



Elefsina European Capital of Culture 2021

Second Monitoring Meeting

Report by the ECOC Expert Panel

Timisoara, June 2019

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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

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Introduction

This report relates to the second monitoring meeting that took place on 4 June 2019 in Timisoara¹. It follows the first monitoring meeting of 10 October 2017 and the monitoring visit of 5 July 2018 by two panel members. Elefsina was nominated as the European Capital of Culture 2021 in Greece on 9 December 2016 by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports on the basis of the panel's selection report²; its bid-book is available on the Eleusis 2021 website³. This report is addressed to the Eleusis 2021 Company and will be published on the European Commission's website⁴.

Attendance

The panel members:

- Sylvia Amann, Cristina Farinha (Chair) and Agnieszka Wlazel, appointed by the European Parliament 2018-2020;
- Paulina Florjanowicz, Dessislava Gavrilova and Pierre Sauvageot, appointed by the Council of the EU 2019-2021;
- Beatriz Garcia, Jiří Suchánek (Rapporteur) and Suzana Žilič Fišer, appointed by the European Commission 2017-2019;
- Alin Adrian Nica, nominated by the European Committee of the Regions 2019-2021.

For Eleusis 2021:

- Maria Philippi, CEO and Member of the Board of Directors;
- Kelly Diapouli, Artistic Director;
- Peggy Tsolakaki, Director of the Department of Infrastructure Planning, Monitoring and European Funding.

Also in attendance were Sylvain Pasqua and Gérald Colleaux from the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture) and Mrs. Eirini Komninou from the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports.

Report from Eleusis 2021

Eleusis 2021 Company submitted a detailed and comprehensive written report together with a series of annexes in advance of the meeting. The report outlined the activities of the organisation since the official nomination as ECOC for 2021.

At the meeting, the delegation made a presentation that included the following points:

- Mrs. Maria Philippi, CEO, introduced her team and described the difficult situation affected by political instability due – in particular – to the recent local elections as well as the Company's efforts to regain citizens' and artists' trust. She also

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://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/files/ECOC-2021-greece-selection-report_en.pdf

³ https://eleusis2021.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/ELEUSIS21_BID_BOOK_2016_ENG_outline.pdf

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/capitals-culture_en

mentioned that small-scale infrastructure projects are now under the responsibility of the Company – a situation that was not planned in the bid-book. Furthermore, Mrs. Philippi pointed out that it was important for the Eleusis 2021 team to keep united.

- Mrs. Kelly Diapouli, Artistic Director, then described the status of the project’s cultural and artistic content and mentioned recent achievements. In total 14 projects were realized in 2018, among them: Synikismos Festival [performing arts], the Culture 2030 meeting and Initiator [international visual artists’ residency]. Mrs Diapouli also explained the approach to capacity building programmes and cooperation with European networks, such as Culture Action Europe, UCLG United Cities and Local Governments (Pilot Cities project) or In Situ (training programme for Eleusis 2021 team) etc. Mrs. Diapouli said that for 2019, the purpose was to implement 20 artistic projects and presented the overall plan for 2021. She also tackled the main challenge, which is the complicated contracting process and other related procedures. Some projects had to be cancelled or postponed due to the inability of the Company to act effectively within the Greek legal framework. The artistic content is also negatively affected by the delays in the completion of the infrastructure projects. Mrs. Diapouli however stressed that there is continued enthusiasm and good will within the team, as well as many successes, despite the difficult conditions the Company is working under.
- Mrs. Peggy Tsolakaki, Director of the Department of Infrastructure Planning, Monitoring and European Funding, presented the long-term strategy that should be embedded into the municipal cultural strategy [expected to be updated in September 2019]. The short-term legacy strategy stands on four pillars: Enhancing the cultural profile of the city through the enrichment of its cultural offerings; Continuing some of the city’s important events and festivals; Legacy deriving from all artistic activity of the ECOC; and Legacy coming from the operation of the Company. Moreover, the Evaluation and Monitoring plan was discussed but it is only in a very early stage of development.
- Mrs. Maria Philippi then explained the status of their „capacity to deliver“. She highlighted that the Company had finalized by now its internal regulations, procedures, organizational chart and definition of roles. There are currently 20 staff members on the Company’s payroll and 6 further people recruited on a contract-base. All procedures are in full compliance with the Greek legal framework, which is a transposition of the EU legislation. The Company feels there is solid support at the national (with the adoption of six specific pieces of legislation facilitating the work of the Company) and regional levels. There is however a lack of coordination and governance-oriented connection with the city representatives, in particular due to the fact that there is no team or Deputy Mayor within the city council designated to collaborate with Eleusis 2021. The cultural infrastructure planning strategy is being developed in two axes: 1) modernization, renovation and energy upgrade of available existing facilities and 2) development of new cultural infrastructures by restoring two former industrial clusters and by creating the Fab Lab plus several smaller facilities. Due to many delays in preparation of the infrastructure, the Company is remapping all existing available venues and redesigning the artistic plans accordingly. The non (or delayed) development of cultural venues is another main challenge of the ECOC project.

Discussion

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

- The panel acknowledged the good will of the team to prepare a quality and progressive ECOC project. Unfortunately, the progress in the preparation since the first monitoring meeting is much smaller than expected. Frustration from the inability to act in a trustful and flexible manner towards key stakeholders is visible from both the written report and the presentation. The absence of any city representative suggests that the project is not taken with due responsibility by the city of Elefsina.
- The panel asked about the contribution of the ECOC to the implementation of the city's cultural strategy. Partially due to the political change that intervened just a few days before the monitoring meeting, the team still lacks a clear coordination and interaction with the city council in this respect. The panel is worried that there is no clear structure on the side of the city council in charge of the cultural strategy implementation.
- The panel had questions on the major challenges faced by the Company, in particular the governing structure and, partly connected to this, the time-consuming financial procedures. The CEO highlighted again that the Company's internal regulations and procedures were totally in line with EU legislation while the Artistic Director regretted that these procedures were too cumbersome and made it difficult to move forward rapidly. As a consequence of these lengthy procedures, some projects, such as „Time Circus“, though approved by the Board of Directors, failed to be contracted on time. Regarding more precisely „Time Circus“, the CEO said they were still trying to find a legal solution to make it happen.
- The panel asked details on how the data for the evaluation were being gathered. The Company answered that the majority of the information came from the artistic team and Mrs. Peggy Tsolakaki's department and that they were assessed primarily based on their artistic quality. Internal evaluation procedures and the formulation of indicators are still in very early stage.
- The panel asked about the cooperation with national tourism authorities as increased flows of tourists is one of the most discussed criteria and a key indicator of success. Culture needs to be articulated with other policy fields. Unfortunately, the municipality has not adopted yet its tourism strategy and no special arrangement at national level has been agreed so far.
- In the bid-book, as well as in the short-term strategy, Eleusis 2021 announced the development of creative industries as one of the main goals for the future city development. The FabLab is supposed to contribute to this aim. It will attract creative professionals as well as operate as a training centre for digital fabrication and a meeting place for the community with a special focus on children and young people. Empty shops will also be offered to creative professionals in order to help them establish themselves and their activities on a permanent basis in the city, create specific events, etc. The Company intends to extend its collaboration with the

OAED authority (Ministry of Labour), so that the FabLab can be hosted in the facilities of the local technical school.

Conclusions and recommendations

The panel considers the status of the Eleusis 2021 progress as worrisome and fears that, under current conditions, the Company might not be able to deliver the project up to the high standards required by an ECOC. There has been no sufficient progress since the first monitoring meeting and the city visit in terms of cooperation between the city council and the Company, infrastructure development, governance (despite the positive progress mentioned above such as the negotiation of new pieces of legislation with the national Government) as well as monitoring & evaluation. There are positive advancements in terms of artistic vision, networking and partnerships, recruitment of staff and clearer internal organisational structure and definition of roles within the Company, but it appears that the procedures, though duly reflecting the Greek and EU legislations, are still too cumbersome and don't make it possible to come to quick decisions. In this sense, the organisational and governance structure is not effective enough. In this scenario, there is a risk that the potential of the existing programme may not be implemented fully. In the panel's view, there is a need now for the city of Elefsina to act rapidly and lend a hand to the Company to ensure that the project can progress rapidly, on a solid ground, and preserve the European Capital of Culture brand, a title acquired through a tough competition with further 13 Greek cities.

Recommendations

The following list of recommendations comprises input from the panel from previous reports and letter as well as new recommendations. Since the major part of the recommendations included in the report from the first monitoring meeting and the panel visit were not implemented, the panel recommends that the ECOC team – together with the BoD and the Municipality of Elefsina – consider these recommendations, as well as those emerging from the second monitoring meeting (see below). The implementation of all recommendations will be assessed during the last monitoring meeting and will be used as a basis for the panel's decision on recommending the payment of the Melina Mercouri Prize.

Recommendation 1: Since no representative of the city was present during the monitoring meeting [only partly understandable due to local elections] there was no possibility to discuss the main challenge, namely the position of Eleusis 2021 as an organisation without clear links to the municipality, thus deprived of important operational and strategic support. The panel recommends taking immediate steps to build an appropriate working governance structure. It is necessary to ensure a firm involvement of the city, which would enable the successful implementation of the ECOC project and the preparation of the city for hosting the ECOC and benefiting from its legacy. Resorting to an external advisory help for this demanding task should be considered as a priority, even without waiting for the new municipal team to come into office in September.

Recommendation 2: Contracting, procurement procedures, taxation issues and other economic oriented tasks are frequently the main challenges for implementing the ECOC project in many countries. Greece is not an exception and the panel strongly recommends to use all the advisory assistance possible and focus on adapting the governance structure so that it fits better within the current legal system in Greece. Due to the lack of time, another change in the national legal system for the benefit of the ECOC (on top of the six changes already achieved) shall not be priority for the ECOC team. Instead, key stakeholders shall find a feasible solution to ease the administration process as much as possible. The bid-book, which is considered as a de facto contract, could be used as a supportive tool for these negotiations.

Recommendation 3: The current decision-making system of the Board of Directors, as presented in the progress report and during the presentation, seems too complex and time consuming. The panel recommends that the Board delegate daily operational decisions to the executive staff [within reasonable financial limits to be set]. The Board of Directors shall allow the Company to act independently and flexibly and concentrate on strategic or financially more demanding decisions as well as on the ECOC legacy.

Recommendation 4: The Board decision-making process and working procedures should be formalised to ensure transparency and clarification on the roles, functions, responsibilities and relationships among the diverse entities represented. A clear privacy and ethics policy code for all the Board discussions should be defined and approved. The law should be reviewed to remove the double function of the CEO also as a member of the Board and/or in the meanwhile include ad-hoc working procedures to ensure the specificities of having the CEO within the Board.

Recommendation 5: The absence of sufficient cultural infrastructure in the city and delays in developing the new infrastructure are among the main challenges of the whole project. Additional financing for more pop-up venues is a positive element, but the panel strongly recommends delegating this responsibility [at least partly] to municipal authorities that have better expertise and resources than the ECOC team. The Eleusis 2021 Company's main objectives shall remain within the soft [programme oriented] operation. A realistic plan for programme production should be produced, including the infrastructure needed and potential alternative venues (plan B).

Recommendation 6: The current municipal cultural strategy is a positive asset and the panel wishes to highlight that articulated work alongside the city council is crucial for its successful implementation most notably in view of incorporating and ensuring the legacy sustainability.

Recommendation 7: The creative industries strategy remains still in a rather theoretical phase but with promising elements. As mentioned in the report, finding strategic partners for a more effective implementation of creative industries in the city is a reasonable step. Consideration should notably be given to the articulation with the European Creative Hubs Network, based in Athens, to bring new expertise and international links, but also make the relevant bridges towards the creative community in Athens.

Recommendation 8: One of the stronger points of Eleusis 2021 project is the wide cooperation within European networks and capacity building programmes. The panel encourages both the Company and city departments to continue to develop this. Recommendation from the first monitoring meeting related to Goethe Institute and other organisations shall be taken into consideration.

Recommendation 9: Although the panel appreciates the fact that data for the monitoring and evaluation are being collected, the evaluation framework shall be changed. From a theoretical and research-oriented approach, it should turn to a more practical framework incorporating indicators to capture achievements (e.g. network development, perceptions of place and of the ECOC etc.). Good practice from past ECOC projects shows that universities should not be the only partner to deliver major – or the whole – evaluation and monitoring. A better structure is needed, including internal monitoring. Moreover, the involvement in evaluation of national level organisations [tourism authorities etc.] is highly recommended.

Recommendation 10: Regarding budget and sponsorship plans, the panel notes the good balance and the interest already obtained among private investors, including big companies – national oil and transport companies. Yet, the panel also reminded that these sponsors remain within a B2B relationship without additional communicational value. The plan to acquire 3,5 Mio. is ambitious. Based on the fundraising results, the overall budget shall be revised in early 2020. Moreover, a strategy to attract and

integrate smaller companies and businesses as sponsors should be developed so that the ECOC could benefit from their funding but also communication wise.

Recommendation 11: Though West Attica did not send so far a representative in the Board of Directors, the panel thinks that the region should contribute to the programme, as proposed in the bid-book. It invites therefore the BoD and the City Council to invite again the region of West Attica to nominate a representative.

Recommendation 12: Tourism is strongly linked with the international brand of Greece. Involvement of national tourism authorities, as well as those in charge of tourism in Athens and Piraeus, is recommended for both the evaluation and monitoring part and for communication purposes [locally, nationally and internationally] as a country priority for 2021. The vision of Elefsina as an incubator for contemporary art and creative industries should be considered to draw a new distinctive tourism alternative strategy.

Recommendation 13: The outreach part of the project is showing some positive elements [workers, walks, labs...]. The panel encourages the team to continue in this direction, finalize the strategic approach and focus on implementation. This is closely linked with the staffing plan, which shows also some delays.

Recommendation 14: The panel finds that the interesting preparatory programme work underway, the site specific and community involvement features are not sufficiently disseminated and made known to wider audiences. The original concept and process of Euphoria should be translated into messages capable of attracting national and international visitors.

Recommendation 15: Internal tensions in the team must be carefully addressed and related measures taken. The mediating role is a duty of the Company owner, which may be carefully supported by external mediator(s).

Next Steps

The panel acknowledges the efforts made under limited organisational conditions by Eleusis 2021 since its nomination.

The main concern that remains since the first monitoring meeting is to continue adjusting the operational framework with no further delay so that Eleusis 2021 can act rapidly with appropriate staffing as well as governance and organisational structure. The cultural programme implementation requires stability and the autonomy of the implementation team and appropriate infrastructure.

Therefore, a second monitoring visit is being scheduled for the autumn 2019 to assess all expected necessary changes.

The Commission will call for a third and final monitoring meeting in late 2020. At the end of the third monitoring meeting, the panel will make a recommendation to the Commission on whether to pay or not the Melina Mercouri Prize to Eleusis 2021.

The conditions for the payment of the Prize are specified in Article 14 of Decision 445/2014/EU:

"The prize money shall be paid by the end of March of the year of the title, provided that the designated city concerned continues to honour the commitments it made at the application stage, complies with the criteria and takes into account the recommendations contained in the selection and monitoring reports.

The commitments made at the application stage shall be deemed to have been honoured by the designated city where no substantial change has been made to the programme

and the strategy between the application stage and the year of the title, in particular where:

- (a) the budget has been maintained at a level capable of delivering a high-quality cultural programme in line with the application and the criteria;*
- (b) the independence of the artistic team has been appropriately respected;*
- (c) the European dimension has remained sufficiently strong in the final version of the cultural programme;*
- (d) the marketing and communication strategy and the communication material used by the designated city clearly reflects the fact that the action is a Union action;*
- (e) the plans for the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the title on the designated city are in place."*

The panel would like to thank Eleusis 2021 for a very informative and interesting meeting and looks forward to the next developments of the European Capital of Culture project.

(Signed) all attending panel's members

