the under-performance in terms of private fundraising, and asked if an important opportunity had been missed here, especially in terms of legacy. Further, the panel asked whether the high number of events would not negatively impact the readability of the programme, and its potential to attract audiences, including those that were far from culture.

- Without wanting to use COVID19 as an excuse, the team pointed out that the pandemic did have an impact. A positive (recent)

development is, however, to be observed: the ECOC office has been approached lately by businesses, which finally realise that the ECOC is indeed going to happen, offering sponsorship. A slight increase of private funding is therefore to be expected.

- The team stressed that the trilogy of the Beast was structuring the programme and was intended to focus public attention. Three big weekends (within the trilogy), and many events in-between make for a rather understandable programme structure.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The panel appreciates the very good work done by the K2022 team, which also benefits from a strong political support demonstrated and a stable financial framework. It was pleased to learn about the good work being done for securing the legacy of the ECOC year, particularly as concerns the modernism theme and the work on youth. It was encouraging to see how well the team has been dealing with the challenge of the pandemic. The panel formulates a few recommendations for the coming months of preparatory work.

On cultural strategy:

- Ensure the key characteristics of the long-term database monitoring tool are captured and shared as part of your ECOC transfer of knowledge. It should be reflected already now on how easily this tool could be replicated / adapted by other ECOC hosts.
- Ensure that key priority quantitative and qualitative data for M&E are being captured already before the opening; be clear about the key points in time when data is best gathered; consider what options you there are to capture international reactions.
- Work with the K2022 external assessors to ensure they can also interrogate internally gathered data (the material captured via your established monitoring process, which covers a far broader period of time) so that there can be adequate interpretation and understanding of impact.
- Explore the possibility to add a more sophisticated qualitative angle to the M&E plans. So far the ECOC team is prioritising numbers in reporting of key facts, whereas the narrative on vision covers significant themes (optimism/ happiness; moving beyond the 'temporary', etc.) that requires a qualitative analysis.

On European dimension:

- Explore the opportunities to collaborate with European cultural networks (e.g. through expert meetings, satellite meetings) that you do not work with yet, as this can lead to new contacts that can be useful for the legacy of your ECOC.
- Give further thought on ways to communicate the European dimension of the ECOC. One way could be that the programme and marketing teams brainstorm together on communicating the European dimension.

On management:

- Consider giving the Kaunas 2022 organisation an important role in the legacy plans and implementation of projects after 2022. It would be a loss if all their experience and network would get lost after 2022.
- Members of the team should be secured after 2022 – otherwise they lose motivation towards the end of the year.
- Take measures to ease the ECOC team’s workload caused by the administrative procedures in order to leave as much time as possible for the team for the actual realization of the ECOC year. Explore if the Municipality can help in this respect.

On outreach:

- Consider ways to work with data, so that the real quality of outreach is being measured. Time/resources should be dedicated to interpretation of significance, as the numbers alone do not say much.

On capacity to deliver:

- Start working already now on planning the post-ECOC period. It could take advantage of the momentum of the ECOC year mobilization of people, artists, cultural organizations, politicians and the private sector, in order to set up conferences, meetings, round tables and forums, drawing on its own successes and failures, and on those of the other ECOCs.

* * * *

Based on the report submitted by Kaunas 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 Kaunas receives the Melina Mercouri prize.

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

All panel members (signed)

