



Timișoara European Capital of Culture 2023

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

Virtual Meeting, 10 November 2022

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EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Introduction

This report follows the virtual meeting on 10th November 2022 between the panel and the Team of Timisoara, one of the three European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) in 2023¹. Timisoara was designated by the relevant Romanian authorities as European Capital of Culture on 25th October 2016 on the basis of the Panel's selection report², initially for the year 2021.

The first monitoring meeting took place on 11th October 2017 in Brussels, followed by a monitoring city visit by two members of the panel in June 2018. The second monitoring meeting was held in Timisoara on 5th June 2019. In December 2020, taking into account the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on the preparatory work of all three ECoC title-holders in 2021, the European Parliament and the Council adopted a Decision postponing - among others - the ECoC year in Timisoara from 2021 to 2023³. This postponement made it consequently necessary to organise an additional second monitoring meeting on 23rd June 2021, before the third and final one, being reported here. The three previous monitoring reports by the panel can be accessed on the European Commission website⁴.

The present report is addressed to the Timisoara 2023 implementation structures and key stakeholders and will be published on the European Commission's website.

Attendance

The panel members (experts nominated by EU institutions):

- Else Christensen-Redžepović, Suvi Innilä (chair), and Jorge Cerveira Pinto, appointed by the European Parliament;
- Goda Giedraityte, appointed by the Council of the EU;
- Beatriz Garcia (rapporteur), Jelle Burggraaff and Hrvoje Laurenta, appointed by the European Commission

Excused:

- Marilyn Gaughan Reddan, Anne Karjalainen and Rossella Tarantino

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, which provides for three formal monitoring meetings between designated cities and the panel. See:

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

² See selection report at: <https://ec.europa.eu/culture/elefsina-timisoara-and-veszprem#timisoara>

³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32020D2229>

⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/culture/elefsina-timisoara-and-veszprem#timisoara>

For Timisoara:

- Timisoara Municipality: Mayor, Mayor's Counsellor on Culture
- Timis County Council: Counsellor on Culture of the President, Project Coordinator; Head of Office for Culture, Education, Minorities, Sport and Cults;
- Timis County Centre for Culture and Art: Executive Director
- Centre for Projects of the Timisoara Municipality: Director, The team of Curators for People territory; Places territory; Connections territory; Cultural production & management; Communication and Marketing strategies; Community engagement and social inclusion; Cultural education and mediation, Power Station strategy; Project Coordinator; Big Events Coordinator; Monitoring and evaluation

Also in attendance were observers from the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture), the Romanian Ministry of Culture and the Romanian Permanent Representation to the EU.

Report from Timisoara 2023

Prior to the meeting, the team of Timisoara 2023 (further referred to as TM2023) submitted a detailed and comprehensive written report, outlining its activities since their previous monitoring meeting. The team also made a 20 min verbal presentation, outlining their progress less than two months before the start of the ECoC year. The main points made included:

On LONG TERM STRATEGY:

An important highlight is the major reform to the public funding system for cultural projects, involving strategic interventions at all governmental levels. This reform makes multi-annual funding possible.

The report referred to the dedicated Culture and Tourism Unit, which is part of the new Organisation Chart of the City and includes an office dedicated to the ECoC project, helping accelerate technical and event approval procedures. Other developments highlighted include a new city app and toolbox – which will become an important legacy for the sector; new international cooperation projects, and a broad range of policy and project-related initiatives.

Monitoring and evaluation updates are presented in the form of a dedicated appendix.

On PROGRAMME:

The report and verbal presentation confirmed that all the Stations and Trails projects selected as part of the core ECoC Cultural Programme have partners and hosts confirmed. For 2022, contracts have been signed and executed for all already active Trails and Stations. For 2023, contracts are now being signed and first instalments will be paid by the end of December for all trails and stations (as the cultural programme is now completely consolidated).

The report goes into extensive detail about different project strands and explains the concept for both Opening and Closing events as well as the City Celebration events that will help mark transition between the seasons of the year.

The Power station is presented as the central point for the capacity building of the local cultural ecosystem. Detailed examples are presented, within the main report as well as dedicated annexes.

An open call is also in progress to extend and consolidate the Cultural Programme. The report includes some details about the call's implementation calendar and budget.

On EUROPEAN DIMENSION:

The report offers a very extensive analysis of projects that are the most indicative of European Dimension criteria as well as priority artistic and culture criteria. The Opening and Closing events are highlighted, as well as City Celebration events and the Open Call programme – with a particular emphasis on the European Echoes station.

On CAPACITY TO DELIVER:

Examples of how the City, the Centre for Projects of the Timisoara Municipality, the Timis County Council and related actors are contributing to a solid governance ecosystem for the ECoC are provided. New legislation in place has resulted in key commitments that enable delivery of the programme – specific details about the legislation are included.

A complete list of infrastructure projects supported since the award of the title is also provided.

On OUTREACH:

The main layers of audience and community development strategies are outlined and this is complemented by specific indications of the most prominent stations / projects meeting specific audience needs. Specific references are made to youth, intergenerational dialogue, accessibility for the elderly and disabled, socially marginalised groups and a special, additional, group for 2022: refugees.

The report goes on to illustrate their volunteering strategy and relationships with schools.

On MANAGEMENT:

The report and presentation highlight the major breakthroughs achieved to solidify ECoC governance and funding procedures. A dedicated section to changes in the legal structure and status of the ECoC delivery body includes a detailed analysis of the new Board, its relationship with the ECoC executive team and the various territorial levels of government and public administration. It ends with a reference to the importance of respecting the independence of the artistic team.

The report also includes a section on staffing approaches and a section on current financial projections in comparison with the bid book. The team notes that the final secured budget is 43.50 million (10% under the initial projections due to the inability to reach the targets in terms of private and EU funding) – and it follows this with a detailed indication of audit arrangements and their capacity to deliver a high quality cultural programme in line with the original application.

This section also includes a full outline of the marketing and communication strategy, contingency planning and an extensively articulated review of how recommendations from the previous monitoring report have been integrated.

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 assess how confident the team was about the timelines of essential structural and legislative changes, which had only taken place months before the start of the ECoC year. Would solutions materialise on time? What are their strongest concerns?

- The team indicated that the new legislative framework was positive and a part of the ECoC legacy. It will benefit the entire cultural community in the country
- They felt very confident about having produced a rich, diverse and quantitatively large programme.

The panel enquired about potential local community criticisms in orienting public funding toward culture and the ECoC project, given the difficult times Europe is going through, post pandemic, with an ongoing economic / cost of living crisis and the war in Ukraine.

- The team indicated that the public is not questioning the value of the ECoC per se, nor the money invested in it. Local debates and criticisms have arisen about specific aspects of the programme some parts of the population are not used to (e.g. programming for LGBTIQ+ communities, exhibitions on feminism etc.). This is precisely what the team expected and generating such debate was in fact one of the aims of the project. The team and the City are in full support of some of the most controversial choices made by the curatorial team and believe this is a valuable learning experience for the community – and an important ECoC legacy.

The panel also asked about the main discovery the team would like to share with future ECoCs, after these years of preparation.

- The team highlighted the importance of collective intelligence – the fact that it can function and move from an abstract ideal into a reality once the administrative systems are in place. The team believes that the response to the Covid and refugee crisis in Timisoara demonstrates that culture is now fully embedded in the city.

Long-term cultural strategy

The panel enquired about the availability of data baselines, any data gaps and most valuable findings so far to inform the ECoC's evaluation. The benefits and challenges of launching a Timisoara data app was also noted.

- The team noted they have valuable baselines regarding cultural consumption and participation – but not necessarily on governance issues. The latter will be addressed through a dedicated study and the taking into consideration of the different dimensions of governance into the other planned studies.

- They are assessing the European dimension of the programme, through the experience of project organisers themselves, but also the monitoring of the communication and some of the planned studies.
- The team highlighted that a strength in their evaluation will be bringing together different perspectives and stakeholders.
- The team indicated two apps are in place: a 'city app' to be used by tourists and residents – whose main functionality will be to act as an event calendar; a 'toolbox' app, which is used to programme spaces and other operational matters, for the benefit of cultural operators. The app will not be ready for the ECoC opening and may not be fully functional as a data-gathering tool in 2023, but the ECoC year provides an important testing opportunity, making these new IT tools a long-term legacy for the city.

Cultural and artistic content

The panel enquired about the current open call process, noting it is taking place very late, which raises important operational challenges; questions were also asked about the state of contracting and, in particular, the state of agreements with international partners.

- The team stated that the open call process is extending and consolidating their core programme – it is not about new complex ideas but rather (with few exceptions) about small projects that extend the programme / ensure a broader range of topics. They are currently debating priority criteria and a final schedule – but the calls have been extensively communicated already, including through embassies and other international channels.
- The team explained that from the main core programme (bid book proposals) contracts have been signed between spring and November 2022 and first instalments paid, corresponding to 85% of the total contractual amount (maximum authorised by the law). They, however, need to be renewed for the upcoming period, and new contracts are therefore planned to be fixed before December and payments of first instalments secured. They clarified that the core programme is not financed from open calls.
- The team noted that the new approved system to finance independent cultural operators is a major progress for the city, which is enabling more diverse and high-quality programming.
- The team also highlighted that most of the international partnerships highlighted in the core programme were tested in 2022 already.

- In terms of open calls for international cooperation (e.g. The European Echoes project), ideas have been mapped through an online form since July 2022 and the curatorial team will assess and recommend which proposals will be directed to apply for financing through the European Echoes programme.

European dimension

The panel noted the detailed overview of available European Funds provided by the team but sought clarification regarding any strategy for securing such funding – and whether the priority was funding towards ECoC programming or legacy purposes. The panel also enquired about the main challenges to cooperation with European and international partners.

- The team indicated that there was no specific strategy to secure more European funding towards programme and ECoC projects in 2023.
- Regardless, cultural operators are encouraged to build on the city's extensive experience to apply for European funds, and dedicated capacity building activities (e.g. Power Station) provide additional training, which would contribute to legacy.
- Some examples of previous successful applications were presented, as well as their cooperation with embassies to fund specific projects – such as Germany, which is allocating 550k Euro.
- Regarding challenges, the team noted that there have been gaps in cooperation due to ongoing changes in the scoping of projects – as well as the major disruptions resulting from the pandemic.
- To address these challenges, the team has established mechanisms such as scholarships for artists and mobility grants for artists and cultural operators. The Creative Europe funded Culture Moves Europe project is identified as a relevant programme.

Outreach

The panel enquired about online delivery plans for the programme, their cooperation with schools and the legacy of capacity building programmes such as Power Station – both locally and from an international point of view.

- The team noted that audio-visual content is a key pillar of the ECoC's offering, from Tik Tok to television. They have a budget to amplify the impact of such channels by translating content into English. They also plan to broadcast their opening event via national television.

- The work with schools is about ‘filling the gaps and holistic communication’. It is not about providing new content but providing mechanisms for schools to connect broader communities. They have been mapping the needs of teachers and working to encourage cultural operators to adapt their work so that it is more suitable for schools.
- The main legacy of Power Station, as a capacity-building programme will be its artists’ scholarships and mobility grants. The Centre for Projects of the Timisoara Municipality will remain beyond the ECoC year as a legacy institution and its main mission will include the provision of training and accessibility.
- The ‘toolbox app’ (noted as part of the ‘Long-term strategy’) is also a key legacy, acting as a tool for cultural operators to identify different types of cultural resources that support their projects and amplify their outreach.
- From an international point of view, Power Station has secured partnerships with Kaunas as well as the British Council – areas they are working on include improvements to disabled access (blind audiences) and include improvements for access to participants and visitors with varying abilities or vulnerable social groups.

Management and capacity to deliver

The panel wanted to clarify financial information as well as their negotiations with sponsors and the private sector.

- The team noted that they have been in touch with 90 companies and are in conversation with three major corporations – including one bank – regarding up to 1million Euro sponsorship deals.
- They are proposing three levels of sponsorship and the key time to fix corporate commitment is now until the end of 2022.

Finally, the panel enquired about the approach to international promotion and availability of information in English.

- The team noted that they are currently upgrading the ECoC website so that it is bilingual and with an enhanced calendar function.
- They are coordinating with the other 2023 ECoC hosts, Elefsina and Veszprem, to share journalist databases and media budgets. This should provide a model for international communication.

Conclusion and recommendations:

The panel appreciates the excellent progress achieved by the T2023 team against major challenges. It was pleased to see a united team that has matured and found solutions to complex structural and legislative requirements, while protecting their original bid vision. The clear support provided at all government levels is also greatly reassuring. The panel remarks on the late confirmation of funding from the State level and the need to ensure efficiencies with any final contracting as well as the importance of communicating the programme at an international level. The panel formulates a few recommendations for the coming months of preparatory work.

Recommendation 1: Marketing and Communications in connection with the programme's European dimension: It is essential that more information is made available in English and that stakeholders and communities across Europe are made a priority. Also, ensure that the EU logo is displayed across platforms.

Recommendation 2: The Open Calls programme must be managed as efficiently as possible. Ensure that you prioritise and balance your timescales so that you can make the best use of remaining resources.

Recommendation 3: From a governance / collaborations point of view, keep making the most of the valuable cooperation achieved between structures of government.

Recommendation 4: Given the difficult economic and political context the ECoC is being delivered in, ensure you have strong / clear messages about the value of hosting your ECoC in Timisoara so that you can deal with potential media criticisms.

Recommendation 5: Unleash the potential of greater European partner involvement by informing local cultural stakeholders about EU programmes. This will consolidate the arts and cultural fabric of your city, region and country and help you build international capacity overall.

* * * *

Based on the report submitted by Timisoara 2023 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 Timisoara receives the Melina Mercouri prize.

The panel would like to remind Timisoara 2023 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 2024.

The panel would like to thank Timisoara 2023 for a very informative and interesting meeting and looks forward to a successful realisation of Timisoara European Capital of Culture project in 2023.

All panel members (signed)

