



European
Commission

Elefsina

European Capital of Culture 2023

Third Monitoring Meeting
Report by the ECOC Expert Panel
Virtual Meeting, November 2022

Creative Europe

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture
Directorate Culture, Creativity and Sport
Unit D2

E-mail: eac-unite-D2@ec.europa.eu

*European Commission
B-1049 Brussels*

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Contents

Introduction.....	4
Attendance	4
Report and presentation from Elefsina 2023.....	5
Discussion	8
Conclusions and recommendations	11

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Introduction

This report follows the virtual meeting on 22 November 2022 between the panel of experts and the team of Elefsina, one of the three European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) in 2023¹. Elefsina was nominated as the European Capital of Culture 2021 in Greece by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sport on 9 December 2016 based on the panel's selection report². Its bid book is available on the 2023 Eleusis website³.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and upon a joint request by the Ministry, the City of Elefsina and the 2023 Eleusis team, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU adopted on 23 December 2020 a decision postponing the ECoC year in Elefsina from 2021 to 2023⁴. In line with this decision, there was a new second monitoring meeting⁵ organised in May 2021, which followed the first⁶ and second⁷ monitoring meetings on 10 October 2017 and 4 June 2019 as well as two city visits by panel members on 5 July 2018 and on 24 October 2019.

This report of the third monitoring meeting is addressed to 2023 Eleusis (the delivery team of Elefsina 2023) and will be published on the European Commission's website.

Attendance

The panel members (experts nominated by EU institutions):

Jelle Burggraaff
Else Christensen-Redzepovic
Beatriz Garcia
Goda Giedraityte (chair)
Suvi Innilä (rapporteur)
Anne Karjalainen
Hrvoje Laurenta
Jorge Cerveira Pinto
Marilyn Gaughan Reddan
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 <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/elefsina-timisoara-and-veszprem>

³ https://issuu.com/eleusis2021/docs/eleusis21_bid_book_2016_eng_issue?utm_medium=referral&utm_source=2023eleusis.eu

⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32020D2229>

⁵ <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/elefsina-timisoara-and-veszprem>

⁶ <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/elefsina-timisoara-and-veszprem>

⁷ <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/elefsina-timisoara-and-veszprem>

For Elefsina:

Representing the Municipality of Elefsina:

Mayor of Elefsina
Deputy Mayor of Elefsina for European Capital of Culture
Mayor's Advisor for Infrastructure

Representing the 2023 Eleusis Company:

Chair of the Board of Directors
Chief Executive Officer
General Artistic Director
Director of Premises and Infrastructure Directorate
Director of Cultural Development
Director of Cultural Training
Director of Audience Development and Participation/Community Engagement
Director of Communication, Marketing & International Relationships
External Evaluator from the Panteion University
Director of CEO Support
Director of Production

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

Report and presentation from Elefsina 2023

Elefsina 2023 submitted in advance of the meeting a comprehensive progress report. The report reflected the progress since the previous monitoring meeting, and was divided into following areas: long-term strategy, programme, capacity to deliver, outreach, management and legacy plan.

At the beginning of the meeting, the representatives of the ECoC 2023 in Elefsina made a presentation, which complemented the written report. The presentation and the interventions were made by the Mayor of Elefsina and - representing the 2023 Eleusis organisation - the Chair of the Board of Directors, the Chief Executive Officer and the General Artistic Director. All emphasised the significant progress that had taken place in the last months especially in terms of governance, financing and programme, and assured the panel that Elefsina had the will and the capacity to organise a successful ECoC year. The importance of the ECoC year for the long-term transformation of the city and the surrounding region was also highlighted. In fact, the ECoC has already changed the city into a city of culture, which it had not previously been.

Long-term cultural strategy

- The artistic programme of Elefsina 2023 aims to enhance the self-confidence, pride and joy of creativity in the residents, to strengthen the sense of community, and to create a constellation of artistic hubs in Elefsina. The ECoC is expected to transform Elefsina into an attractive cultural and artistic destination both for creators and audiences. One of the main objectives of the programme is to introduce Elefsina as a cultural city to the Athenians.
- The evaluation of the 2023 Eleusis project is carried out on two distinct levels: the first level is the evaluation of the general objectives of the ECoC, and the second

level includes the evaluation of the strategic objectives. The report concluded that despite the pandemic and related severe restrictions, the general objectives had been well actualised during the years 2021 and 2022. The development of Elefsina 2023 events and actions have attracted many local actors and visitors, and infrastructure development for the ECoC improved during 2021 and 2022 as the renovation work on two main infrastructure projects could be started.

- The research on the external impact of Elefsina 2023 has been assigned to a team of external experts who are based at Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences (Athens).
- The design of monitoring and evaluation methodology complies with the formal requirements and indicators that are commonly employed for the ECoC impact assessment across the cultural, social and economic realms. The evaluation team uses both quantitative and qualitative methods. Baseline study was implemented in 2020, and in 2024, Elefsina 2023 will present the outcomes of the final evaluation.
- Elefsina 2023 has established several legacy programmes to e.g. strengthen the sense of identity and community among citizens, to encourage and stimulate interdisciplinary dialogue in the fields of culture, science, technology and society, to transform the city into a regional centre for cultural education and creativity, and to promote the public space through multiple artistic uses.
- The legacy of the ECoC year has two main dimensions; the infrastructure of the city as well as the continuation of several actions and the institution that will operate in organising cultural events also in the future.
- The work for the intangible and tangible legacy of the ECoC will continue gradually after 2023, and the Melina Mercouri Prize will be used specifically for the various legacy projects.

Artistic and cultural programme

- According to the report, the programme is now fully developed and the team is in a fast-paced implementation phase of the projects. The complete programme of Elefsina 2023 will be announced during an international media conference on the 13 December 2022.
- The programme, titled as the *Mysteries of Transition*, has three main elements: People/society, Environment and Labour, in line with the original bid book. Special attention has been paid to the Environment axis of the programme, a subject that is inextricably linked with the challenges Elefsina as a (post)industrial city (but also Europe and the world) is facing.
- The programme, covering 346 days, consists of 130 projects (i.e. 'mysteries') which include various activities, among others 465 events. The programme has 137 international stakeholders and 192 Greek stakeholders. More than 30 initiatives have been designed and implemented by local artists and companies, which is notable considering that Elefsina did not have an established art scene when the ECoC project started.
- At a national level, the programme actively involves both emerging and established artists, creating synergies that introduce contemporary issues to the public through

arts and culture. Their involvement has been one of the fundamental principles in the final form of the programme.

- The opening ceremony takes place as a large participatory celebration on 4-5 February 2023. According to the report, the development and design of the Opening is completed, and the team is in the final stage of contracting the subprojects.
- Securing the success of the flagship events described in the bid book and in the second monitoring report has a high priority in the programme implementation. The flagship events constitute key gestures in the *Mysteries of Transition* concept and fundamental components of the artistic programme. Some elements of the flagship project *Mystery_29 Elefsina - Raw Museum by Erato Koutsoudaki* have already been realised in Athens, and *Mystery_99 The ARK* by a Belgian collective Timecircuit has already started its journey from Antwerp in May 2022, arriving to Elefsina for the opening ceremony after visiting among others Veszprém and Timisoara (the other two ECoCs 2023).
- Ensuring artistic quality has had an important role in the design and implementation of the programme, and the independence of the artistic team is strongly emphasised by the Board of Directors.
- 90% of the legacy projects have already been implemented, and the remaining ones are in the final stage of contracting.

European dimension

- According to the report, the programme seeks to highlight the components of cultural diversity that are inscribed in the history of the city and which are therefore a treasure trove of Europe's diverse cultural heritage. It also seeks to promote dialogue between people and mutual understanding through the identification of common components and contemporary European issues.
- Collaboration with European and international artists, cultural professionals and scientists includes 137 European and international stakeholders from more than 30 countries.
- One part of the capacity building is to support the internationalisation of existing cultural institutions of Elefsina. The team has also established collaboration with European networks, other ECoC cities as well as EU-Japan Fest.

Outreach

- Specific action has recently been taken in outreach to local audiences.
- As there are only a few months to the title year, the meetings with the groups and organisations participating in the programme have been intensified. For this reason, the directorate has recently been reinforced with two residents of Elefsina.
- The Cultterra group, composed of teenagers and young people from the city and surrounding areas in 2019 as part of the ECoC process, is now hosted at the Old Railway Station. This is a new space for the young people to exchange views and ideas.

- A mapping process by a group of young artists (professionals and non-professionals) of Elefsina and the surrounding area resulted in two large meetings at the Old Railway Station, as well as the first Pride parade in Elefsina on 6 July to create a safe space for people belonging to the LGBTQI+ community, to shed light on the issues that concern them and to send meaningful messages to future generations.
- Adolescents and young people from Elefsina had the opportunity to actively participate in the celebration of Europe Day in Elefsina, on 7 May 2022. The celebration took place outside Athens for the first time. As part of the celebration, a painting exhibition was held at the Old City Hall with works by students from schools across the country on the theme Peaceful Arcs.
- In the framework of the Capacity Building and Applied Innovation Centre, a series of educational programmes for formal and informal education have been created.
- Significant progress has also been made in activating citizens either by participating in actions as observers or as part of them through volunteering.

Management

- According to the report and presentation, Elefsina 2023 has succeeded in progressing significantly in recent months through adjustments to legislation, placement of key people, simplification of internal regulations and the collective nature of the company's staff. At the same time Elefsina 2023 has formed a functioning contracting structure in order to secure the delivery of the programme.
- Simplifying procedures such as the Board of Directors now focusing on strategic procedures has resulted in more efficient and faster contracting and decision making. The number of staff has grown significantly since 2021, with 12 new employees. The overall number of staff is now 25, which is in line with the original plan for the opening period.
- The budget of the bid book is now complete and might even rise to 29 million Euros, even though all funding has not yet been finally secured. The team is, however, convinced that the initial target of 16,5 million Euros for the programme budget will be reached.

Capacity to deliver

- The team assured the panel that the set ECoC milestones had been achieved, as most projects were already completed or in progress.
- The main infrastructural projects, indoor and outdoor, are either finished or expected to be ready in time for the ECoC year in Elefsina. E.g. the Bowling Art Centre, the first indoor multipurpose cultural venue of the Municipality of Elefsina, has hosted all Elefsina 2023 projects that needed an indoor space since its delivery. In addition, the partnerships around the infrastructure projects have been strengthened during the recent months.

Discussion

During the subsequent discussion the panel sought clarification on following issues:

General

- As the launching of the Elefsina 2023 year is only a couple of months away, the panel wanted to know the team's biggest current challenges and their plans to overcome them. The team responded that the main challenge had been getting to this point; the ECoC journey as such with its ups and downs and difficulties caused by legislation, but these challenges had now been solved. At the moment there are some challenges concerning the Iris Factory and getting its renovation ready on time. All efforts are made to meet the deadline.
- The panel reminded the team of the formal criteria for being awarded the Melina Mercouri Prize, and asked the team to explain why Elefsina should be awarded. The team responded that Elefsina had covered an enormous distance during its ECoC journey, starting from a zero level in many aspects. In addition, the legacy of Elefsina 2023, especially the tangible legacy with many new cultural infrastructures the city needed will be very strong.

Long-term cultural strategy

- Concerning the evaluation and the indicators, the team explained that the evaluation was made on two levels. The first level is about macro impacts, and the second level focuses on 69 indicators selected from the European Commission's ECoC guidelines. A baseline scenario of 2021 has been produced and the evaluation team is now working on 2022.
- The panel also sought clarification on two distinctive figures concerning people's perception on the ECoC, and learned that in the latest telephone survey 60% of the people were confident about the value of the ECoC year, and 28,6% that the year would benefit Elefsina in the long term. These figures are expected to rise in the next survey, as the general faith in the management team has become stronger.

Artistic and cultural programme

- Regarding the programme budget, the panel was concerned if there was any risk that the planned programme budget of 16,5 million Euros would not be realised, and was confirmed by the team that this amount was expected to be allocated to the programme.
- The panel was impressed by the fact that already 90% of the legacy projects were at the implementation stage, and wanted to hear examples of how their success was measured. In their response, the team emphasised that Elefsina was an industrial city hoping to become a centre of modern art and culture through the ECoC year and its legacy projects. They want to remind people of European values and discuss common topics such as the European Union, climate change, future as well as the mythical past. One of the most important examples of such projects is *Mystery_99 The ARK*.
- Based on the report, contracting of the projects will continue throughout the entire year 2023. The panel wanted therefore to know what this meant for the launch of the programme in December. The team responded that they would communicate the full programme, also projects that were not yet contracted. They will work on the contracts quarter by quarter, and they are now very close to having contracted all the events for the Opening, projects taking place in January as well as most of

the legacy projects. The team is continuously communicating with the selected projects, and as there is now a good model for the contract structure in place, they are convinced that the contracting can be made efficiently.

European dimension

- Concerning the new ECoC handover ceremony planned to take place in Athens on 9 January 2023 with the six previous and upcoming ECoCs, the panel wanted to know what Elefsina's contribution to this event would be and its significance to the city as it was only mentioned very briefly in the report. The team explained that they considered this ceremony very significant, especially as an opportunity for highlighting European values, and for discussing the importance of the ECoC action beyond 2023. With the handover ceremony Elefsina wants to promote the importance of placing culture at the centre of city development. All six cities work on this initiative together, but Elefsina has a special role in the production and logistics due to its location close to Athens. Even though similar ceremonies have been experimented with at previous occasions with various challenges, the team is confident that there is demand for such ceremonies.
- The panel also wanted to know more about the role of Elefsina in the Culture Next Network, and learned that Elefsina was one of the founding members when this network for ECoC candidate cities was established in 2016. The network, now funded by the EU Creative Europe programme, wants to support the idea of placing culture at the centre of city development by organising mutual conferences, workshops and funding applications.

Outreach

- As the report indicated that Capacity Building and Applied Innovation Centre would be one of the main legacies of Elefsina 2023, the panel was interested in knowing if and how this work would continue after 2023. The team responded that the municipality and the 2023 Eleusis team cooperate on finding a new location and prerequisites for this important work after the end of 2023.
- Concerning the question about the international volunteers, the team stated that there would be international volunteers, already 50 from Esch (Luxembourg) for the opening.
- The panel was impressed by the project concerning community radio, run by a group of young people, and wanted to know more about its role in bottom-up mapping of the emerging cultural potential of the city. The team explained that based on a previous survey the local community considered that the cultural life of the city didn't have a proper communication platform. This led to the idea of community radio.

Management

- The budget situation presented in the report raised questions among the panel as it was not completely clear. The team, however, confirmed that 26 million Euros have already been confirmed, out of which more than 18,7 million have been received. Of the 16,5 million programme budget, 90% has been confirmed.
- In addition, the panel wanted to learn more about the budget of the infrastructural projects that were included in the operational expenditures, as well as the reason for the significant increase of the other expenditures. The team explained that the

other expenditures had increased due to legal and other unexpected but necessary costs. Part of the infrastructural costs included in the operational budget were covered by the partners of these projects in kind, rather than in direct funding.

- Considering the turbulent times, the panel noted that the current high inflation rate was not mentioned in the report although it is a serious risk for the projects. The team responded that they had not made any adjustments concerning inflation as all contracts had been agreed upon and would be dealt with in accordance with the current budgets.
- As the delivery team is the greatest asset in realising a successful ECoC, the panel wanted to learn about the plans for ensuring the team's wellbeing, motivation and dedication on a daily basis throughout the upcoming months. The present team has been working for six months in its present compilation, and is very committed and working hard. Some of the staff members have been involved in the project longer, but having new employees has helped their workload and given new energy to the whole team.
- The panel was also interested in knowing the strategy for tackling communication with the media in case of negative issues popping up before or during the ECoC year. The panel also enquired about ways the team would ensure consistency in statements to the media from the Elefsina 2023 stakeholders. The team responded that they were working closely with the municipality, and that there was a crisis management plan in case negative media attention would emerge at the local or national level.

Capacity to deliver

- The panel wanted to know the status of the planned infrastructure. The team assured the panel that enough infrastructural projects had been completed to host a great year.
- Impressed by the huge effort made on international communications, the panel also wanted to know the amount of projects that could be experienced online by those who cannot travel to Elefsina. According to the team, their main aim is to invite people to the events physically, as live experience cannot be replaced by a remote one. Documentation of all projects will be made on some level as well as live streaming of the most important and suitable events on a YouTube channel.

Conclusions and recommendations

The panel appreciates and congratulates Elefsina for the huge progress it has made in the last months on all levels of governance to ensure the successful delivery of the ECoC year. The transformation which the 2023 Eleusis team has undergone has been a true embodiment of the *Mysteries in Transformation*. To support the work of the coming months the panel wishes to make the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: The panel welcomes the measures taken to speed up preparations; however, project contracting is still critically late. This can be a risk, especially when many of the projects will be published before formal contracting. It is therefore recommended to speed up this process even more.

Recommendation 2: The panel is concerned about the risks, which the high inflation rate might have on the projects, and would encourage the team to develop contingency plans for ensuring the successful delivery of the programme.

Recommendation 3: In case cuts have to be made to the planned budget due to rising costs, the panel strongly recommends prioritising all necessary funding for the programme.

Recommendation 4: The panel would also like to underline the importance of supporting systematically and on a daily basis the wellbeing of the team during the heavy workload of the coming months.

Recommendation 5: Maintaining a very strong European dimension throughout the programme is of utmost importance for a European Capital of Culture. The panel therefore would like to underline the importance of promoting the European relevance of the ECoC year.

Recommendation 6: The panel sends all its good wishes for the ECoC handover ceremony planned for 9 January 2023, none-the-less with its aim of promoting European values and the importance of the European Capital of Culture action. The panel encourages the team to uphold the promotion of European values and the value of the ECoC brand throughout the Elefsina ECoC year.

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

The panel would like to remind Elefsina 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 (not e.g. Cultural Capital) 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 Elefsina 2023 for a very informative and interesting meeting and looks forward to a successful realisation of Elefsina European Capital of Culture project in 2023.

All panel members (signed)

