



EUROPEAN CAPITAL
OF CULTURE

Elefsina

European Capital of Culture 2021

First Monitoring Meeting

Report by the panel of independent experts

Brussels

October 2017

Introduction

This report follows the meeting in Brussels on the 10th October 2017 between the panel and Elefsina, one of the three European Capitals of Culture (ECOC) in 2021¹. Elefsina was nominated as the European Capital of Culture 2021 in Greece on the 9th December 2016² by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports on the basis of the panel's selection report; its bid book is available on the Elefsina 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 (Rapporteur) and Agnieszka Wlazel, appointed by the European Parliament 2015–17

Ulrich Fuchs, Aiva Rozenberga and Pauli Sivonen, appointed by the Council of the EU 2016–18

Beatriz Garcia, Jiří Suchánek (Chair) and Suzana Žilič Fišer, appointed by the European Commission 2017–19

Alain Hutchinson, nominated by the Committee of the Regions 2016–18

For Elefsina:

Diapouli, Angeliki	Artistic Director
Philippi, Maria	CEO
Tsolakaki, Panagiota	Monitoring and Evaluation Manager
Tsoukalas, Georgios	Mayor of Elefsina
Kampanis, Gavriil	Vice-President of Eleusis 2021 Organisation
Papadopoulos, Dimitrios	Member of Eleusis 2021 Board and Municipality Council

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

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/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

Report from Elefsina 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.

At the meeting Elefsina 2021 made a presentation that included the following points:

Governance and staffing

- Georgios Tsoukalas, Mayor of Elefsina, at the moment the interim President of the Board, affirmed the full support of the City Council to the ECOC and announced that the implementation of the cultural strategy (published on their website) was taking place.
- The CEO, Maria Philippi, who took official office only in September (though started to work informally in May), declared that despite obstacles related to national legislation influencing governance and management, they were gradually moving towards the concept of EUphoria.
- The Eleusis 2021 company, a S.A. which sole shareholder is the Municipality of Elefsina, was founded in April 2017 but could officially begin its operations only in August, which caused delays, most notably at the level of recruiting, planning and starting of the main projects. However, the dedication of the team – some staff members already in place from the candidacy – and the close collaboration with the City Council, allowed the partial implementation of the planned programme even though informally and without due funding. The Board is composed of 11 members and have met quite often during this year.
- The choice for a municipal company SA resulted from a decision adopted by the Greek Parliament especially for the ECOC in July 2016 and following the former Greek ECOC models. However and mostly due to the financial crisis and the special regulatory framework imposed on the country's public administration this model reveals to be inadequate to manage an ECOC today due to constraints regarding recruitment: very low number of staff members allowed (max. 5) and unsuitable average salary levels to attract specific and/or international expertise needed. While currently the company has only 4 employees and essential members are missing (for example for communications and marketing activities), it presented to the panel reasonable future staffing intentions, including average salaries – reaching up to 40 staff members in 2021. However its implementation is still dependent on permission and/or changes in the regulation from Government.
- Furthermore the operation under the municipal law for companies leads to more obstacles, such as difficulties in the provision of services and work contracts; and unclear status regarding sponsorship and donations.
- There is strong political support from regional and national authorities that has been crucial to the development of the project: prefecture of West Attica supports with funding; the Ministry of Culture is represented in the Board and the Ministry of Internal Administration is helping to deal with administrative and legal issues.

Programme

- The Artistic Director, Angeliki Diapouli, said that despite difficult conditions, there was national and international positive appreciation for their ECoC concept and programme plans as well as a willingness from diverse institutions and artists to partner with Elefsina 2021. The potential for a project that is site specific and based on community involvement is very much recognised. In some co-production cases, partners even took charge of the Elefsina 2021 financial share, demonstrating high commitment and a strong belief in the project's potential.
- Timetable was revised and some projects were merged for the ramp up years: Persephone (community based work and public space) and Culture 2030 (capacity building). Within this last programme, the "Networking Strand", beyond the City ArtLab activities, extended to the creation of a network of Greek cities culminating in the new proposal to implement a Greek Capital of Culture initiative modelled after the ECOC.
- 13 projects have already been realised – while 10 planned have not started yet – and they helped developing relationship with local audiences as well as with international networks. Despite tight budget, the team engaged in meetings in Athens with interested cultural institutions, all over Europe (the French Institute in Athens covered several trips to France), China and Japan. Collaborations with other ECOCs and other cities such as Bremen have been taking place. The overall result has been good: more than 175 professionals from Europe and USA participated in different projects and meetings that covered many essential European topics, such as refugee crisis; several abandoned places in the city were activated; and local citizens and audiences not normally involved in culture and international contacts were engaged.
- Next steps for 2018 in key words: activities will have a strong focus on the worker movement and the working class; four creative producers will be hired; the "Usual Bread" project will be pursued; research will be developed on creative industries; activities will be implemented in West Attica; audience development plans will go forward; a first training programme will be launched for site specific creation; and the artistic residencies will start.

Evaluation and monitoring

- The evaluation and monitoring office is meant to start soon in collaboration with external partners already selected from the University of Athens. The team shared that it was complex to find adequate partners due to lack of specific expertise in the country.

Cultural infra-structure

- The cultural infra-structure development plan, though still dependent on changes in the programme, is focusing on two main axes: modernisation of existing venues (refurbishment) and public places; and creation of new infra-structures in two former industrial clusters. In this respect there are main challenges faced in absence of a specific regulation for the ECOC project and the team is planning to decide on plan B for venues, notably: the strict control

mechanism of regional funding regarding capital expenditure; the impossibility for municipality to recruit as well as the monitoring of calls for tenders; excessive bureaucracy involving construction permissions; ownership issues; coordination of diverse stakeholders.

Funding

- In 2017 the funding and cash flow situation is good, as the planned instalments from the different stakeholders have been duly received (or are about to be received before end 2017) (approx. 2 M). Several donors, notably some big companies have also been showing interest in sponsoring and becoming partners of this initiative.

Communication and marketing

- Without advertising expenses, yet with good networking, there has been a good media response to the project and its concept. Good partnerships with press agencies and other Greek international institutions allow good worldwide coverage. There has been also a steady growth on the social media dynamics.
- Together with the Greek National Bank the project will put in place a “hybrid engagement system design” linked with the smart city concept: an application that allows the local businesses to engage and get to know their audiences associated with a system of rewards and engagement schemes.

Discussion

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

Governance and staffing

- The panel asked about the Board’s role and functioning as it should have a strategic, auditing and advisory function not an executive one, therefore the big number of meetings held (24 times officially until the moment) was considered excessive. Yet the Board is operating on a temporary basis, due to the specificities of the Greek regulation in force for the ECOC: the Mayor is the interim President; and the CEO is integrated into the Board structure. The latter is not a common practice in ECOCs and might put into question the autonomy between both implementation team and Board.
- The panel was also concerned by the composition of the Board, its mainly local character and potential conflicts of interests, as it recommended already in its selection report that its members should have no vested interest in or links with the cultural programme. The panel received some reassurance from the Board members that there was no such conflict of interest.
- The obstacles brought by legal frameworks under which the company is operating were widely discussed. This pending and pressing issue needs to be solved as soon as possible so that staffing and procurement processes may proceed. The city is working with the Government on a more adequate solution having the end of the year as a deadline. The further establishment of an exception status for the

ECOC, with facilitation of procurement and recruitment procedures; the change to private legal nature or the option for an extended outsourcing of the programme implementation to external agents (though not an ideal solution) were alternatives debated.

- The staffing plan calendar was also questioned. It is essential that there is a clear strategy to further grow the operational human resources. The roles and relationships among the different bodies and staff members should be clear to ensure effective decision-making. The panel particularly noticed the lack of communication and marketing Director in the current team and the urgent need for creative producers.
 - **Recommendation 1:** A strategy on how the Board should operate and its composition should be revised. The panel would like to suggest considering that diversity of expertise as well as affiliations, notably including members from outside of Elefsina and internationally, would be of added value. The full independence of the implementation team as well as easy and clear decision-making procedures should be guaranteed. The Board's function should quickly move on from **executive to strategic** at this point.
 - **Recommendation 2:** The panel urges the city alongside with the Government, to find the most appropriate solution for the organisation legal operational framework **not later than the end of the year**. This solution should recognise the special features and needs of the implementation of an ECOC project that requires fast decision-making and procurement processes; as well as capacity to recruit specific expertise.
 - **Recommendation 3:** A detailed staffing plan for the whole project should be ready to be taken into consideration within negotiations with the Government to make sure it will be compliant with the new governance solution. Furthermore, it would also be relevant to devise an organisational chart describing roles and relationships among all bodies and staff members planned that will serve as a management tool for the development of human resources.

Evaluation and monitoring

- The evaluation and monitoring process was debated and the team explained that a partner from the University of Athens had been chosen due to his social and cultural impact expertise (the previous research partner, the University of Thessaly had a more tourism background that was considered less relevant for the project). The intention is to carry on a city social profile survey to inform the following selection of indicators for the ECOC. The plan is to work with local young researchers to conduct the survey so as to build along their research capacity and expertise.
 - **Recommendation 4:** The panel insists that the definition of the ECOC evaluation indicators should be well tuned with the city impact objectives to account for the transformation expected in the city, beyond the ECOC year.
 - **Recommendation 5:** The panel also believes that it is important to apply multiple research techniques (both qualitative and

quantitative) as well as include in research diverse expertise, notably cultural policy experts. In this sense, collaboration between the University of Athens and other Universities with other expertise – including in quantitative data is advised. The suggestion of involving local researchers (as mentioned by the team), is therefore, advised.

Funding

- Regarding budget and sponsorship plans, the panel praised the good balance and the interest already obtained among private investors, including big companies. The panel would like to remind that these sponsors should have no interference in the programme; and furthermore that they remain within a B2B relationship without additional communicational value.
- The panel sought information on the cooperation with the city of Bremen and its potential to approach the Goethe Institute, as the cooperation between the two cities is not yet at the financial level.
 - **Recommendation 6:** A strategy to attract and integrate smaller companies and businesses as sponsors as well as negotiate media partnerships should be developed so that the ECOC could benefit more funding and communication wise and the same time strengthening local involvement and the sense of co-ownership.
 - **Recommendation 7:** Within the cooperation with the city of Bremen, the Goethe institute should be approached swiftly as these national cultural institutes might define specific budgets for these events – yet it needs to be planned much in advance.

Programme

- The panel was pleased with the good job done under deficient conditions regarding programme, national and international networking and outreach. The topics of refugees and the future of work are inspiring and in line with the European current debates. The fact that local audiences have been involved and had the opportunity to be in contact with cultural projects is also an important step further. However the temporary situation raised concerns as the organisation lacks stability and adequate frameworks and human resources to move further with programme implementation as well as with audience engagement and outreach.
- The panel asked how the topic of the anniversary of the Greek revolution (that will take place in 2021) could have an international outreach and if Turkish partners would also be included in the programme. The team ensured that the original plans were still to be pursued so to have a European dimension of this specific Greek event.
- The contribution of the region of West Attica to the programme, planned in the bid book, notably regarding culture and creative industries development is not yet in place due to lack of means. The team claimed it needed a special curator/creative producer for this issue.
 - **Recommendation 8:** Keep track on European dimension of the projects, making sure there are enough resources to bring

international artists and partners planned. Focus on the bid book projects and related audience engagement and outreach.

- **Recommendation 9:** Proceed with baseline mapping research of the culture and creative stakeholders in the region so to device the programme plans for the industrial sites and clarify accordingly staffing needs.

Cultural infra-structure

- Efforts should be done in order to put in place the cultural infra-structure plan as foreseen in the bid book while considering alternative solutions in face of actual obstacles.
 - **Recommendation 10:** Proceed with definition of plan B venues for the cultural programme in case obstacles regarding ownership and urban legislation are not solved within adequate timeframe.

Communication

- 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.
- In relation to the initiative "hybrid engagement system design", the panel stressed the need to address data protection issues in order to ensure an appropriate implementation and learnt that the team had already planned an independent authority in this respect.
 - **Recommendation 11:** A detailed communication plan for the whole project needs to be put in place and start to be implemented. The original concept and process of EUphoria should be translated into clear messages capable of attracting national and international visitors. The team needs to integrate as soon as possible communication and marketing Director and specialists.

Cultural strategy and legacy

- The panel appreciates the fact that the cultural strategy is being implemented and it is accessible in the municipality website. It would like to recommend adding also an English executive summary so to facilitate cooperation and exchange of practices with other cities.
 - **Recommendation 12:** Special focus and attention should be given to pursue the overall long-term cultural strategy of the municipality so that the ECOC legacy is smoothly planned and ensured. The work already done with other 2021 ECOCs could also be potentiated to develop into a common plan for legacy activities.

Next Steps

The panel acknowledges the great and committed work carried out by Elefsina 2021 since its nomination and appreciates very much the effort done under limited organisational framework.

The main concern is now to settle governance, organisational structure and staffing by adjusting and designing an adequate legal operational framework for the ECOC. The cultural programme implementation requires stability and the autonomy of the implementation team.

The panel therefore invites Elefsina 2021 to submit by end of March 2018:

- 1/ updated governance, organisational and staffing plan, making account of the solution achieved alongside the Government;
- 2/ updated cultural programme with related budgetary overview as well as key future milestones for ECOC implementation;
- 3/ a progress report on the panel's recommendations (from both post-selection and monitoring reports) explaining how Elefsina 2021 is acting (or plans to act) on each recommendation. The recommendations' numbers, as included in the reports, should be maintained.

The panel is available for Elefsina 2021 questions and advice, through the Commission services.

The Commission will call for a second monitoring meeting in mid-2019. The panel proposes however a monitoring visit of panel representatives to Elefsina in mid-2018.

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