



Brussels, 6 October 2025
(OR. en)

13521/25
ADD 1

CULT 102
CODEC 1432
EEE 26
SOC 645

COVER NOTE

From:	Secretary-General of the European Commission, signed by Ms Martine DEPREZ, Director
date of receipt:	2 October 2025
To:	Ms Thérèse BLANCHET, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union
No. Cion doc.:	SWD(2025) 284 final
Subject:	COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT EVALUATION Accompanying the document REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS on the first interim evaluation of the European Capitals of Culture Action 2020-2033

Delegations will find attached document SWD(2025) 284 final.

Encl.: SWD(2025) 284 final



EUROPEAN
COMMISSION

Brussels, 2.10.2025
SWD(2025) 284 final

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

EVALUATION

Accompanying the document

**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE
COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

on the first interim evaluation of the European Capitals of Culture Action 2020-2033

{COM(2025) 587 final}

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Glossary

<i>Term or acronym</i>	<i>Meaning or definition</i>
ECoC	European Capitals of Culture
EU	European Union
EFTA/EEA	European Free Trade Association/ European Economic Area
The legal basis	Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 establishing a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2020 to 2033 and repealing Decision No 1622/2006/EC
CCS	Cultural and Creative Sectors
ISG	Interservice Group
DG EAC	Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture
SWD	Staff Working Document

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose and scope of the evaluation/fitness check

1.1.1. Regulatory and legislative considerations

This Staff Working Document supports the Commission's report on the first interim evaluation of the European Capitals of Culture action for the period 2020-2033, as required by Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council.¹ In line with Article 16(2) of the Decision, the Commission is mandated to ensure an external and independent evaluation of the action on a regular basis and *present to the European Parliament, the Council and the Committee of the Regions [...] reports based on those evaluations, accompanied, if appropriate, by relevant proposals:*

(a) an initial interim report by 31 December 2024;

(b) a second interim report by 31 December 2029;

(c) an ex-post report by 31 December 2034.

1.1.2. Evaluation and focus area

The evaluation assesses the performance of the action against the five evaluation criteria established in the Better Regulation Guidelines and Toolbox. The evaluation also assesses the longer-term impact of the intervention to understand the full potential of the legacy linked to hosting a European Capital of Culture (hereafter, 'ECoC'). Furthermore, it aims at identifying good practices and lessons not only for future ECoC cities but also for European cities interested in further developing their cultural strategies and cultural offer. Finally, its objective is to identify a number of potential changes to the ECoC action to be considered for the successor initiative post-2033.

The evaluation covers all cities holding the title between 2013 and 2023, as well as cities bidding under the current legal basis for the titles 2020-2028.

1.1.3. Methodology and data sources

This SWD on the first interim evaluation of the ECoC draws mainly, among other sources,² on the supporting study conducted by ECORYS Europe EEIG SA (tender lead) and KEA European Affairs SRL (partner), under contract with the European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC).³ The final report delivered by ECORYS and KEA provides answers to all evaluation questions⁴ defined in the Terms of Reference and related to the five evaluation criteria. The final report of the contractor also contains recommendations addressed to the Commission.

A broad set of data collection and analytical techniques were used, drawing on both primary and secondary data collection:

¹ Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 establishing a Union action

² Annex II. I Methodology and Analytical models used.

³ See Annex I. Procedural Information.

⁴ See Annex III for evaluation questions.

- A total of 64 interviews were conducted with EU and national representatives as well as representatives of local authorities and organisations;
- Data from previous evaluation reports of ECoC titleholders were mapped against about 60 key indicators in a tailored data mapping tool;
- A total of 199 resources were used to compile the literature review for this study and 38 statistical data indicators were mapped;
- Six focus groups with national and European expert panel members, ECoCs and preselected cities were conducted;
- A public consultation was conducted collecting 60 responses;
- Eight case studies were conducted;
- A validation workshop was conducted to discuss the main findings and the potential actions for the future.

1.1.4. Challenges and limitations

Although there is a wide number of stakeholders and organisations involved in the implementation of ECoCs, challenges were encountered in identifying and engaging with stakeholders with sufficient knowledge of the issues to be evaluated. Due to COVID-19's consequences on the implementation of the European Capitals of Culture at the beginning of the concerned period (2020-2033), the choice was made to include a broader scope of different European Capitals of Culture and to include into this evaluation titleholding cities selected and monitored under the provisions of the previous legal instrument, i.e. Decision No 1622/2006/EC.⁵ This choice was also motivated to get a better perspective on the longer-term impact of the action.

Therefore, some individuals who held key positions in relation to the ECoC 2013-2019 (e.g. former members of the local ECoC delivery teams) left their positions or moved on to new roles in different organisations some years ago, meaning tracking them down was sometimes challenging.

Despite the challenges encountered, the consultation strategy adopted for this evaluation encompassed a wide range of relevant stakeholders, ensuring that different views could be collected and could feed into the triangulation and analysis. The details of this consultation strategy are laid out in Annexes II and V of this SWD.

Moreover, despite a wide range of sources being used for the collection of statistical data, many of these sources did not always cover the issues that this evaluation is interested in (e.g. longer-term impact) or did not cover the required period to be useful for this study. Geographical scale was also a limiting factor with many data sources not at a low enough granularity to provide valuable insight. Datasets at the city level would have been ideal for this analysis. Some datasets were, however, only available at the national level.

Missing data was, where possible, supplemented through quantitative information collected through interviews and literature review; however, in most cases, the evaluation often had to rely on qualitative evidence.

Furthermore, this evaluation had to rely heavily on the existing evaluations of past ECoCs conducted by external evaluators and/or title cities. While these evaluations provided a

⁵ Decision No 1622/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 2006 establishing a Community action for the European Capital of Culture event for the years 2007 to 2019 (OJ L 304, 3.11.2006, p. 1).

great depth of data, gaps were still identified and, in some cases, cities used different definitions for some data categories. For instance, the indicator ‘number of cultural activities conducted’ was interpreted more loosely by certain cities than others, leading to difficulties in comparing data across the different ECoCs. Nevertheless, this evaluation attempts to use the available data to draw reliable findings and conclusions.

Finally, it should be noted that the majority of data compiled relates to the Effectiveness and Efficiency evaluation questions, given the more quantitative nature of these evaluation criteria. Less was found on Coherence, Relevance, and EU added value criteria.

2. WHAT WAS THE EXPECTED OUTCOME OF THE INTERVENTION?

2.1 Description of the intervention and its objectives

Born in 1985 upon an idea of former Greek and French Ministers of Culture Melina Mercouri and Jack Lang, the European Capital of Culture is a flagship action of the European Union, and one of the best known and most appreciated by European citizens.

The aim of the initiative is to promote and celebrate Europe's rich cultural diversity and shared aspects of our cultures and heritage, thereby increasing citizens' sense of belonging to a common cultural area. It also aims to strengthen the contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities.

Initially, the cities were designated as ‘European Cities of Culture’ by Member States acting on the basis of a Resolution of the Ministers Responsible for Cultural Affairs,⁶ which recognised the essential role cities play in the formation and spread of culture in Europe. The action was changed in 1999 into a Community action following the adoption of Decision 1419/1999/EC⁷ (the ‘European Cities of Culture’ became ‘European Capitals of Culture’), which was amended in 2005 by Decision.⁸ A further decision was adopted in 2006 (1622/2006/EC), completing the rules for the selection and monitoring of the different European Capitals of Culture. The current legal basis, on which the Staff Working Document is based, was adopted in 2014 to cover the years 2020-2033; it is Decision No 445/2014/EU⁹ (now referred to as ‘the legal basis’).

The general objectives of the action are defined as follows in the legal basis:

- a) to safeguard and promote the diversity of cultures in Europe and to highlight the common features they share as well as to increase citizens' sense of belonging to a common cultural area;
- b) to foster the contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities in accordance with their respective strategies and priorities.

The specific objectives of the action are defined as follows in the legal basis:

⁶ Resolution of the Ministers Responsible for Cultural Affairs concerning the Annual Event European City of Culture (7081/84).

⁷ Decision No 1419/1999/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 May 1999 establishing a Community action for the European Capital of Culture event for the years 2005 to 2019

⁸ Decision 649/2005/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 April 2005 amending Decision No 1419/1999/EC establishing a Community action for the European Capital of Culture event for the years 2005 to 2019.

⁹ Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 establishing a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2020 to 2033 and repealing Decision No 1622/2006/EC

- a) to safeguard and promote the diversity of cultures in Europe and to highlight the common features they share as well as to increase citizens' sense of belonging to a common cultural area;
- b) to widen access to and participation in culture;
- c) to strengthen the capacity of the cultural sector and its links with other sectors;
- d) to raise the international profile of cities through culture.

Design of the action

Under the current legal basis, the competition to award the title of “European Capital of Culture” to a city is organised and supervised by Member States, whose cities are entitled to hold it for one year in accordance with the calendar found in the action’s legal basis. However, this is not the case with the competition between cities in EEA/EFTA countries, candidate countries and potential candidates, which is ran and supervised by the European Commission.

All competitions start with the publication of a call for submission of applications¹⁰ by the relevant authority (usually the Ministry of Culture for competitions in Member States, and the Commission for the competitions in non-EU Member States), explaining the selection procedure and criteria. Interested cities send their candidatures in the form of a bid book by a deadline indicated in the call. The cities are then designated after an assessment of their candidatures based on six criteria listed in article 5 of the legal basis: ‘contribution to the long-term strategy’, ‘European dimension’, ‘cultural and artistic content’, ‘capacity to deliver’, ‘outreach’ and ‘management’.

The assessment of these criteria for applicant cities is ensured by an independent panel of cultural experts, who perform the selection and monitoring of the candidate and selected cities. Their work is supervised by the relevant national authority and the European Commission. The panel of experts is composed of up to 12 members. Ten are nominated on a rolling basis for a period of three years by different EU institutions and bodies as follows: Council of the European Union (3 members), European Parliament (3 members), European Commission (3 members), European Committee of the Regions (1 member). In addition to these European experts, up to two experts can be appointed by Member States for the selection and monitoring of their respective ECoC. The pre-selection of the European experts is made by the Commission through an open call for expression of interest (currently EAC/A03/2021¹¹). The criteria to select the experts are listed in Article 6 of the legal basis.

The competition to select European Capitals of Culture is carried out in two-rounds (pre-selection and final selection), which is acknowledged as an efficient mode of implementation in the recitals of the current legal basis and explains why it was reconducted after adopting this model from the previous ECoC method of selection. The pre-selection must take place no later than five years ahead of the title year, while the final selection is organised no-later than nine months after the pre-selection meetings. Following the recommendation of the panel in charge of selecting the European Capital of Culture, three monitoring meetings are organised ahead of the title year to monitor the progress of the city towards implementing their title.

The role of the European Commission is detailed in article 15 of the legal basis. It must:

¹⁰ [Call for applications Template, European Capital of Culture - Culture and Creativity](#)

¹¹ EAC/A03/2021

- a) ensure the overall coherence of the action;
- b) ensure coordination between the Member States and the panel;
- c) establish guidelines to assist with the selection and monitoring procedures in close cooperation with the panel;
- d) provide technical support to the panel;
- e) publish on its website all reports of the panel;
- f) make public all relevant information and contribute to the visibility of the action at the European and international levels;
- g) foster the exchange of experience and of good practices between past, present and future cities holding the title, as well as candidate cities, and promote wider dissemination of the cities' evaluation reports and lessons learned.

The European Union ensures the financing of its support for the ECoC action through the Creative Europe Programme.¹² The action is managed in the European Commission by the Creative Europe unit (D2) of DG EAC.

The European Union does not finance directly selected cities, but it pays at the beginning of the title-year EUR 1.5 million through the Melina Mercouri Prize upon the recommendation of the panel during their last monitoring meeting a couple of months before the start of the year. The financing of the different European Capitals of Culture rather comes externally from local, regional and national levels that a city must manage to successfully coordinate to ensure a successful title year.

On the following page is a simplified representation of the intervention logic. The complete intervention logic of the action is found in Annex VI of this Staff Working Document.

¹² Regulation (EU) 2021/818 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing the Creative Europe Programme (2021 to 2027) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1295/2013 (Text with EEA relevance)

General objectives:

- Safeguard and promote the diversity of cultures in Europe; highlight the common features they share; increase citizens' sense of belonging to a common cultural area;
- Foster the contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities in accordance with their respective strategies and priorities.

Specific objectives:

- Enhance the range, diversity and European dimension of the cultural offering in cities, including though transnational cooperation;
- Widen access to and participation in culture;
- Strengthen the capacity of the cultural sector and its links with other sectors;
- Raise the international profile of cities through culture.

Operational objectives:

Cultural Diversity

- Stimulate and implement a diverse range of cultural activities of high artistic quality promoting cultural diversity, dialogue and mutual understanding and highlighting (shared) European cultures and themes;
- Involve European artists, promote cooperation with different countries and transnational partnerships
- Combine traditional arts forms with new types of cultural expression.

Access and Participation

- Create new and sustainable opportunities for a wide range of citizens to attend and/or participate in cultural events;
- Involve local citizens, artists and cultural organisations in development and implementation;
- Provide opportunities for volunteering and foster links with schools and other education providers.

Cultural Capacity

- Improve cultural infrastructure;
- Develop the skills, capacity or governance of the cultural sector;
- Stimulate partnerships and cooperation with other sectors.

International Profile

- Attract the interest of a broad European and international public;
- Improve the European and international connections of the cultural community

Inputs:

- FTEs and financial resources dedicated to coordinate, support implementation of and implement the action made available by the EC, Member States and cities;

- EU financing of the European Capitals of Culture and the Melina Mercouri Prize;

- Financial resources made available by the Member state, the region, the title city, sponsors and, eventually, the EU;

- Selection, monitoring and support procedures;
- Reports, studies and evaluations.

Main activities:

EU

- Appointment of an independent panel of experts by EU institutions and Member States;
- Selection of one EFTA/EEA, candidates or potential candidate country to host a European Capital of Culture in 2022, 2024, 2028, 2030 and 2033;
- Monitoring and support to title cities;
- Award of the Melina Mercouri Prize of EUR 1.5M to title cities
- Development of guidelines for cities own evaluations and other guidelines.

Member States and title cities

- Selection of two cities in Member States to host European Capitals of Culture each year based on the six defined selection criteria
- Development and submission of the application;
- Preparatory activities to the title year;
- Implementation of cultural programme during the title year;
- Monitoring and evaluation.

Outputs:

Cultural Diversity

- Number of events and cultural activities of different genres and categories;
- Number of new cross-border collaborations, co-productions and exchanges involving local and international operators;
- Number of artists involved in international cooperation and number of local artists involved in international projects abroad.

Access and participation

- Attendance at ECOC events and evolution compared to the regular cultural audience of the City;
- Diversity of audience (as regards with geographical origin, target groups, age and gender) through various schemes and initiatives;
- Diversity of volunteers;
- Diversity of the cultural workforce;
- Number of cultural professionals trained.

Cultural Capacity

- Strategies for long-term cultural development of the city;
- Schemes and programmes supporting professional development of cultural managers and artists;
- Total value of investment in cultural infrastructure, facilities and in cultural programmes

- Number of sustained multi-sector partnerships;

- Number and profile of projects developed with other sectors;
- Number and profile of people and organisations participating in capacity building programmes.

International profile

- Number and profile of people reached via media coverage;
- Geographical scope of media coverage;
- Number of tourists visiting;
- Volume and % of positive media coverage of cities;
- Awareness of the ECOC among residents and cultural sector representatives abroad;
- Volume and % of city coverage about the ECOC and/or its cultural offer

Results:

- Increased range, diversity and European dimension of cultural offer in title cities;
- Increased financial contributions obtained from public, private and third sector partners.

Cultural Diversity

- Increased exposure of and to European artists;
- Increased number of cultural initiatives linking heritage and innovation;
- Increased cooperation between the city and locations in other countries;
- Increased transnational mobility of artists into and out of the city

Access and participation

- Increased level of awareness of the cultural offer and participation in cultural programmes;
- Increased level of access to and participation in culture by citizens in selected cities;
- Increased level of active engagement with culture by local population;
- Increased motivation for and depth of participation in culture;
- Increased diversity of the audience

Cultural Capacity

- Increased investment in cultural infrastructure in title cities
- New competencies developed by professionals from the cultural sector;
- Broader networks developed between cultural sector and other sectors and across geographic borders;
- Created/improved conditions and programmes or development of NGOs, cultural and creative industries;
- Raised cultural management standards in terms of skills, capacity or governance.

International profile

- Increased European and international visibility of selected cities;
- Increase in tourist visits in the years leading up to, during and following their host year;
- Changes in city positioning/representation/inclusion for the first time in international city brand rankings.

Impact:

European cultural and linguistic diversity and heritage are safeguarded and promoted:

- Citizens are more aware and appreciative of the diversity of European cultures developing a sense of belonging to a common cultural space;
- Cultural professionals increase transnational and cross-sectoral cooperation on culture, resulting in an increased European perspective;
- The quality of cultural activities is increased;
- Common elements we share as Europeans.

Title cities' long term cultural capacity is strengthened in terms of:

- Post-ECOC cultural strategy and implementation plans;
- Cultural infrastructure, increasing the availability of affordable space for cultural production;
- Cultural active participation.

Title cities' economy, cultural panorama and international recognition are strengthened:

- GDP and employment in title cities' cultural and creative sectors increase;
- The prestige and international recognition of selected cities is increased, resulting in strengthened tourism sectors;
- Increased ambition and professionalization of the cultural community.

2.2 Point of comparison

In comparison with its predecessor, the current legal basis brought to the ECoC action the following changes:

- Removal of the need for confirmation of selected cities at EU level, with ECoC titleholders designated directly by the Member State concerned;
- Opening of the Action to candidate countries, potential candidates and EFTA/EEA countries every three years (with the European Commission responsible for the official designation in these cases);
- More specific and robust selection criteria (six instead of two), including a stronger emphasis on the long-term impact of the Action and reinforcement of the European dimension;
- Composition of the Panel by 10 independent experts, which get completed by up to two national ones appointed by the national authorities organising the competition in their respective Member States;
- The addition of a third monitoring meetings organised before the title year between the selected city and the expert panel;
- The ex-post evaluation of the ECoC is now the responsibility of the designated city and not the European Commission;
- Postponement of the payment of the Melina Mercouri Prize to the beginning of the title year (instead the end of the previous year).

3. HOW HAS THE SITUATION EVOLVED OVER THE EVALUATION PERIOD?

The European Capital of Culture action is supported by the Creative Europe Programme, which covers the following costs for the implementation of the European Capitals of Culture 2020-2033:¹³

- Melina Mercouri Prize (EUR 1.5 million per city);
- Expenses to cover the activities of the panel;
- Other exceptional costs (e.g., events, communication).

Therefore, the cost of the action for the European Union budget oscillates between EUR 3,4 million and over EUR 5 million per year, depending on the number of European Capitals of Culture taking place in a given year (minimum 2, and up to 3). These costs are integrated into the Creative Europe annual programme budget.¹⁴

Since its creation in 1985, the title has been awarded to 82 different cities in all EU Member States (including the UK until its departure from the EU in 2020) and was granted to cities in 5 non-EU countries: Iceland (2000), Türkiye (2010), Norway (2000, 2008, 2024), Serbia (2022) and North Macedonia (2028). 22 cities have been selected under the current legal basis so far, 13 of them occurred/are occurring at the time of the drafting of this SWD, while 9 of them have been selected and are yet to be implemented.

The following cities have been selected so far under the current legal basis:

¹³ Regulation (EU) 2021/818 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing the Creative Europe Programme (2021 to 2027) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1295/2013

¹⁴ <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/resources/creative-europe-annual-work-programmes>

Title year	Country	Selected city	Bidding cities having reached the final selection round
2020	Croatia	Rijeka	Dubrovnik, Osijek, Pula
	Ireland	Galway	Limerick, Waterford
2022	Serbia	Novi Sad ¹⁵	Herceg Novi (ME)
	Lithuania	Kaunas	Klaipėda
	Luxembourg	Esch-sur-Alzette	-
2023	Romania ¹⁵	Timișoara	Baia Mare, Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca
	Greece ¹⁵	Elefsina	Kalamata, Rhodes
	Hungary	Veszprém	Debrecen, Győr
2024	Estonia	Tartu	Narva
	Austria	Bad Ischl	Dornbirn, St. Pölten
	Norway	Bodø	Banja Luka (BA), Mostar (BA)
2025	Slovenia	Nova Gorica	Ljubljana, Piran, Ptuj
	Germany	Chemnitz	Hannover, Hildesheim, Magdeburg, Nürnberg
2026	Finland	Oulu	Tampere, Savonlinna
	Slovakia	Trenčín	Nitra, Žilina
2027	Latvia	Liepāja	Daugavpils, Jūrmala and Valmiera
	Portugal	Évora	Aveiro, Braga, Ponta Delgada
2028	Czech Republic	České Budějovice (Budweis)	Broumov
	France	Bourges	Clermont-Ferrand, Montpellier, Rouen
	North Macedonia	Skopje	Budva (ME)
2029	Poland	Lublin	Bielsko–Biala, Katowice, Kołobrzeg
	Sweden	Kiruna	Uppsala
2030	Belgium	(TBD)	Ongoing competition (final selection in September 2025)

¹⁵ Originally foreseen for 2021.

	Cyprus	(TBD)	Ongoing competition (final selection in December 2025)
	EFTA/EEA countries, candidate countries and potential candidates	(TBD)	Ongoing competition (final selection in October 2025)

The legal basis was amended in 2017 to integrate European Free Trade Association countries that are parties to the Agreement on the European Economic Area.¹⁶ It was amended again in 2020 to address the consequences of the **COVID-19** pandemic.¹⁷ It notably offered both 2020 ECoCs (Rijeka and Galway) the possibility to extend their ECoC 2020 year until 30 April 2021, while keeping the same year of designation. Furthermore, the ECoC year in Timișoara and in Elefsina was postponed from 2021 to 2023 while the title year in Novi Sad was postponed from 2021 to 2022.

The **Russian War of aggression in Ukraine** did not have a direct consequence on the European Capitals of Culture action, however its impact was felt in particular with Kaunas 2022 when the city swiftly adapted its programme to secure funding for activities that celebrated and supported Ukrainian culture and refugees, for example with the opening of the CulturEUkraine centre in Kaunas former Post Office.

The extension of the status of **EU candidate country** to Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova in 2022 and 2023 made the first two countries eligible for the competition open to cities in EFTA/EEA countries, candidate countries and potential candidates, as both these countries also participate in the Creative Europe Programme.¹⁸ The city of Lviv (Ukraine), is currently engaged in the competition for the 2030 title under this category of countries, alongside the city of Nikšić (Montenegro).

4. EVALUATION FINDINGS (ANALYTICAL PART)

4.1 To what extent was the intervention successful and why?

Effectiveness

The evaluation has found that the ECoC action has stimulated an increased number of cultural activities in hosting cities during their title year, compared to preceding years. Looking at the local evaluations undertaken by the ECoC held between 2013 and 2022, a typical ECoC year consists of around 1,000-1,200 separate cultural activities, with title years implementing anything between 160 activities in Paphos to 3,400 in Mons.¹⁹ As an

¹⁶ Decision (EU) 2017/1545 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 September 2017 amending Decision No 445/2014/EU establishing a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2020 to 2033 (Text with EEA relevance)

¹⁷ Decision (EU) 2020/2229 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 December 2020 amending Decision No 445/2014/EU establishing a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2020 to 2033

¹⁸ Participation of a given third country in Creative Europe is an eligibility criterion.

¹⁹ An ECoC 'activity' was defined as either an event, a cultural work, or a single project supported by an ECoC that formed part of a cultural programme delivered over the host year. Definitions of an activity

example, baseline data collected from local evaluations in three ECoCs supported between 2013 and 2022 shows that cultural activity increased by around 300-500% in the ECoC year compared with years before the ECoC took place.

Beyond scale, stakeholders' interviews and evaluations done of the ECoCs that took place between 2013 and 2022 highlighted that the action also widened both the type and location of culture on offer in host cities. Not only did the action allow for a focus on new genres including comedy, youth theatre, community choirs, film making, poetry or literature festivals, but it also encouraged more innovative venues to experience culture, such as the streets of (often deprived) neighbourhoods, people's homes and gardens, local shops, community centres, places of worship and schools as well as parks, city squares and heritage sites that for example acted as backdrops to theatrical productions, music ensembles or art installations.

Underpinning the increase in the scale and scope of the cultural offer was a significant increase in investments in cultural activities across host cities stimulated by the year. Analysis of the budgets set out in local evaluations of ECoC taking place between 2013 and 2022 shows that the Action has collectively stimulated around EUR 900 million in funding towards the cultural agenda across the EU, taking into consideration all the funding spent from EU, national, regional, local and private sources. Data also shows that a typical ECoC has a budget of around EUR 50 million for the preparation and implementation of its cultural year, with the highest budgets coming from Marseille, Košice and Leeuwarden (each spending around EUR 100 million) whilst the smallest budget was from Paphos (with a budget of EUR 8.2 million).

Although baseline figures do not exist across the ECoC to show how much was spent on cultural activity outside of ECoC years, stakeholders highlighted that the cultural budgets of host city administrations were often around five times larger as a consequence of hosting their ECoC. This level of increase was also supported by an analysis of the annual budgets for culture for city municipalities presented at pre-selection stages by ECoC over the 2020-2028 period.²⁰ This shows that future ECoC host cities spend on average EUR 13 million yearly on culture, meaning an ECoC (with an average budget of EUR 50 million) sees spend increase by around four-fold in comparison with a normal non-ECoC year.

Official attendance figures of the 2013-2022 ECoC set out in local evaluations show that around 38.5 million people participated in ECoC-supported cultural activities over this time period either as an audience member, a curator or a project beneficiary.²¹ Participation levels set out in local evaluations varied across different ECoC depending on budgets, size of host city and size of programme but the average participation of an ECoC was around 2 million people with the main influencing factor in participation being the size of the host city.

Analysis of attendance data for the ECoC from 2013-2022 suggests that local residents generally supported and benefitted from their local ECoC and enjoyed their city hosting a

differ between ECoC, meaning a direct comparison is not possible. It is nonetheless useful when assessing the general scale of the activity found in each cultural programme.

²⁰ Bid books from 2020 titles onwards presented (in the management section of each bid book) the annual expenditure of the city administration on culture in a non- ECoC year.

²¹ Source: National ECoC evaluations and national monitoring data of audience participation and project beneficiaries. Note: a participant includes individuals who attended a one off ECoC event (e.g., opening ceremony). Most ECoC also counted the same resident attending for example five cultural events as five rather than one attendee.

large cultural programme. Data from local evaluations of ECoC falling within the study period showed that typically around 6 out of every 10 residents of a host city attended at least one ECoC event or project during the host year.

Local evaluations from different ECoCs also indicate that the action has stimulated large numbers of volunteers who supported the implementation of the different cultural capitals. Many ECoCs successfully used volunteers to help deliver part of their cultural programme with monitoring data showing how residents directly helped produce rather than just consume culture attached to their ECoC. In total, data from local evaluations show that 24,261 volunteers were involved in the ECoC delivered between 2013 and 2022, meaning on average an ECoC had around 1,300 volunteers. Stakeholders highlighted how their volunteer programmes had firstly been instrumental in helping them deliver a successful ECoC programme but also how these programmes had helped instil a sense of ownership of the ECoC among active citizens of the host city.

Evaluation findings also show that there was a concerted effort by ECoC to engage with people who did not traditionally consume culture. For example, local evaluations in Matera, Leeuwarden, Riga and Mons highlighted that groups being targeted to increase their consumption of culture during the ECoC year included school children, people from disadvantaged backgrounds (including migrants and the unemployed) as well as people living in the outermost neighbourhoods surrounding the city centre. Stakeholders interviewed were keen to stress that their ECoC did not just focus on traditional audiences and went out of their way to broaden the appeal and reach of culture in their ECoC programmes.

Desk research shows that all the ECoCs in the study period developed projects that specifically targeted harder-to-reach and non-traditional audiences of culture and specifically invested in projects to expand the reach and appeal of culture in their cities. These projects included cultural activities purposely located in target communities (e.g., cultural projects in youth clubs, synagogues, prisons, support centres for migrants etc.), as well as capacity-building organisations working with target (non-traditional) groups to deliver a culture-related project (e.g., funding a youth migrant NGO to run a cultural activity over the summer break) as well as ensuring that non-traditional groups were also producers of culture to help them deliver a cultural project themselves (often in their neighbourhoods or social groups).

The ECoC also helped widen participation in culture by investing in new cultural venues and sites. A range of new infrastructure projects gave host cities a new or improved cultural offer and, in turn, helped attract new types of participants. Budget data from eight ECoC set out in the local evaluations that collected relevant data shows that between 2013 and 2022 a total of EUR 1.3 billion new infrastructure projects were developed before or during the ECoC year. An example of a new venue developed for an ECoC year includes Marseille with the *Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée*, which was part of a EUR 600 million investment by public and private authorities in the city of Marseille and was the first national museum opened in France outside the Paris region. Another example was in Košice, where the city authority invested in the *Kasárne* Kulturpark and the Kunsthalle/Hall of Art.

Stakeholders who were linked to ECoCs that contained a large infrastructure project often highlighted how a new building gave a focal point or 'centre piece' for their ECoC and acted as a tangible project they could highlight when discussing issues including impact and legacy. In return, the ECoC often helped raise awareness of the new venues opening

just before or during the title year. For example, the ECoC 2016 in Wrocław contributed to the considerable success of the New Forum for Music concert hall (opened in September 2015) in attracting audiences in its first full year of operation. During 2016, the venue held 2,000 events, more than twice the number in previous years in the old venue, many of which were formally part of the ECoC programme and co-financed by the ECoC delivery organisation. These events at the New Forum for Music attracted audiences of over 500,000 in 2016 – substantially higher than at the old venue.

Desk research of local evaluation reports shows that about half of the ECoCs between 2013 and 2022 made a concerted effort to invest in capacity-building projects to develop their local CCS. Activities identified to strengthen the CCS included various grant and loan projects to finance the sectors (Esch-sur-Alzette, Kaunas, Leeuwarden, Marseille, Plzeň and Riga), training schemes on issues such as business planning, marketing, commercialisation and digitisation (Marseille, Košice, Riga, Mons, San Sebastián, Wrocław, Paphos and Galway) as well as projects to encourage local CCS organisations to bid for and deliver contracts linked to the delivery of the ECoC year (Paphos, Leeuwarden, Valetta, Matera, Plovdiv, Kaunas and Esch-sur-Alzette). Limited data was collected by ECoCs to understand the impact of this support. However, illustrative examples²² of where this capacity-building activity helped strengthen the local CCS were noted. For instance, local evaluations show that 40% of Wrocław's CCS saw increases in their turnover during the celebrations, 62% of Košice's CCS saw increases in the skills levels of staff during the ECoC year, 58% of Umeå's CCS felt that their skills and capacity were stronger after the ECoC year and 38% of Umeå's CCS secured a contract linked to the delivery of the ECoC cultural programme.

It is worth noting that around half of the ECoC studied did not have a specific support programme in place to help develop the capacity of the local CCS. Stakeholders highlighted that they tended to rely on local CCS organisations receiving funding to deliver ECoC-related activity, which in turn helped develop the latter's capacity rather than explicitly implementing an intervention to support the sector to strengthen their skills. However, evidence from the local evaluations of some of the smaller ECoCs including Paphos, Plovdiv and Plzeň suggested that this natural trickle-down of benefits did not always automatically take place and that some of the local CCS did not either receive funding to deliver a cultural activity or did not receive contracts linked to its delivery (e.g., the supply of lighting for a large event). Evaluations in smaller ECoCs such as Paphos and Plzeň highlighted that larger companies in the CCS from outside of the host city were more successful than local firms in gaining contracts as local firms lacked the resources and skills to compete in various tendering processes.

On a more positive note, interim findings also highlight that the ECoC project helps generate stronger networking within the local CCS as a consequence of being involved in an ECoC year. Local CCS organisations often highlighted that ECoC helped establish either a formal or informal cultural ecosystem in their city and encouraged them to work together to design and deliver cultural content.

Results also show that delivering an ECoC greatly helped to strengthen local talent within the local CCS through the implementation of often hundreds of cultural projects at a different more ambitious scale than previously experienced. Evaluations in Wrocław, Aarhus, Košice, Kaunas and Galway all highlighted how the local CCS saw a jump in their

²² Local evaluations did not have a common or similar measurement to demonstrate an average or overall scale or impact of capacity building support provided by ECoC in a collective way.

skills and track record attached to putting on bigger and more sophisticated productions, fuelled by the much larger budgets that hosting an ECoC allowed. Skills identified as being developed in the local CCS included marketing to international audiences, digitisation and ticketing and commercialisation, as well as more technical skills such as video production, lighting and sound engineering.

Local CCS in host cities were also strengthened financially as a consequence of being involved in their ECoC. Stakeholders stated that hosting an ECoC greatly boosted the financial position of local CCS in three main ways: firstly, through the CCS receiving grant funding to design and implement a cultural activity as part of the cultural programme, secondly through the local CCS receiving contracts linked to the supply of goods and services and finally through cultural organisations such as museums and galleries seeing higher levels of visitors and tourists who were in the city because of the ECoC. As noted earlier and as way of an illustration, 40% of Wrocław's CCS saw increases in their turnover during the ECoC year, cultural venues in Aarhus saw a 17% increase in visitors during their ECoC year compared to the previous year, 38% of Umeå's CCS secured a contract linked to the delivery of the ECoC cultural programme and 47% of the CCS in Mons stated they were more financially secure during the ECoC year.

However, drawing on limited data but also the very nature of the ECoC (temporary, less focussed on infrastructure activity, with projects tending to be delivered by existing organisations and staff) the evidence to support a hypothesis that ECoCs create employment numbers in host cities is relatively moderate.

Analysis from those ECoCs that collected relevant data shows that an ECoC year can increase visitors numbers in a host city by around 30-40% and most of the ECoC cities assessed as part of this study²³ often noted that their ECoC year had helped stimulate their highest number of tourists ever recorded (for example, San Sebastián saw an extra 1 million visitors during its host year). Perhaps unsurprisingly, smaller and/or less touristic ECoC cities saw a more noticeable increase in their visitor numbers because of their ECoC: with Matera, Leeuwarden, Paphos and Mons all seeing increases of up to 50% in their visitor figures. Mons saw an extra 100,000 visitors to the city during their ECoC year, which was a 40% increase from the previous year whilst Marseille and Riga saw visitor figures increase by around 5% during their ECoC year.

Stakeholders tended to highlight how their ECoC status raised the profile of their cultural scene and increased the attention international stakeholders gave to their city and cultural players. The ECoC gave host cities visibility on a European and sometimes global scale and made them a much more thought for destination for culture from international audiences seeking a cultural experience.

Analysis of data presented in local evaluations seems to also show that between 25-35% of visitors of ECoC host cities come from abroad. As noted above, it is interesting to note that the largest increases in international visitors were recorded in cities that saw themselves as being more *off the beaten track* when it came to international tourism. Cities like Leeuwarden and Plzeň both highlighted that their ECoC gave them a 'hook' for promoting themselves on the international tourism market and a reason why international tourists were more likely to visit them during the ECoC year. The analysis also shows that the ECoC greatly increased the coverage of title cities in the international press and travel journals, participating in boosting their profile on an international scale. Data on the

²³ Except for Galway and Rijeka (taking place in the Covid pandemic), Kosice and Umeå.

amount of international media coverage generated by a ECoC shows that the title year tends to stimulate a large volume of additional media coverage before and during the ECoC year. Indeed, data from the local evaluations shows that a typical ECoC year generates anything between 10,000 and 58,000 extra mentions or articles about the host city as a direct consequence of the city hosting an ECoC. Although most ECoC did not collate monitoring data on the types of media outlets that published articles on their ECoC programme, those that did (Riga, Leeuwarden Aarhus, Košice, Kaunas) highlighted how the outlets had high levels of global reach including the National Geographic, the New York Times, The Times (London), Rough Guides and Condé Nast Traveller.

A higher international outlook of host cities also came from the stronger international collaboration that took place between stakeholders found in the host city and those found in other countries. Again, stakeholders, particularly in the smaller host cities such as Umeå and Paphos, highlighted that the international profile of their local artistic communities tended to be limited before the ECoC year took place and that the presence of the ECoC gave them the hook to encourage partners from other countries to work with local cultural players. International artistic exchanges, foreign visits and the swapping of works (e.g., local sculptures and paintings) were commonplace in various cultural programmes of the ECoC studied although ECoC did not tend to collect data on this issue.

However, the evaluation also identifies existing issues and external factors affecting the ECoC:

- Interviews with city-level stakeholders highlighted challenges such as facing financial constraints and pressures, acting with limited capacity and human resources but also having to deal with political influences that can be detrimental to the implementation of the title year.
- As seen in earlier paragraphs, the size of the city plays a critical role in a city's ability to fully exploit the potential of the ECoC. It influences a wide variety of issues linked to budgets, size of the cultural programmes, audience figures, and capacity.
- Discussions organised in the framework of the evaluation with stakeholders also stressed the importance of involving a wide range of actors, including cultural organisations, political authorities and the general public, to build broad-based support for ECoC activities.

Efficiency

In terms of efficiency, the evaluation found that, by design, ECoC is a cost-effective action able to leverage public and private funding at relatively low cost for the Union. The title of European Capital of Culture does not come with earmarked EU funding beyond the EUR 1.5 million Melina Mercouri prize, whose value represents only a fraction of the entire ECoC budget of title cities (normally ranging between 2% and 7%).²⁴ Between 2013 and 2022, the ECoC action stimulated a total of EUR 940 million in funding towards the cultural agenda across the EU, taking into consideration all the funding from EU, national, regional, local and private sources.²⁵

²⁴ Notable exceptions are Plzeň (2015), Paphos (2017) and Rijeka (2020), in which budget the prize accounted for 9%, 22% and 10% respectively. This aspect is further explored below.

²⁵ About EUR 800 million if only non-EU funding sources are considered.

This comes with an investment of just EUR 28.5 million when calculating the overall cost of the Melina Mercouri Prize over the same time period, meaning that the amount of co-financing generated is significant: each euro spent by the Union on the prize stimulated about an additional 30 euro of other funding from either national/regional/local or private sources.²⁶ This figure does not consider any additional infrastructural investment that might have been done by cities in connection with to hosting their ECoC (which is not included in their overall ECoC budgets).

The evaluation shows that the ECoCs generally do not totally deliver against their budget set out in their original bid book. Overall, only about a third of the ECoCs managed to deliver their year in line with their original planned budget (+/- 5%), namely Marseille, Riga, Umeå, Matera, Kaunas and Novi Sad. Three ECoC had higher than anticipated budgets compared to their bid book (Košice by 32%, Wrocław by 10%, and Leeuwarden by 41%). However, the majority of ECoCs over the period saw actual budgets being 10% or more lower than those set out in their bid books. The reasons behind these differences in planned and actual budgets tended to fall into three categories:

- One-off and sometimes unique circumstances specific to the ECoC (abandonment of specific infrastructural projects, changes to local politicians, COVID-19).
- Less funding being received from national public sector sources and, to a lesser extent, private sources. The main reasons reported for this were over-optimism at the bidding stage and the 5-6 years' timeframe, which often led to a lack of firm commitment at the time of bidding.
- Original ECoC budgets in bid books often overestimated how much income would be generated by ticket sales and the extent to which people would 'pay for their culture'. Although many cultural activities were ticketed, there was a limit to how much of the cultural programme could follow this model, in particular because a usual motivation among ECoC cities is to attract new harder-to-reach audiences.

Overall, the budgets for ECoC show that a significant portion of funding comes from public sources, totalling 71% of the overall budget. This includes on average about 30% from national funding, 25% from local funding and 17% from regional funding. Private funding accounts for about 11% of the total budget across the 2013-2022 timeframe. Notably, cities like Leeuwarden, Marseille, and Aarhus stand out for their higher levels of private funding, with Leeuwarden at 51% (much more than expected at bidding phase), Marseille at 15%, and Aarhus at 19%. The remaining 17% encompasses EU funding and other funding sources, including, for instance, ticket sales. Stakeholders representing title cities emphasised how ECoC enabled them access to funding streams, in some cases very substantial, they would not have had without the title, generating an unprecedented in-flow of capital for culture.

The Melina Mercouri prize is, under the current legal basis, the only EU financial contribution directly linked to the ECoC title. While this source of financing is still interesting for smaller cities or smaller Member States, it may not constitute a strong motivational factor for larger cities.

Consultations with stakeholders highlighted that the Melina Mercouri prize is generally symbolic and does not directly affect the scale or scope of the ECoC and its cultural programme. Furthermore, the pecuniary value of the Prize has not changed since its

²⁶ Although there are other costs associated with the implementation of the action (e.g., human and financial resources from the EC and the panel of experts), the Melina Mercouri prize represented the largest expense per title city.

introduction in 2010, and consequently, due to the inflation in the EU area, it depreciated over time. If the Prize was to be adjusted to account for inflation, the equivalent value in today's prices would be about EUR 2 million.

The consultations shed light on two potential negative consequences of the relatively low pecuniary value of the Prize. It tends to reduce the leverage that the European Commission and the panel have at monitoring stage to steer the implementation of the ECoC and ensure legacy plans are in place. It also may not represent a sufficiently attractive leverage for larger cities to apply for the title,²⁷ hence possibly reinforcing the current trend of smaller cities bidding.

Consultations highlighted the need for a wider discussion on whether the Melina Mercouri prize should be increased and also the need for the allocation of specific EU funding to the Action. While the lack of EU funding pushes cities to invest in culture and seek the involvement of other key players such as regional and national Governments and private sector stakeholders, the lack of dedicated EU funding is felt as a missed opportunity in terms of what could be achieved with more financial leverage from the European Union. More dedicated EU funding could also help the Commission reinforce some of the perceived weaknesses of the ECoCs' cultural programmes (e.g. legacy and European dimension) whilst at the same time giving clearer independence to ECoC teams on the artistic focus, scale and scope of their cultural programme.

Although reinforcing the Melina Mercouri prize could contribute to better programming of the legacy and the post-legacy period, consultees also stressed the need to strengthen the legacy plans already at the bidding phase.

Role of human resources

Three bodies play a significant role in the successful implementation of a European Capital of Culture: the title-holding city, the Expert Panel and the European Commission.

Ensuring that cities have enough human resources with the right skills to plan and manage an event such as ECoC is essential (this is also a criterion for selection). Results of the Public Consultation place the capacity of city authorities to run an ECoC as the second most important factor for the success of the ECoC. Available data on the actual number of human resources involved in the implementation of ECoC over the period 2013-2022 is uneven and difficult to compare as cities have reported the number of human resources involved in different ways, in some cases reporting only the core team managing the project while in others including also projects' managers and volunteers.

Data, however, indicate that the ECoC implementation is a resource-intensive activity that reaches its peak in the title year. Indeed, as the cities approach the title year, the team managing the event increases substantially. As emerged from the consultation conducted, being such a resource-intensive endeavour, smaller cities face more challenges in adapting to the scale of the event, as they often end up relying only on small teams to deliver the entire cultural programme over several years.

²⁷ Evidence collected suggests that the ECoC budget is not proportional to the size or annual budget of title cities. The budgets of ECoCs covered by this evaluation reached about 100 million EUR in Marseille (about 900,000 inhabitants) and Leeuwarden (about 125,000 inhabitants), showing that two cities with very different population size can put forward similar budgets. This implies that funding received by a city hosting the title will be far more appealing for cities that normally have access to much smaller funds/budget.

Evidence from interviews and focus groups indicates that cities often also struggle with identifying and employing enough skilled personnel to manage and implement their ECoC project. While this is often evident at the bidding stage, when bidding cities are known to rely to some extent on external consultants or experienced professionals from previous ECoC cities to develop their bid book, it can become a hindering factor once a city has been selected, slowing down the setting up process of the ECoC managing entity and the actual start of the implementation.

This issue is particularly evident in relation to some specific leadership roles such as those linked to the overall management and artistic direction of the ECoC. Cities often foresee in the bid book an open competition for the selection of these key figures. While in principle this could favour the identification of the best candidate, in reality the pool of actual candidates is rather small, in particular in smaller countries, due to the need to speak the local language and the busy schedule of high-skilled professionals who might not be available at such short notice.

Furthermore, many stakeholders consulted referred to the ECoC implementation as a 'learning on the job experience', suggesting that the team behind the planning and implementation of the event do not often possess all the required skills and competencies from day one. Instead, these competencies are acquired over time, creating inefficiencies and unnecessarily slowing down the process.

Ensuring already at the bidding stage that the necessary skills and competencies are available and that there are clear plans for timely capacity-building well integrated into the bid book would potentially ensure continuity between the bidding and implementation phases as well as strengthen the quality of the event. For instance, cities passing the pre-selection round could be asked to have capacity-building activities in place during the period preceding the submission of the revised bid book for final selection. Capacity-building activities could also be provided by the European Commission, ensuring knowledge sharing and exchange of good practices between former ECoCs and bidding cities (as it happened through the Creative Europe funded ECoC capacity-building project run between 2019 and 2022).

When it comes to the panel of experts, it comprises ten independent experts appointed by European Union institutions and bodies and up to two by the Member States hosting the ECoC.²⁸ Given their central role in the selection and monitoring of the ECoCs, it is essential that the experts are provided with sufficient resources to fulfil their mission. In particular, participants of focus groups highlighted some key intervention areas:

- **Experts' selection:** while the expertise of the members of the panel was overall recognised, it was suggested that the panel composition could aim to be more diverse in terms of the representation of minority groups, geographical distribution, and gender balance as well as in terms of skills and competencies. For instance, it was considered important to ensure that artists were sufficiently represented in the panel and that the group of experts presented complementary competencies, including legal skills and legal knowledge (especially regarding how public and cultural sectors operate in different countries).

²⁸ Experts appointed by the Member States are only involved in the competition in the country that have nominated them. There are no national experts in the competitions between cities in EEA/EFTA and (potential) candidates countries.

- **Experts' onboarding and handover:** while renewing the panel of experts is essential to bring in new perspectives, it was noted that new panel members might require additional onboarding or training. At the moment, there seems to be a lack of tools and formal mechanisms for transitioning the new members (though a half-day training session is organised with newcomers). This lack of a more structured handover process can lead to the loss of relevant knowledge and experience (of the members leaving the panel) and the uneven involvement of new panel members. Developing a handbook or a structured onboarding process could ensure better preparedness of the members.
- **Time and resources:** reviewing the bidding documents and monitoring reports and providing guidance to cities is a time-consuming process. A contract with the experts defines the amount of time members of the panel are expected to spend reviewing and processing documents. For instance, half a day is allocated to the reading of a bid book at preselection phase (up to sixty pages per bid book) and a full day per bid book at selection phase (up to 100 pages per bid book).²⁹ Panel experts consulted suggested that this allocation, coupled with the limited timeframe often available and the sometimes-large number of documents to review, might not allow the panel experts to accurately review the bids, ultimately risking frustrating bidding cities that might feel their work is not fully appreciated.

The European Commission plays a central role in the overall management of the Action and is deeply involved in all ECoC activities and stages, supporting Member States, the panel experts, and the cities.

It is challenging to quantify the amount of work and resources the European Commission would need to effectively and efficiently manage the ECoC action for several reasons: a) there are large yearly variations in the number of cities bidding to host ECoC, spanning from a minimum of 1 (in the case of Luxembourg for the 2022 title) to a maximum of 21 (in the case of Italy for the 2019 title); b) the work distribution is not linear but presents high peaks, in particular in relation to pre-selection and selection meetings. Currently, it is estimated that, within the Commission, about 2 FTE are allocated to ECoC divided between policy officers (about 75%, or 1.5 FTE) and financial assistant (about 25%, 0.5 FTE). While recognising the importance of the role played by the European Commission in the overall management of the Action and the several competing priorities, stakeholders consulted highlighted how, despite being such a visible action of the Union, additional resources could be put forward within the Commission to ensure the Action reaches its full potential.

For context, looking only at key quantifiable outputs, on average, the Commission participates in fourteen meetings per year for a total of about twenty-two days, reads twenty bid books and seven monitoring progress reports and reads and comments on four to five preselection and selection reports and seven monitoring reports, in addition to managing the experts' contracts, liaising with Member States and cities, and participating to ECoC related events.

More human and financial resources could allow the Commission to provide stronger monitoring, additional support for networking and capacity-building between ECoCs as

²⁹ Additionally, experts are remunerated for taking on additional work such as chairing monitoring and (pre)selection meeting, preparing (pre)selection panel reports, or reporting from a meeting, and for contributing to or finalising (pre)selection reports. All experts are also entitled to daily allowances and reimbursement of travel and accommodation expenses.

well as enhanced communication activities promoting the Action. While there is scope for the Action to be expanded, to ensure the European Commission is sufficiently equipped to support the coordination and implementation of the Action, any change in this sense would need to be assessed against the available human and financial resources within the European Commission, in a context of several competing priorities and overall reduced resources.

Efficiency of the selection and monitoring procedures and implementation timing

The new legal basis of the Action modified the selection and monitoring processes, establishing, among others, new selection criteria and more frequent monitoring meetings. In particular, the selection process encompasses the following steps:

- Call for submission of applications: at least 6 years before the title year.
- Application submission deadline: minimum 10 months after the publication of the call for submission of applications.
- Pre-selection meeting and report: 5 years before the title year.
- Revised application submission deadline and selection meeting and report: about 9 months after the pre-selection meeting.
- City designation: 4 years before the title year.

Following the selection, three monitoring meetings take place, three years, 18 months and two months before the year of the title.

While stakeholders consulted consider the current selection and monitoring processes overall as working well,³⁰ they also identified areas for improvement:

- **Application timeline:** While at the governmental level the timeline for the selection process is considered overall sufficient, cities find meeting the current deadlines challenging; in particular, the nine-month period between pre-selection and final selection adds pressure on cities, particularly smaller or less-experienced ones, in terms of building international relations and securing commitments from local stakeholders. Extending the time for this phase could allow cities to strengthen their proposals and better address feedback from the panel of experts at pre-selection stage. However, it is important to note that extending the timeline for the selection process should not come at the expense of the preparation period post-selection, as cities require sufficient time for the event preparation, in particular when there is a need to develop infrastructures and re-engage partners to invest in the initiative.
- **Monitoring meetings:** Meetings with the panel of experts are a key moment for cities to receive guidance and advice on the implementation. In this respect, some stakeholders stressed that these meetings should focus on providing support more than merely checking if milestones are reached. This suggestion is underpinned by the request for a shift from a monitoring process toward a more advisory role, with panel experts working closely with cities, offering real-time solutions and mentorship. This would be in line with the challenges identified above in relation to the lack of the required skills and capacity-building in ECoCs.

The timing of the meetings was also questioned by stakeholders consulted, with some of them mentioning that the twelve-month lag between the selection and the first monitoring meeting is potentially too long as cities tend to delay processes (in

³⁰ As reported by the large majority of the respondents to the public consultation as well as interviewees and participants in the focus groups.

particular in relation to the identification and hiring of key figures in the managing entity). Furthermore, the time between meetings does not allow for close monitoring of the ECoC implementation. Some stakeholders also mentioned the need to extend the monitoring to the year after the end of the title year to ensure legacy plans are actually implemented. Increasing the number and frequency of the meetings could allow better monitoring during the different phases of the ECoC implementation.

Finally, while meetings are now only held online, both a number of representatives of ECoCs and of members of the panel of experts highlighted how confining the monitoring to online means limits the panel's ability to engage with local teams, making it harder to identify problems and offer solutions. Both stakeholder groups would welcome more monitoring meetings or in situ visits³¹ to allow panel members to better understand the local context and challenges, fostering deeper interaction with the local stakeholders and offering more practical, tailored advice.³²

Once the selection process is completed, selected cities have about four years to prepare for the event. Stakeholders consulted indicated that while this time can in principle be sufficient for the preparation and implementation of a cultural programme, it can be less so depending on a number of factors such as city preparedness, infrastructure development, community engagement and political support, partnerships and cultural networks.

Overall, while four years could be enough for cities to implement the event, this timeframe might be challenging if a city has not already reached a certain level of cultural maturity. Hence, cities should be encouraged to start planning and preparing for the ECoC long before the formal announcement of the opening of the selection process. While this does not necessarily imply that less prepared cities should not be considered for hosting ECoC, their bid book should be realistically examined and judged in light of the city's actual cultural capacity, and if selected, sufficient guidance, monitoring and capacity-building opportunities should be provided.

A number of inefficiencies were identified during discussions with stakeholders attached to the ECoC. These were often not quantified (in terms of resources wasted or lost) but still add into the discussion on efficiency.

Analysis shows that there were around 40 cities that bid for ECoC status that were unsuccessful between 2013 and 2022. Figures do not exist on the cost of submitting a bid, although cities taking part in the focus group estimated that it took between 6 and 8 months to prepare a bid meaning around 300 months were used by cultural stakeholders across the EU to prepare unsuccessful ECoC bids over the 2013-2022 period. Selecting an ECoC city through a competitive bidding process has long been used as part of the Action, with it helping to stimulate innovation and quality.

The bidding process itself was mentioned by stakeholders as being a useful moment of reflection for cities with culture ranking up in the public discourse and the political agenda. Initiatives such as CultureNext³³ show that there is interest in and willingness to still build on the work done by non-selected cities. However, when cities are finally not selected to

³¹ On top of the three formal monitoring meetings, informal meetings and in situ visits by a delegation of panel members and staff members of the European Commission are organised when necessary.

³² Implementing more city visits would of course represent a cost for both the EU and the hosting cities.

³³ Culture Next is a network established by Cluj, unsuccessful bidding city for the ECoC title 2021 in Romania, whose mission is to support current and former European Capital of Culture candidate cities to implement culture-led urban development programmes and policies: [Culture Next – Candidate Cities Network](#).

become the next ECoC, there is no structured way of capitalising on the work done and competencies acquired. There could be scope for ECoC to become a moment of cultural renovation not only for the title cities but also for unsuccessful bidders.

Although an ECoC network ('family') does exist, its work is sometimes limited and patchy, depending on which city is taking the lead in the network in any given year (current ECoC cities tend to chair this network). Other networks span from ECoC such as the already mentioned CultureNext and the University Network of the European Capitals of Culture (UNeECC), however these are parallel initiatives whose action is separate from ECoC and not led by the Commission (although, notably, CultureNext is now funded through Creative Europe). Overall, this means less networking takes place between past, current and future ECoC cities and therefore good practice is sometimes missed and advice on pitfalls and challenges does also not get shared as much as it should be. This therefore leads to inefficiencies as mistakes are replicated.

Stakeholders also highlighted that another area where time is sometimes wasted relates to a misunderstanding of two key aspects of the ECoC, namely – the European dimension and legacy. Although those taking part in the evaluation stated they eventually had a clear understanding of each term, some stated that a better understanding of what the European dimension *looked like* in terms of actual activity would be useful and would save time at either bid or planning stages. Stakeholders understood the concept of a European dimension but sometimes struggled to understand how to operationalise it and what, for instance, a project with good levels of European dimension would look like. This was also true for legacy, where stakeholders said it took them time and resources to properly understand what is expected of a legacy and how best to operationalise a legacy plan that was both ambitious and based on likely levels of culture and investment post-ECoC. Therefore, the Commission being more prescriptive with these two aspects would help save time across the bidding and planning stages of the ECoC.

Stakeholders at all levels have indicated that while cities tend to have in place good communication plans, these are not sufficiently supported by communication activities at EU level. The ECoC brand is overall recognisable and well-known among European citizens; however, and despite its sought-after European dimension, the promotion of the Action is left to the title cities. Implementing a communication campaign at the EU level could ensure higher visibility to cities hosting during the year, increasing the perception of the European dimension of the initiative, but also spotlight preparatory efforts by prospective title cities or legacy activities conducted by former ECoCs.

Coherence

Internal Coherence

The overall internal coherence of the ECoC action **appears strong**, as formal processes for selecting and managing title-holding cities align well with the objectives of the Action. The application process, for example, requires bidding cities to embed their ECoC project into a cultural strategy and to actively engage with cultural operators, citizens, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders, in line with the objectives of the action. The design of the Action further promotes strong collaboration between national and subnational levels across cultural, social, and economic areas. The competition for the title is open to cities and their surrounding areas, fostering participation and collaboration that aligns with both EU objectives and regional socio-economic goals. This approach enables smaller cities, like Bodø (population around 40,000) in the Norwegian region of Nordland (population approximately 250,000), to involve an entire region in cultural initiatives that

foster regional development and local growth, as well as collaboration at the European level.

Quantitative evidence confirms alignment between different levels of governance, as ECoC costs are shared between national, local, and regional stakeholders. Data presented in the efficiency section reveals that approximately 30% of the typical ECoC budget comes from national funding, 24% from local funding, and 17% from regional funding. This relatively equal distribution suggests robust financial support for ECoCs across different territorial layers of cultural policymaking. It also reflects coherence in objectives, as funding would not be granted if ECoCs did not reflect policy priorities at those levels. This diversity in public funding sources highlights the interconnectedness of ECoCs and suggests a ‘uniting’ effect of the Action in bringing together various stakeholders and policies representing different levels of governance.

National stakeholders, in particular, have been observed to play a vital role in the success of ECoC – not only by often serving as the primary funding source – but also by actively participating in the development and delivery of the cultural programme itself. ECoCs generally have strong involvement from national stakeholders, who often sit in steering groups and management boards. This means ECoCs are designing and implementing their programmes in collaboration rather than in isolation from national policymakers, who are usually fully involved. National stakeholders in most cases see the ECoC as a matter of ‘national importance’ and support it through active engagement, aligning the initiative with their own goals such as promoting cultural tourism, boosting economic growth or strengthening the social cohesion of communities.

In contrast, evidence also suggests that a lack of engagement from national policymakers has a clear negative effect. Subnational stakeholders stress the importance of having national policymakers onboard to secure the necessary support and resources. For example, in one of the consulted cities in the framework of the evaluation, it took about a year to engage properly with the national cultural authorities to have them recognise the national value of the ECoC project. This highlights the importance of timely and proactive engagement with national policymakers to ensure support and resources are available when needed, ultimately maximising the Action's potential impact.

Stakeholder interviews undertaken for the evaluation further suggest that ECoC objectives tend to align well with cultural and socio-economic priorities at the local level. Cities report that they are eager to enhance their cultural profile, stimulate culture-driven local economic development, and foster culture-based community engagement, which matches the overall ECoC goals. However, balancing these local priorities with the overall EU action’s emphasis on promoting European cultural diversity and commonalities can be challenging, and the literature review conducted indicates that many applicants struggle to meet the ‘European dimension’ criterion, often prioritising local issues and themes over broader European objectives. For instance, cities might prefer to take the ECoC opportunity to focus on boosting their local economy or cultural infrastructure, rather than investing in programmes that engage with cultural partners from across Europe. This tension between local priorities and the European dimension can hinder applicants from fully embracing the international aspects of the ECoC action.³⁴

Collected evidence also points to the importance of effective coordination and a shared vision among involved stakeholders, especially when transitioning from planning to implementation. City-level interviewees highlight the particularly challenging conditions

³⁴ ECoC Literature review

faced by newly formed ECoC organisations, including tight deadlines, frequent staff changes and intense public scrutiny, as they work to transform the bid's vision into reality. Locally, expectations may be very different compared to the national level, making it important to coordinate actions across all involved parties to ensure success and avoid confusion, delays, and potential setbacks.

This underlines the critical need for clear communication and collaboration among often a very diverse set of stakeholders – e.g., artists, cultural organisations and institutions, local governments, community groups, private sponsors, and tourism boards – to pull in the same direction. For example, this coordination could involve creating a joint steering committee with representatives from all stakeholder groups, such as in Aarhus 2017, where a central foundation included members from the municipality, region, private sector, art consultants, musicians, architects, and the national sports association to ensure a unified approach.³⁵

External Coherence

The ECoC shows a high level of external coherence, as it is closely aligned with other EU programmes in culture and related fields. This view is reinforced by stakeholders consulted more widely. The majority of respondents to the Public Consultation felt that the ECoC action was either largely complementary (22%) or complementary (45%) with other EU initiatives and policies.³⁶ Only 8% of stakeholders considered the ECoC to overlap with other EU initiatives and policies. For national initiatives and policies, the responses were somewhat similar: 20% viewed ECoC as largely complementary, 43% saw it as complementary, while only 13% considered it to overlap with national initiatives and policies³⁷ – indicating a very slightly higher perception of overlap at the national level. A prominent example of alignment at national level is the Italian Ministry of Culture's creation of the Italian Capital of Culture programme in 2015, inspired by the ECoC model, as a follow-up to the competition for the ECoC title in Italy, which attracted a record number of 21 candidates.³⁸ Since then, the Portuguese and Polish ministries too decided to set up national capitals of culture in the wake of their respective ECoC competitions in 2022 and 2024.

Synergies between ECoC and other EU culture-related programmes, funds or initiatives are fostered by the Action being often managed at national level by the same authority also facilitating access to these other programmes, funds or initiatives, such as, for instance, Creative Europe and the New European Bauhaus. As a result, information about various EU cultural funding opportunities is often shared through their channels, increasing awareness about these opportunities and increasing the potential for synergies.

The close ties to the umbrella programme of ECoC, Creative Europe, stand out when examining the external coherence, particularly regarding its Culture strand. There are common objectives, including the promotion and protection of cultural diversity in Europe and fostering stronger cross-border collaboration among cultural organisations.³⁹ The

³⁵ [The Board of Aarhus 2017 | Aarhus 2017](#)

³⁶ The remaining share responded 'I don't know'.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ See: <https://capitalidellacultura.cultura.gov.it/capitali-italiane-della-cultura/>.

³⁹ In addition to these general objectives, the specific objectives of the Action are: (a) to enhance the **range, diversity and European dimension of the cultural offering** in cities, including through **transnational cooperation**; (b) to widen **access to and participation** in culture; (c) to strengthen the **capacity of the**

majority (around 40-65%) of ECoC projects have a good degree of transnational working and there are numerous examples of ECoC projects being co-produced or delivered by partners from different countries. Most ECoC studied to date also have strong examples of artistic exchange programmes, country visits and projects that toured one or more Member States.

Overall, the ECoC action is aligned with and supports the overarching objective of improving the competitiveness of the EU's cultural and creative sectors set out in the Creative Europe programme as well as the New European Agenda for Culture.⁴⁰ Although not all ECoCs implemented capacity-building projects, around half did foresee actions aimed at improving the strength and robustness of these sectors. The very fact that host cities deliver a cultural programme that often had in excess of 1,000 separate cultural activities helped strengthen the sectors, allowing cultural operators to acquire new competencies and skills as illustrated above. ECoC's support to skills development through capacity-building helps entrepreneurs and artists scale their initiatives and compete globally, fostering long-term competitiveness in European cultural and creative sectors.⁴¹ Furthermore, although the Action is not generally perceived as aiming at job creation, there is evidence of ECoC contributing to employment in the cultural and creative sectors. By strengthening the CCS, ECoC contributes to long-term economic growth and highlights the vital role of culture and creativity in the economy.

There is also clear evidence that the ECoC action has strong coherence with another key objective of the Creative Europe programme, namely to increase access to and participation in culture and to increase audience engagement and improve audience development. The ECoC action can be firmly seen as a mass cultural participation event with around 38.5 million people participating in ECoC cultural activities between 2013 and 2022, and often the large majority of the residents of title cities attending cultural activities in less traditional venues. ECoC also tends to focus much attention on reaching out to new audiences, often less exposed to culture, in a way that engages them through interesting and different cultural activities not previously seen in their city.

Both ECoC and Creative Europe are linked to strengthening European identity and values through cultural awareness, arts education, and culture-based creativity in education. Although some ECoCs took time to fully embrace the European dimension, they all aimed to implement cultural programmes that strengthened and promoted European identities, having key European values as major themes or topics of their programme. Stakeholders consulted highlighted how the ECoC had often made their cultural offer in their city much more international and diverse, full of content, works and performers going beyond the local dimension.

Beyond programme objectives, ECoC also shares common features with projects and priorities of the Creative Europe programme in relation to greening as well as inclusion

cultural sector and its **links with other sectors**; (d) to raise the **international profile** of cities through culture.

⁴⁰ In particular in relation to the objective of 'Supporting culture-based creativity in education and innovation, and for jobs and growth' outlined in the New European Agenda for Culture and the priorities under this objective such as promoting innovation and collaboration among cultural industries, technology firms, and traditional businesses.

⁴¹ European Commission. (2018). *Commission staff working document: A new European agenda for culture - Background information accompanying the document communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions A new European agenda for culture (COM(2018) 267 final)*. Available [here](#).

and equality. For instance, ECoCs are encouraged to promote social inclusion by ensuring their cultural activities are accessible to all, with a specific requirement under Article 5(5) of the 2014 Decision to prioritise accessibility for young people, people with disabilities and the elderly.

ECoCs analysed in the context of this evaluation presented a strong social dimension and they often used culture as a vehicle to stimulate a broad range of actions targeting disadvantaged communities and engaging with them through the power of culture. Many stakeholders consulted saw ECoC as being a social action as much as a cultural one, and many title cities reported to have used their ECoC year to tackle social issues. Cities in Member States and other participating countries also include additional themes that reflect their unique cultural heritage. Both Umeå and Bodø, for instance, had a focus on promoting their indigenous Sami populations, the only recognised indigenous people in the Europe, holding a special status in Sweden and Norway. Tartu, in its bid, highlighted 'Resilience' and 'Arts of survival', echoing the views of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) on the 'transformative power' of culture with the potential to strengthen society and communities.

Similarly, ECoCs are also increasingly integrating greening objectives, focusing on environmental sustainability through eco-friendly initiatives and raising awareness of climate change. There is, however, potential for ECoC to further strengthen its alignment with sustainability and environmental priorities, which are central not only to Creative Europe but also other EU initiatives such as the New European Bauhaus. Although some ECoCs had projects focusing on a 'greening' theme, this is not a central theme of the Action, reflecting the fact that there is no corresponding selection criterion. More recently, sustainability concerns were embedded in bid books, which, very often, mentioned the environmental impact of the ECoC year. However, these concerns mostly translated into a broad overarching ambition rather than the implementation of specific projects or the development, for instance, of specific criteria to monitor the environmental impact of activities implemented.⁴²

The external aspect of ECoC aligns with broader European efforts to strengthen the EU's enlargement policy, by including cities from candidate and potential candidate countries in the initiative. In doing so, ECoC also feeds into the New European Agenda for Culture, which aims to strengthen cultural diplomacy and international cultural relations, including in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.⁴³ Interviews with relevant stakeholders suggest that there is room to further align ECoC objectives with EU external policies with the aim, in coordination with the European External Action Service, of establishing cultural partnerships in countries where the EU has a strategic interest. Concerning the Southern Mediterranean, there is untapped potential to strengthen cooperation by sharing good practices to candidates for the Mediterranean Capital of Culture.

One existing channel that could be leveraged is the EU Cultural Diplomacy Platform,⁴⁴ which provides advice on external cultural policy, facilitates networking, organises activities with cultural stakeholders, and offers training programmes for cultural

⁴² Tartu however developed [Guidelines for Organising Environmentally Friendly Events - Tartu 2024](#).

⁴³ European Commission. (2018). *Commission staff working document: A new European agenda for culture - Background information accompanying the document communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions A new European agenda for culture (COM(2018) 267 final)*. Available [here](#).

⁴⁴ [Cultural Relations Platform](#)

leadership. Cultural diplomacy has the potential not only to strengthen international cultural relations but also to enhance the competitiveness of the European cultural and creative sectors, aligning with the objectives of ECoC action. By fostering cross-border collaborations, knowledge exchange, and market access, cultural diplomacy can help European artists, cultural institutions, and creative businesses expand their reach and influence globally.

ECoCs often involve international artists and have a global echo, which could be leveraged to further strengthen cultural ties with non-EU countries, foster cultural diversity and dialogue, and create opportunities for cultural entrepreneurs. This may also attract investment and increase the visibility of European cultures. In this way, cultural diplomacy through ECoC can serve as both a tool for soft power and a driver of economic growth, reinforcing Europe's strong position in the global creative economy.

Despite most evidence showing that the ECoC action is generally coherent to broader EU approaches linked to culture, data shows that this alignment does not necessarily manifest itself in terms of EU funding being channelled into ECoC related activity and projects. As already mentioned, the main source of direct EU funding for a ECoC tends to be the Melina Mercouri prize and EU funding is often less than 10% of the total budget of an ECoC programme. Support from the Cohesion Policy Funds, including in the field of culture, local and regional development, employment, social inclusion and education may indirectly support the ambitions of ECoC actions in the respective cities, regions and Member States. However, the proactive coordination and targeted programming between the ECoC and other EU funding remains underutilised. However, it should be noted that evidence on the use of EU funds is scarce and does not provide the full picture of the extent ECoCs have been able to channel EU funding directly through the foundation or indirectly through projects implemented. Indeed, interviews with stakeholders highlighted how much EU funds, and in particular ERDF, were used to support projects that often indirectly complemented the ECoC programme but were not necessarily counted as part of their official programme budgets.

For instance, in Paphos, ERDF funding was used to enhance public spaces and the public realm, providing improved venues for cultural activities during the ECoC year. It is also estimated that Rijeka received the equivalent of EUR 24.65 million from ERDF to cover capital investments connected with their ECoC project, in particular for the rehabilitation and transformation of the former Benčić factory into cultural buildings that now house the City Museum of Rijeka, the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, the Rijeka City Library and the Children's House (the first building of its kind in Croatia, dedicated to the development of children's creativity). And more recently several 2021-2027 cohesion policy programmes (mainly the Friuli-Venezia Giulia ERDF regional programme, the Slovenian national Cohesion Policy programme, and the Interreg VI-A Italy-Slovenia programme) have coordinated ERDF investments in culture and sustainable tourism in view of directly contributing to Nova Gorica/Gorizia 2025.

Furthermore, even if not used directly for the ECoC implementation, evidence suggests that prior experience in broader European collaboration in EU-level networks and projects, as well as in accessing EU funding, facilitated participation in ECoC. For example, a national ministry highlighted that they were not surprised by a city's interest in the ECoC action, ahead of its bid, given its track record of actively pursuing European initiatives and funding. Although not necessarily evidence of coherence with ECoC, it is an indication that often, stakeholders participating in EU initiatives undergo a learning process enabling them to use their experience and networks to apply for and deliver the ECoC event.

Considering the challenges in successfully implementing the European dimension of the Action, previous experience in using EU funds and participating in EU activities could be used as a preferential criterion for the selection of future ECoCs.

4.2. How did the EU intervention make a difference and to whom?

Overall, the ECoC action has been recognised in the consultation organised in the framework of the evaluation as able to sort a number of impacts that would not be possible without action at the EU level. 77% of the respondents to the Public Consultation considered the action essential to the results achieved, with a similar level of support expressed during the focus groups and by the stakeholders interviewed in the framework of the evaluation (more details in Annexes II and V).

In particular, stakeholders highlighted the importance of the action in pushing the cities towards exploring and embracing a European dimension of culture in terms of contents, values and collaborations. ECoC also provided a level of international visibility otherwise unattainable, often giving smaller cities the opportunity to shine on the European and international stages. Representing such an opportunity for title cities to attract an international audience, ECoC also fosters the development of ambitious cultural programmes with an unprecedentedly large and diverse offer. These aspects are further explored in the subsections below.

ECoC results in a level of **cross border collaboration in the cultural sector** that national-level programmes do not aim to achieve, providing opportunities for artists and cultural institutions to connect globally, including with non-EU countries. Such intensity of collaboration has the potential to transform the city's cultural landscape and has significantly enriched the cultural offerings of host cities. During their title year, each ECoC typically engaged with a large number of international partners coming from a wide variety of countries. These collaborations elevate the international profile of the host cities and provide them with an access to a new and broader cultural network.

Activities such as artistic exchanges, foreign visits, and artwork swaps taking place in titleholding cities demonstrate the type of cross-border collaboration that ECoC fosters. In the feedback collected by the evaluator, some stakeholders reported how the European dimension of ECoC helped them establish networks that would have been difficult to achieve through national initiatives alone, therefore inscribing the ECoC action in the efforts carried out to create a European cultural space, in line with the Creative Europe Programme.

In addition to fostering European partnerships, the ECoC action facilitated cooperation between EU cultural players and artists from non-EU countries, going even beyond the reach of the countries associated to the Creative Europe Programme. For instance, local artists in host cities worked with artists from countries such as Japan (e.g., Košice, Wrocław, Matera, Valletta) or the United States (e.g., Wrocław). Therefore, on top of making cities in a certain number of non-EU countries eligible to host a capital year, the ECoC action is also contributing in this way to the EU efforts in terms of international cultural relationships.

Finally, the international prestige associated with the ECoC title also plays a critical role in attracting global attention. In Poland, for example, the ECoC brought international attention to the titleholding city as detailed in the effectiveness section with tangible effects on increased cross-border tourism and international media mentions, far surpassing what

could have been achieved through a national initiative. The tourist presence during the title year increased by 50%, which was translated into a 11% increase of nights spent in tourist accommodations in the city on average during the title year in comparison with the previous year. It can also be argued that the high levels of cultural activity organised (detailed in section 4.1) is possible and worth doing only when there is an audience large enough. Without an EU's intervention able to provide such an international stage to title cities and, hence, an unprecedented access to an international audience to attract, cities would be less inclined to implement so many cultural activities.

The greater attention on the capacity of the cultural sector benefit in turn the local wider urban landscape and act as a catalyst for business investments and urban revitalisation. This was especially true in smaller cities but also in larger ones such as in Marseille where the ECoC was the key driver in regenerating urban spaces. For example, in Marseille, the ECoC helped regenerate urban areas and introduced a wide range of cultural events such as the '*Quartier Créatifs*', an 18-month project where artists working primarily in the fields of architecture, design and landscaping, collaborated with local citizens to transform public spaces.

Therefore, it can be argued that the impact of ECoC is particularly strong in cities where cultural movements might have struggled to gain traction without EU support. The Action helps cities to internationalise and increase international tourism and international coverage to a level that they would not reach without hosting the title. It also develops networks and skills that enable the local cultural scene to develop itself at an international level as a legacy of the title year.

A beneficial aspect of the action connected with its EU added value dimension is its promotion of **EU values**. The evaluation found out that approximately 40-65% of all projects supported through the cultural programme of the various capitals had a significant European dimension. These projects helped to promote European values at the local level, championing themes such as tolerance, co-existence, peace, and equality. For instance, Kaunas 2022's **CulturEUkraine** initiative was a direct response to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and highlighted the role of the ECoC in providing tangible cultural and institutional support for artists and creatives displaced by conflicts. Hosted in the city former post office, the project functioned as a cross-border solidarity platform, linking cultural institutions in Kaunas with Ukrainian artists and organisations across Europe.

However, the evaluation puts to the front limitations to the potential of the EU added value dimension of the Action. For instance, the knowledge sharing between ECoCs remains limited in the absence of an institutional platform/organisation and is often delegated to external initiatives such as the CulturNext network. The evaluation also concludes that the absence of a centralised database limits the potential to assist cultural operators and artists involved in European Capitals of Culture in the internationalisation of their careers and reduces their chances to be contacted for potential future EU projects.

The evaluation also pleads that further support from the EU level concerning communication activities would help the action and the different cities to reach out to a wider audience and cast a stronger light on the event and the cities. Finally, the evaluation argues that the title year legacy, despite being an important aspect evaluated at the selection stage, can be affected by a multitude of factors such as a shifting political support. Based on the feedback of several stakeholders, the evaluation puts forward the idea of the

establishing a number of criteria cities need to continuously meet to keep the ECoC title beyond the title year.

4.3. Is the intervention still relevant?

Although the European Capital of Culture action is one of the longest running EU initiatives, their objectives are still viewed as relevant given their alignment with the broader socio-economic and cultural development needs of cities. This is connected particularly with the objective of the action on the ‘contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities in accordance with their respective strategies and priorities’. The relevance of the ECoC action’s objectives is particularly noteworthy in terms of the development of cultural strategies and strengthening of the cultural offering.

The **bidding process**, which requires efforts several years ahead of the title year, is often for cities the opportunity to redesign (and in some cases, to design for the first time) city-level cultural strategies and policies in the field of culture. This is to be seen for instance in the context of the Culture for Cities and Regions 2017 report,⁴⁵ based on contributions from 150 cities, highlighting the need for long-term cultural planning for cities if they are to develop a vibrant cultural sector. Integrated approaches to culture are developed as part of the impetus towards the ECoC title, and many ECoCs have developed or refined their cultural strategies as part of the bid development process. All ECoCs from 2015 onwards developed or adapted their cultural strategy, according to contextual data on cities’ policies retrieved from the final evaluation report of each ECoC. These strategies provide a long-term vision and cover the bidding process, the ECoC plan and some legacy strategies, and are developed at an early stage of the bidding process.

As a result, unsuccessful bidding cities also benefit from the development of new cultural plans. For example, this was the case of Žilina in Slovakia and Broumov in Czech Republic, where a regional strategy for culture was developed starting from the one designed at the city level during the ECoC bidding process. Thus, it can be argued that the ECoC action plays a relevant role in strengthening cultural policies across cities. The effect of planning for culture with a long-term perspective when applying for the title can also benefit other local policy areas, such as urban design, with examples such as Aarhus 2017, where culture, rather than being peripheral to the city’s planning, became a starting point for a wide range of policies from urban design and health initiatives to social and economic development, integrating and mainstreaming culture into the city’s future.

It is also good to note that the integration of the ECoC in a city’s policy sometimes extended already existing measures further. For instance, Galway 2020 included a strategy to develop a regional film fund to strengthen its local creative economy, in line with the national strategy for skills development inter alia in the audiovisual sector. Furthermore, the process of bidding, often, gave politicians and the management team confidence in the local cultural sector and gave a more strategic role for culture, addressing the important issue of advancing the level of prioritisation for culture in policymaking.⁴⁶ This resulted in the allocation of resources towards culture-driven urban regeneration across many ECoCs. Elefsina2023 for example used the title to renovate and reuse 10 unused industrial

⁴⁵ Culture for Cities and Regions (2017) Future creative cities: Why culture is a smart investment in cities <https://culturalheritageinaction.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/03/Future-creative-cities-.pdf>

⁴⁶ Culture for Cities and Regions, (2017) Future creative cities: Why culture is a smart investment in cities. Ibid

buildings, creating a new cultural district in the process and breathing new life into the industrial waterside front of the city.

Overall, the ECoC title is also seen by city representatives interviewed and focus group participants as a relevant initiative to highlight the importance of culture while cities' yearly budgets for cultural funding are often under pressure. Such a flagship initiative helps other cities to make the case for cultural funding locally, and ECoC evaluations do make a robust case for cultural investment, for instance by measuring the leverage effect of the budget invested in ECoCs, or by documenting the positive cultural and economic impacts of hosting an ECoC.

However, similarly to other large-scale cultural events such as the World Expo,⁴⁷ the sustainability of the ECoC impacts can limit the transformative effect of the action on a given city due to the weak legacy planning or the fast phasing out of the ECoC delivery body. Several ECoCs have set up legacy organisations to build on the effect of their title years (such as Lille 3000, Arcadia in Leeuwarden, Mons2035) but these are more the exceptions than the norm. Therefore, measuring the true impacts of ECoCs remains a challenge and immediate post-title evaluations were not seen to fully capture the benefits, which often materialise years later, according to stakeholders taking part in the focus groups. This is accentuated in the data limitations (see chapter 1) across different city evaluations and the lack of long-term impact evaluations of ECoCs. However, it must be noted that the ECoC initiative makes a relevant contribution to the improvement of the evaluation of cultural policies and large-scale cultural programmes at city level. This is a relevant area for many cities, as highlighted by the focus of major associations of European cities, which set up a specific workstream on cultural impact evaluation.⁴⁸

Another relevant aspect of ECoC to mention is its value to regional development through a cooperation between the awarded city and its surroundings. Rural areas face particular challenges in bidding for ECoCs and suffer from the lack of investment in infrastructure and mobility, and there is often no clear leadership from one particular city to onboard a rural area towards an ECoC candidacy. As such, this dimension has been exploited to good effect within specific ECoCs such as Kaunas 2022, where it was decided to share the title with the broader Kaunas District. Fifteen local municipalities were integrated into the ECoC programme, decentralising the events, improving access and spreading the benefits. Although Kaunas captures the capacity of ECoC to deliver for a region it is also the case that many cities did not exploit the opportunity ECoC provided to deliver benefits for wider regional development.

Continued relevance

The action has adapted over time to meet changing EU policy priorities and maintain its relevancy over time. Changes implemented in the current regulatory framework, Decision No. 445/2014, are detailed in Chapter 2 of this SWD. For instance, new changes such as the opening of the Action to cities in candidate countries and potential candidates and to EFTA/EEA countries allowed to further develop the international dimension of the ECoC action and can serve as a springboard for EU integration for candidate countries. Among the changes of the current legal basis, there is a more robust selection criteria including a stronger emphasis on the long-term impact and a reinforcement of the European Dimension

⁴⁷ Jones ZM (2020) Cultural mega-events: opportunities and risks for heritage cities. Routledge, Abingdon

⁴⁸ Eurocities (2020), How to measure the value and social impact of culture? A digest of inspiring examples and new approaches. Eurocities Culture Forum Working Group 'Cultural services & culture for inclusive cities': <https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Measuring-the-impact-of-culture.pdf>

to ensure the transformative effect of the action, as detailed in the previous section of the SWD.

If there is an overall consensus regarding the different selection criteria, there are contrasted views on the 'European dimension' criteria, which can potentially lead to varying interpretations. The evaluation has not managed to obtain a definitive answer from the different stakeholders on whether this dimension should remain a distinct criterion or become a horizontal one, integrating it across all criteria while maintaining its importance, though potentially diminishing its visibility. Some other stakeholders argued that the environmental and digital dimensions have gained significant prominence since the adoption of the 2014 Decision in terms of policies and actions, but they are not explicitly addressed in the selection criteria for ECoCs (though more recent candidates systematically cover these dimensions in their bid books). Some stakeholders argue that environmental sustainability needs to become a formal criterion as well, whereas the digital dimension could be embedded in all the other criteria and across the entire ECoC project.

Under the current legal basis, the chronological order of countries hosting the ECoC during the time period covered by the legal basis is mapped out and allows for cities to prepare ahead of the pre-selection phase if they wish (for instance Leuven, currently in the competition for the 2030 title announced having started its intention to join in the list of competing cities back in 2017). In some countries, a very strong interest from the different bidding cities can lead to a very high number of applications to assess.

For example, in the competition for the 2016 edition, 15 Spanish cities and 11 Polish cities expressed a desire to become their country's European Capitals of Culture and engaged in a fiercely competitive bidding process. However, the number of applications can be much lower in other Member States, one in Malta for 2018 (but most probably two for the 2031 title), three in the Czech Republic for 2015 and Cyprus for 2017. This low number can potentially stem from the fact that some Member States have a far larger pool of realistic candidates than others, which may become a problem in the future and selecting weaker candidates for the title in some countries may risk damaging the prestige and brand value of the ECoC in the longer term.

It should also be noted that several small or medium-sized Member States have already hosted the ECoC title on a number of occasions (e.g., Luxembourg with three ECoCs hosted). There is, therefore, a risk of having weaker ECoCs in certain years. It is worth noting that no country, during the collection of feedback from different stakeholders, has expressed any interest in 'opting out' of hosting the ECoC title, including those with fewer potential candidate cities. In practice, the legal basis does foresee the possibility that no city is selected in a particular country, but Member States do have an obligation to organise the competition. Another aspect that needs to be accounted for is the size of the city, which is currently not a criterion, but participants remarked on the difficulty of competing and comparing cities with different sizes, numbers of inhabitants, and capacities. Such comparison is complicated for Panel members as well.

Some small cities do struggle with the competition and preparation phases, as significant efforts are required of small teams, who often experience risks of burnout. If the integration of small and mid-sized city is perceived as a positive element by the different stakeholders interviewed (notably for the diversification of the cultural offering it can bring), it can create an issue with their capacity to deliver. In the framework of the evaluation, this topic brought the question of the concept and meaning of 'city', which is left undefined in the legal basis on purpose. The current concept of 'city', as seen by the expert panel, is seen

by some respondents as outdated and could thus be replaced by that of ‘territory’, therefore allowing provinces, regions, and alliances of smaller cities (comprising a leading city) to participate as well.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED?

5.1 Conclusions

Looking at cities holding the title between 2013 and 2023, as well as cities bidding for the title so far under the current legal basis, for the titles 2020-2028 the evaluation of the European Capitals of Culture action has revealed both notable achievements and areas for further development, while confirming the continued relevance and impact of this forty-year-old flagship cultural initiative of the European Union.

Regarding **effectiveness**, while limitations were encountered regarding the availability of data and the possibility to standardize results often coming from evaluations of past ECoCs, the action was found to have stimulated an increased number of cultural activities, and it allowed for a widened cultural offer in host cities, both in terms of genre and location. Looking at the local evaluations undertaken by the ECoC held between 2013 and 2022, a typical ECoC year consists of around 1,000-1,200 separate cultural activities. It also had a considerable effect on investments in cultural activities and infrastructure across host cities, with cultural budgets of host city administrations often around five times larger as a consequence of hosting their ECoC. Official attendance figures of the 2013-2022 ECoC set out in local evaluations show that around 38.5 million people participated in ECoC-supported cultural activity over this time period either as an audience member, a curator or a project beneficiary. Such a stimulated dynamism, alongside a cost factor especially allowing for the public to attend many events for free, helped in widening the type of beneficiaries who consumed culture and encouraged people who had not previously been active on the cultural front to attend cultural activities.

The ECoC also participated in strengthening the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors in host cities. While this was sometimes a result of concerted efforts to invest in capacity-building projects, it was mainly due to the ECoC helping in establishing either a formal or informal cultural ecosystem in the cities. Local actors are encouraged to work together to design and successfully deliver cultural content for the ECoC. Results also show that delivering an ECoC greatly helped to strengthen talent within the local CCS through the implementation of often hundreds of cultural projects at a different scale than previously experienced.

Evaluation findings also show that there was a concerted effort by ECoC to engage with people who did not traditionally consume culture. For example, local evaluations in Matera, Leeuwarden, Riga and Mons highlighted that groups being targeted to increase their consumption of culture during the ECoC year included school children, people from disadvantaged backgrounds (including migrants and the unemployed) as well as people living in the outermost neighbourhoods surrounding the city centre.

The ECoC successfully tackles its strategic objective to raise the international profile of the host cities through the delivery of a strong cultural programme. This is especially illustrated by an increased number of visitors in host cities (25%-35% of which come from abroad), but also by a large volume of additional international media coverage before and during the ECoC year and by stronger international collaboration that take place between stakeholders found in the host city and those found in other countries.

On **efficiency**, the ECoC is a cost-effective action able to leverage public and private funding at relatively low cost for the Union. The Melina Mercouri prize represents only a fraction of the entire ECoC budget of title cities, normally ranging between 2% and 7% of the overall ECoC budget. A significant portion of the funding comes from public sources, with national, local, and regional funding collectively providing 71% of the budget. However, it should be noted that there is often a discrepancy between the planned and actual budgets, with most cities facing shortfalls due to various factors, such as reduced financial commitments from national governments and unforeseen circumstances, including the COVID-19 pandemic. Only a few cities delivered their ECoC programmes with their original budget projections.

The evaluation also outlined challenges affecting the efficiency of the action and the actual lessons candidate or title-holding cities could learn from their ECoC experience. For instance, time constraints between the pre-selection and final selection stages represent a major issue for candidate cities, which sometimes cannot fully improve their proposals. At a later stage, they can encounter difficulties to actually capitalise on the work done and competencies acquired during the bidding process. Moreover, they can have a hard time relying on sufficient learning and communication between past, current and future ECoC cities. Furthermore, there is a need for a clearer communication on core concepts like the European dimension and legacy in order for cities to save time and resources during the bidding and planning stages.

On another level, the onboarding and handover of panel experts present another area of improvement, with new members often lacking the appropriate tools for a seamless transition, leading to knowledge loss and uneven involvement. The ECoC action could benefit from developing structured onboarding processes. On a more general note, it was perceived that a more centralised communication strategy at the EU level would increase the visibility of the initiative as a whole, but also of individual titleholding cities.

In terms of **coherence**, the ECoC action showcases strong internal coherence as the processes for host-city selection and management align well with ECoC objectives. Indeed, the bidding process mandates that cities embed their ECoC project into a broader cultural strategy, while involving various stakeholders and different governance levels. Moreover, such a mix between national, regional, and local funding support reflects the alignment across territorial governance levels. National stakeholders are especially vital, often viewing ECoC as a matter of national importance, while their lack of involvement can hinder progress. However, challenges may arise in balancing local priorities with European objectives, particularly regarding the European dimension of programmes, which many host cities struggle to tackle. Such an internal coherence is complemented by the action's strong external coherence. Indeed, the ECoC aligns with other EU programmes, funds and initiatives, especially the EU flagship programme supporting the CCS, i.e. Creative Europe. As such, both the ECoC action and the Creative Europe Programme share core objectives like enhancing cultural diversity and fostering cross-border collaborations. Similarly, both the ECoC action and Creative Europe aim to support EU cultural and creative sectors' competitiveness, enhance cultural participation, and promote European identity. The ECoC action also shares features with EU priorities in the fields of greening and social inclusion for example. However, there is room for improvement in aligning with environmental priorities and EU external policies. EU funding, such as from the Cohesion Funds, remains underutilised by the different capitals, although ECoCs often indirectly benefit from projects cofinanced by those funds. Regarding the relationship with national initiatives, the evaluation noted synergies, as well as some limited overlaps.

The ECOC action demonstrates a clear and significant **EU added value** by fostering international collaboration among cultural players in hosting cities and their peers in other countries, by enhancing the visibility of European cities, and by promoting a shared European cultural identity. Through the support of the ECoC, cities—particularly smaller and less internationally recognised ones—have successfully accessed global cultural networks, hosted ambitious and diverse cultural programmes, and attracted audiences and media attention that would have been otherwise unreachable.

The initiative has not only led to a boost in international tourism and cross-border partnerships but also contributed to urban regeneration, civic engagement, and the strengthening of local cultural sectors. Cities like Marseille and Kaunas stand out as powerful examples of how the ECoC title can act as a catalyst for long-term development, cultural diplomacy, and the embodiment of EU values such as tolerance and peace. By enabling cooperation with artists and institutions from both EU and non-EU countries, the action supports the EU's cultural diplomacy goals and strengthens the cultural fabric of Europe as a whole.

Nonetheless, the evaluation highlights several structural limitations that hinder the full potential of the ECoC action. Notably, the lack of a formal institutional mechanism for knowledge sharing and the absence of a centralised database of cultural operators restrict the sustainability and reach of the networks created during the title year. Moreover, while the initiative successfully promotes European values, inconsistent political support and limited post-title engagement can threaten the longevity of the impact of the title year. The evaluation therefore suggests that more structured EU-level support—especially in communication, data sharing, and legacy planning—would be essential to enhance the effectiveness and lasting influence of the ECoC action. Despite these challenges, the ECoC continues to play a vital role in uniting Europe through culture, offering cities a transformative opportunity to redefine their identity on the European stage and participate in a broader dialogue about the future of culture in the EU.

The action continues to be **relevant**, as it is evolving alongside the socio-economic changes and cultural landscape of Europe. Despite being one of the EU's longest-running cultural actions, the initiative remains aligned with cities' long-term development goals, particularly in embedding culture within urban planning and policymaking. The requirement for bidding cities to develop comprehensive cultural strategies has transformed the way municipalities view and utilise culture, often leading to the creation or refinement of city-wide cultural policies. These processes are not confined to successful titleholders alone; even cities that do not win the title benefit from strengthened cultural strategies and improved planning frameworks. The cases of Žilina and Broumov illustrates how the ECoC bidding process can stimulate the development of regional strategies, thereby broadening the initiative's impact beyond the city level.

The integration of the ECoC action into city policy frameworks often reinforces and extends pre-existing measures, providing legitimacy and renewed focus on cultural development. Galway 2020 exemplifies this by leveraging its ECoC candidacy to align with national audiovisual strategies and strengthen its creative economy through regional film initiatives. Moreover, the bidding process instils confidence in both political leadership and the cultural sector, often leading to tangible investments in culture-driven urban regeneration, as seen with the example of Elefsina. These outcomes are particularly significant in the face of shrinking municipal budgets for culture: the cultural capitals serve as a flagship initiative that not only secures local political buy-in but also provides robust evidence of the socio-economic value of cultural investment. Evaluations of ECoC consistently demonstrate its leverage effect, generating broader economic and cultural

benefits in proportion to the initial investment, which cities use to justify continued and increased support for cultural initiatives.

However, the legacy of the action remains at the heart of potential questions concerning the ECoC's relevance. While some cities have established legacy organisations, such as Lille3000 and Mons2035, many others lack adequate long-term planning mechanisms. The fast phasing-out of ECoC delivery bodies often results in missed opportunities to maintain momentum, with many of the benefits of the title year only becoming visible years after its conclusion. Weak legacy planning, combined with data limitations and a lack of long-term evaluation frameworks, undermines the ability to capture the full impact of the initiative. Still, the ECoC initiative has helped elevate the importance of cultural policy evaluation across Europe. Focus groups highlighted the growing interest in assessing the impact of culture, with many European city networks creating dedicated workstreams on cultural impact assessment. This growing emphasis suggests that while legacy planning may be inconsistent, the initiative still plays a pivotal role in advancing the practice of cultural policy evaluation at the local level.

Another important dimension of the action's relevance is its potential to support regional development through collaboration between cities and their surrounding areas. Although this regional approach is unevenly adopted, examples such as Kaunas 2022, show how the initiative can successfully decentralise cultural benefits and increase access across multiple municipalities. However, structural challenges persist particularly in rural areas and smaller municipalities which can potentially lack the capacity to deliver required to participate effectively. These disparities are further complicated by the open definition of "city" in the current legal framework, which does not account for variations in size, capacity, or political structure.

In parallel, the ECoC has adapted to remain relevant to EU policy priorities, including expanding eligibility to cities in (potential) candidate and EFTA/EEA countries, embedding a stronger focus on long-term impact, and promoting the European dimension. However, ongoing debates around the role and visibility of the European dimension, and the underrepresentation of environmental and digital priorities in formal selection criteria, indicate areas for further refinement to maintain the initiative's relevance in a rapidly changing policy context.

5. 2 Lessons learned

It appears that, based on the result of the evaluation, the ECoC action is a successful flagship action of the EU with a strong cost-effectiveness as it has a very limited impact on the overall EU budget. Over the period of 2013-2022, it is estimated that 38.5 million people have been reached by the different actions organised in the context of the different European Capitals of Culture. Moreover, the action can have a transformative effect on candidate and selected cities as it requires long-term planning and the inclusion of culture in local city policy in order to achieve the status of "serious contender". The action also has a strong coherence with other actions of the EU and in particular the Creative Europe Programme and allow for the spreading of EU values and the dissemination of the works of European cultural professionals and artists across national borders in the EU and beyond.

However, the evaluation has also been the opportunity to figure out that a few elements can and should be improved for the future of the action.

Based on feedback, it appears that the ‘**European dimension**’ criterion is often not fully understood by the different ECoC stakeholders. Cities should ensure that sufficient attention is allocated to understanding and implementing this criterion. Cities should also, among others, seek cross-country collaborations, possibly engaging other cities, in particular - but not only - former, current and future ECoCs.

Knowledge sharing with previous ECoCs could be improved through a stronger network of participant cities, building on the benefits and the experiences gained and supporting long-term investment in the cultural sector. In the same vein, it could be useful to develop a centralised database of the cultural operators and artists participating in ECoC for ongoing and future collaboration. To continue on the institutional side, the evaluation put to the fore the idea of a stronger centralised communication from EU institutions to the benefit of the action as a whole and of the various ECoC titleholding cities receiving in order to increase their reach.

Concerning the expert panel, there is a plea to reinforce interinstitutional dialogue to ensure diversity (e.g., areas of competence, gender, age, ethnicity and geographical balance, experts representing artists, experts with legal skills/knowledge). The possibility to implement a structured onboarding process (with for example a handbook) for new members of the panel to ensure their preparedness and a smooth transition and adequate handover between old and new members was made.

A high number of recommendations apply to bidding cities as they are the ones in a decision-making role when building their ECoC project. In particular, the way to tackle political instability is an element they should anticipate, because it is one of the main issues often negatively impacting ECoC implementation. Cities bidding for the title should seek wide political support across parties for their project to ensure unabated support all along the implementation phase. In addition, ECoCs’ final budgets tend to be smaller than what was originally envisaged at the bidding stage. This is mostly due to less funding coming from national sources or overestimating revenues from ticket sales. Cities should seek formal agreements with national ministries to secure national funding commitments at the selection stage and set realistic expectations on the number of paying participants expected.

The evaluation has shown the limits of the available data related to the European Capitals of Culture. As such, it is difficult to measure the tangible impact of the European Capitals of Culture and aggregate figures as each ECoC uses a different set of data to monitor their impact. Refining the data obtainable from the ECoC action would help to measure the real impact of this flagship action. While the cities are the ones which implement the cultural programme and run their own evaluation, the EC could develop and provide cities with clear, measurable, qualitative and quantitative targets/indicators (through a handbook for instance). Such a set of “usable” indicators would be especially relevant to obtain comprehensive, coherent and comparable data from cities and limit, as much as possible, data gaps. For instance, EC could establish a clear and common understanding of an indicator such as “number of cultural activities conducted”. Such an approach could be especially useful to assess criteria which cities often struggle to grasp, such as long-term impact and EU added value.

Finally, the Action places great focus on its legacy, however there is no monitoring framework in place for this. Developing monitoring tools for the legacy of the Action could allow to better track the long-term impact of ECoC. While ECoC is generally very well regarded and highly appreciated, there is demand for a discussion on the nature of Action and what it aims to achieve in the long-term. In particular, while ECoC is seen as an

opportunity for long-lasting change in hosting cities, the effects of ECoC in its current form risk being limited to the title year. There could be an open a discussion about the nature of the Action and whether it should evolve from its current form into a wider project recognising and fostering cities' commitment toward culture, not limited to the ECoC year, but as a process to be monitored and continuously earned.

ANNEX I: PROCEDURAL INFORMATION

The European Capitals of Culture 2020-2033 first interim evaluation (PLAN/2023/1623) has been steered by the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC). The evaluation was carried out under the scrutiny of an Interservice group (ISG) comprising of representatives of 5 other DGs (SG, LS, BUDG, REGIO and ENEST).

The ISG was involved repeatedly at key stages of the evaluation by writing and the group convened at several stages of the evaluation on the following dates:

- 13 March 2024
- 13 November 2024
- 18 February 2025

The ISG has been consulted as well (in writing) on the final version of the document produced by the contractor.

No exception from the usual procedural requirements of the better regulation guidelines was requested for this evaluation.

This evaluation is based on evidence gathered via different channels and an overview is presented in Annexes II, III and IV

The main sources of evidence are internal analyses by the European Commission, the report presented by the evaluator contracted in the framework of this evaluation carried out between 2024 and 2025.

ANNEX II. METHODOLOGY AND ANALYTICAL MODELS USED

The first interim evaluation of the European Capitals of Culture action 2020-2033 was coordinated by the Creative Europe Programme EAC.D2 unit, in cooperation with the unit Evidence-Based Policy and Evaluation, of DG EAC with the support of an interservice group comprising five Commission DGs chaired by DG EAC (more details in Annex I). The evaluation process started in 2023 and was guided by the Terms of Reference drawn up for contracting the external evaluator, consulted with the ISG and approved by EAC board of directors.

The Staff Working Document draws upon extensive quantitative and qualitative evidence gathered through a variety of data collection activities undertaken by the external contractor, and a thorough evaluation analysis, applying the methodologies described below. The data was tested and triangulated against the main evaluation criteria in accordance with the approaches outlined in the better regulation toolbox 2023 chapter 6, and the framework established by the 2014 Decision on the European Capitals of Culture 2020-2033.

Additionally, there was potential for missing perspectives in interviews, and the possibility of bias in self-reported data from participants when it comes to surveys conducted for the evaluation. A major limitation is the recent

WP 1	Inception	<p>The Inception phase consisted in five tasks, including a Kick-off meeting, six Scoping Interviews, Initial Desk Research, method fine-tuning and the Inception Report and meeting to discuss the Report.</p> <p>The Kick-off meeting for the study took place between the contractor and DG EAC in Brussels on 13 March 2024.</p> <p>The Inception Report was submitted on 12 April 2024 and was approved on 16 May 2024, following the reception of comments from DG EAC and the Inception meeting was held on 07 May 2024.</p>
WP 2	Data Collection	<p>Work Package II consisted of four major tasks aimed at collecting relevant data, identifying and reviewing potential data gaps, and engaging with all relevant stakeholder groups through a range of consultation activities.</p> <p>A data matrix was developed to compile quantitative and qualitative, primary and secondary data aligned to the evaluation framework. Its purpose was to collect monitoring and evaluation data from</p>

ECoC titleholders in a systematic and comprehensive way to support other work packages. The complete matrix consists of data from ECoCs from 2013 to 2022, covering the years for which evaluation reports are available.

To complete the table, **ECoC ex-post evaluations and city evaluations** were used. In total, 60 key indicators were included, with corresponding data from each city (where it was available) added to the tool accordingly. Each indicator was then arranged in accordance with the relevant evaluation questions they related to. It should be noted that the majority of data compiled related to the Effectiveness and Efficiency evaluation questions, given the more quantitative nature of these evaluation criteria. Less was found on Coherence, Relevance, and EU added value.

A literature review was performed first through initial desk research, which aimed to gather extensive secondary data from previous studies and evaluations linked to the ECoC action at the EU and Member State level. During this phase, 199 documents were retrieved, encompassing various categories:

- background documents, including legislation and programme documentation;
- European-level evaluations, studies and reports (ECoC years 2013-2019);
- official evaluations of ECoC and reports (ECoC years 2013-2019);
- pre-selection, selection and monitoring documents produced by the ECoC expert panel (ECoC years 2020-2029);
- title-holding cities' evaluations, strategies and databases;
- academic literature;
- additional publications produced by relevant stakeholders, such as the University Network of the European ECoC (UNECC) outputs, the CECUT outputs and the legacy from the ECoC capacity-building project taking place between October 2019 and May 2022.

A data mapping exercise was conducted to identify the widest possible set of publicly available quantitative datasets to contribute to the evaluation process. This was aimed at contextualising and complementing the findings of the literature review and stakeholder consultations. Quantitative datasets were identified for a range of indicators related to the cultural sector. These included data sources such as:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eurostat statistics at the city level and above (including Gross Value-Added figures, cultural engagement and cultural employment), • OECD regions and cities data (around improvements to cultural infrastructure) • The Cultural and Creative Cities monitor (primarily focused on cultural engagement), and • European Social Surveys. <p>The study team carried out in-depth, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholder groups involved in the ECoC action at the European, national and local levels. A total of 64 interviews have been conducted by the study team and were used to inform the findings for the evaluation questions as part of this report. These interviews are detailed in Annex V of this SWD.</p> <p>A Public Consultation was launched on 18 June 2024 and closed on 24 September 2024. A total of 60 responses were received, of which 58 were from respondents in the EU covering 22 Member States. This Public Consultation and its results are detailed in Annex V of this SWD.</p> <p>A series of six focus groups were organised, with four in the first half of July 2024, and two at the end of August 2024, with the following breakdown of participants:</p> <p>The evaluator also produced 8 case studies aim at capturing more in-depth insights around the impacts of selected ECoCs and deep-diving into specific themes of the evaluation. The case studies were selected in consultation with the European Commission during the Inception phase of the project. The selection includes the following eight cities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Aarhus 2. Elefsina 3. Galway 4. Kaunas 5. Leeuwarden 6. Matera 7. Novi Sad 8. Wrocław

WP 3	Impact evaluation	<p>This WP encompassed the analysis and triangulation of all data collected to answer the evaluation questions and conduct the contribution analysis for the evaluation.</p> <p>The contribution analysis aimed to test three hypotheses to facilitate the exploration of the contribution pathway between the ECoC initiative and the defined impact area:</p> <p>(Intermediate) Hypothesis 1 (H1): In preparing for and becoming an ECoC, title cities implement activities to raise funds and invest in the city's cultural and tourism infrastructure;</p> <p>(Intermediate) Hypothesis 2 (H2): In preparing for and becoming an ECoC, title cities increase the volume, diversity and quality of cultural activities and events using ECoC-related funding to invest in organisations or projects producing cultural activities or events;</p> <p>(Main) Hypothesis 3 (H3): Through the increased investment in the city's cultural and tourist infrastructure, activities and events, employment opportunities in areas related to culture and tourism improve in title cities.</p>
WP 4	Key issues for a potential successor	<p>This WP encompassed the identification of key challenges and issues to be considered for the future of the Action and the implementation of a dissemination workshop.</p> <p>The dissemination workshop saw 20 attendees including expert panel members, ECoC representatives, independent researchers, European networks of cities and representatives of European institutions.</p>

ANNEX III. EVALUATION MATRIX AND, WHERE RELEVANT, DETAILS ON ANSWERS TO THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS (BY CRITERION)

Effectiveness

Evaluation questions	Judgement criteria and indicators of success	Data collection methods
What have been the effects of the intervention? Are these effects as expected when introducing the intervention? What external factors have affected progress towards the objectives and how?	ECOC intervention produces a wide variety of effects on Title-holding cities and beyond, including, but not limited to, economic growth, strengthened cultural sector and participation in culture. The extent to which these effects produced, meeting or failing expectations, depended on identifiable and quantifiable factors Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected as to unintended effects that might have produced	Quantitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations on socio-economic effects of ECoC including on economic growth, strengthened cultural sector and participation in culture: Quantitative and qualitative evidence from desk research and interviews on potential socio-economic effect of ECoC, whether these were expected and factors that might have influenced them Quantitative and qualitative evidence from desk research and interviews on potential unintended effect of ECoC Quantitative impact estimates from the counterfactual impact evaluation assessing the causal effects of the ECoC action on impact measures related to the specific and operational objectives.
What are the main issues and challenges faced by the cities when bidding for the ECOC title and – if selected – when preparing the ECOC year? In particular, what are the specific challenges that they have to manage regarding: governance, budget, relationships with local and national authorities, development of European and international connections? For example, to what extent do political considerations interfere with artistic choices and funding guarantees? Has this disrupted the preparation of the cities?	Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected as to main issues and challenges faced by the cities at the different stages (bidding, preparation, implementation and post-ECoC) of the Action.	Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research and interviews on the challenges and issues faced by cities when bidding for and preparing the ECoC year Qualitative evidence from public consultation Example of good practices implemented by Title-holding cities to overcome issues and challenges encountered
What have been the effects of the new selection procedure introduced by the 2014 Decision?	The new selection procedure is perceived as being more transparent being based on six clear criteria, allows a fairer and shared selection and enables bidding cities to develop a	Qualitative and quantitative evidence from analysis of expert panel's recommendations and evaluations of bids and identification of differences and key trends

<p>To what extent has the role of the panel been reinforced during the selection phase?</p> <p>To what extent is the new composition of the panel (with a higher number of members nominated by EU institutions and bodies) an added value for the assessment of the bids?</p> <p>Are the appointed panel members relevant to the criteria requested in the 2014 Decision?</p>	<p>stronger and more focused proposal.</p> <p>The selection procedure and the criteria in particular contribute to strengthen the European dimension of the ECoC event ensuring the bids with the strongest focus on cultural diversity and commonalities of European cultures, heritage and history as well as the best European and international partnerships are selected.</p> <p>Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected on whether there are differences among Member States in relation to the impact of measures aimed to foster the European dimension of the initiative</p>	<p>Qualitative evidence from interviews with Title-holding cities and representatives of Member States on the new process, its advantages and disadvantages and whether it is considered fair</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from interviews and focus groups with bidding and Title-holding cities on whether: the selection criteria are clear and meaningful and help them prepare a stronger bid</p> <p>the selection criteria are proportionate and well-focused</p> <p>the selection procedure is designed in a way to allow the bids to express their full potential</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on:</p> <p>the new process, its advantages and disadvantages and whether it is considered fair</p> <p>what factors can impact the quality of the bids, including bidding city size, existence of a well-established cultural strategy and vision, political support, etc.</p> <p>the selection criteria are proportionate and well-focused</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from public consultation on the effectiveness of the selection process and the selection criteria</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from desk research, public consultation, and interviews and focus group on whether: the selection procedure and the criteria contribute to strengthen the European dimension of the ECoC</p> <p>there are difference among Member States in relation to the impact of measures aimed to foster the European dimension of the initiative</p> <p>changes to the selection procedure and/or criteria would be required to strengthen the European dimension of the ECoC event</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from the validation workshops on advantages, disadvantages and impacts of changing the selection procedure and/or criteria to strengthen the European dimension of the ECoC event</p>
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<p>To what extent has the new selection procedure fostered competition among bidding cities? To what extent does the selection procedure help the cities design a programme that is relevant to the objectives and criteria laid down for the action? Could the selection procedure be improved, and if so, how?</p>	<p>Proposals developed under the new procedure are overall stronger and of higher quality The criteria set in the Decision as well as the recommendations issued by the panel during the preselection and selection stages allow the cities to design a programme in line with the objectives of the Action The need to have a cultural strategy already in place provided an incentives to cities to develop one and strengthen the effects of the ECoC action Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected as to the extent the current procedure could be improved and how</p>		<p>Qualitative and quantitative evidence from analysis of expert panel's recommendations and evaluations of past bids under the previous and new procedure Qualitative evidence from interviews with Title-holding cities on whether the selection criteria are clear and meaningful and help them prepare a better bid Qualitative evidence from interviews with Title-holding cities and local cultural and civic organisations on whether the requirement of having a cultural strategy already in place provided an incentive to cities to develop a strategy in the first place and strengthen the effects of the ECoC action Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on whether the new procedure led to stronger and higher quality proposal Comparative analysis of effects between Title-holding cities that had and didn't have in place a long-terms cultural strategy Qualitative evidence from desk research, analysis of current processes, interviews with cities and the public consultation on possible ways of improving the selection process Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on possible ways of improving the selection process Qualitative evidence from the validation workshops on advantages, disadvantages and impacts of changing the selection procedure</p>	<p>Qualitative and quantitative evidence from analysis of expert panel's pre-selection and selection reports and recommendations</p>
<p>What have been the effects of the new monitoring procedure introduced by the 2014 Decision? To what extent is the new</p>	<p>Having a larger share of members of the panel nominated by the EU institutions and bodies ensures that more technical expertise and objectivity is brought into the</p>			

<p>monitoring procedure adapted to the preparation of an event of the scale and scope of an ECOC event (for example, concerning the timing)? In particular, does it help title-holding cities in preparing a programme relevant to the objectives and criteria as specified in the 2014 Decision and in implementing a successful title-year? To what extent do ECOC title-holding cities benefit from the European monitoring support during their preparation phase? Could the monitoring procedure be improved, and if so, how?</p>	<p>process to the advantage of the cities (that can count on better support) and of the overall fairness of the procedure</p> <p>The panel members appointed so far under the new procedure meet the criteria determined by Art. 6 of the 2014 Decision</p> <p>--</p> <p>The extension of the monitoring period as well as the introduction of an additional meeting closer to the title year ensured a closer monitoring and stronger support to title-holding cities</p> <p>The procedure allows to timely identify criticalities and ensure they are successfully tackled</p> <p>The procedure timeline is considered adequate to monitor the implementation process</p> <p>Title-holding cities benefit from the multiple meetings and recommendations from the panel, improving the overall quality of their programme</p> <p>---</p> <p>Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected as to the extent the current procedure could be improved and how</p>	<p>Qualitative evidence from interviews with Title-holding cities and representatives of Member States on the composition of the panel of experts and whether it adds value to the process (including advantages and disadvantages)</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on the composition of the panel of experts and whether it adds value to the process (including advantages and disadvantages)</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from interviews with representatives of Member States and EU institutions on the process followed to select and name the members of the panel and the overall quality of the members selected</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on the process followed to select and name the members of the panel</p> <p>Analysis of panel members' references selected in light of the criteria requested in the 2014 Decision</p> <p>--</p> <p>Qualitative and quantitative evidence from analysis of expert panel's recommendations and evaluations of past bids under the previous and new procedure indicating that the timing is adequate to allow to identify and tackle potential issues</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on the effectiveness and adequacy of the monitoring procedures</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from interviews and focus groups with title and bidding cities on the effectiveness and adequacy of the monitoring procedures</p> <p>Concrete examples of how the monitoring procedure helped title-holding cities in preparing a programme relevant to the objectives and criteria as specified in the 2014 Decision and in implementing a successful title year</p>
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<p>To what extent has the EU intervention achieved (or progressed towards) its objectives? To what extent have the ECOC programmes implemented by the title holding cities succeeded in attaining the objectives of the action?</p>	<p>ECOC delivered the implementation of a large number of events having a strong European Dimension, involving European artist and developed through international partnerships.</p> <p>ECOC increased citizens exposure to European culture, artist and cultural activities.</p> <p>On the long-term, ECoC contributed to raise citizens awareness of the diversity of European cultures and to strengthen the cultural offer in the title-holding cities through better cultural strategies and increased spending on culture.</p> <p>ECOC stimulated the implementation of a diverse range of cultural activities of high artistic quality promoting long-term change of the local cultural scene strengthening diversity, dialogue and mutual understanding and highlighting (shared) European cultures and themes.</p> <p>Through ECoC, a large number of European artists were involved in Title-holding cities cultural activities further promoting cooperation with different countries and transnational partnerships.</p>	<p>Outputs</p> <p>Quantitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations on: Total n. of events and cultural activities implemented, including activities highlighting European diversity, based on European themes or based on transnational cooperations and N. of new cross-border collaborations, co-productions and exchanges involving local and international operators</p> <p>N. of artists involved in international cooperation</p> <p>N. of local artists involved in international projects abroad</p> <p>Results</p> <p>Quantitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations on the level of citizens exposure to European culture, artists and cultural activities</p> <p>Impacts</p> <p>Quantitative evidence from past ECoC evaluation on the impact of the Action on the citizens awareness of the diversity of European cultures and sense of belonging to a common cultural space</p> <p>Quantitative evidence from desk research on public culture spending in Title-holding cities in the years after the ECoC event</p> <p>Evidence of existence of a long-term cultural strategy in the Title-holding cities with a strong European dimension</p>

<p>Qualitative evidence from interviews with local stakeholders (e.g. cultural and civic organisations, representatives of local authorities) on the quality and European dimension of the cultural offer in the Title-holding cities in the years after the ECoC event</p> <p>Qualitative and quantitative evidence and concrete examples of long-term impacts from the Case studies</p> <p>Quantitative impact estimates from the counterfactual impact evaluation assessing the causal effects of the ECoC action on: transnational mobility of artists, transnational cooperation among cultural sectors.</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative assessment of relevant outputs, results and impacts against the intervention operational, specific and general objectives</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations on whether the ECoC programmes implemented by the title-holding cities succeeded in attaining the objectives of the Action</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from interviews with local stakeholders (e.g. cultural and civic organisations, representatives of local authorities and of national culture ministry) on whether ECoC contributed to enhance the cultural offer in the title-holding cities by elevating its European dimension, engaging international and European artists participation and developing international partnerships</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from public consultation on whether ECoC contributed to enhance the cultural offer in the title-holding cities by elevating its European dimension, engaging international and European artists participation and developing international partnerships</p> <p>Qualitative and quantitative evidence and concrete examples of how the intervention achieved its objectives from the Case studies</p>	
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<p>To what extent bidding cities devise and prepare the ECOC event as part of their long-term development?</p>	<p>ECOC is perceived as a catalyst for change and as pivotal opportunity for Title-holding cities for development far beyond the title year. Title-holding cities have a long-term vision and development plan which recognise the central role of ECOC but, at the same time, go beyond it, making sure to leverage and make the most of the ECOC opportunity.</p> <p>Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected as to the ECOC action sorted long-term effect on Title-holding cities and surrounding areas.</p> <p>Hosting the ECOC action led the title-holding cities to push culture higher in their political agenda and allocate more funding from public sources into the culture agenda</p>	<p>Quantitative impact estimates from the counterfactual impact evaluation assessing the causal effects of the ECOC action on impact measures related to city's cultural offer.</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECOC evaluations, desk research and interviews on the extent the ECOC event is designed in the context of a wider, long-term development strategy</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from desk research and interviews on whether the new requirement to have in place a cultural strategy when bidding for hosting the ECOC title has changed the way ECOC is considered and integrated in a long-term development strategy</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative evidence from the analysis and mapping of cities cultural strategies indicating culture acquired more importance as a consequence of hosting the ECOC event</p> <p>Quantitative evidence on public spending by title cities on culture in the years preceding and following the title year</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative evidence past ECOC evaluations, desk research and interviews on the extent the ECOC event sorted sustainable long-term effects on Title-holding cities</p> <p>Qualitative and quantitative evidence from the Case studies</p>
<p>Are there any unexpected or unintended effects? Have ECOC events exceeded initial expectations, and what effects have this had? Where expectations have not been met, what factors have hindered the development of the action? To what extent can the positive effects of the ECOC action be considered to be sustainable?</p>	<p>ECOC events generally met expectations of the different stakeholders involved (i.e. European Commission, panel of experts, Title-holding cities representatives, ECOC coordinators, citizens, visitors).</p> <p>Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected as to the extent of effects of Title-holding cities where the implementation of the ECOC events exceeded expectations and how these compare to the effects in Title-holding cities where expectations were not met</p> <p>Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected as to the main factors that might have impacted the capacity of the ECOC events to meet or exceed expectations</p>	<p>Quantitative evidence from past ECOC evaluations on whether expectations were met.</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from interviews (e.g. cultural and civic organisations, representatives of local authorities and of national culture ministry) on whether expectations were met and why</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from focus groups with members of the selection panel on whether expectations were met and why</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative evidence from desk research and interviews on relevant effects that might have been impacted by the specific ECOC aspect that exceeded/didn't</p>

Does the ECOC planned cultural programme last the entire year? If this is not the case, what are the reasons?	Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected as to the length of the cultural programme in Title-holding cities and reasons for deviation from expected duration	meet expectations and comparison with other Title-holding cities
		Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research and interviews on the length of the cultural programme in Title-holding cities and reasons for deviation from expected duration

Effectiveness

Evaluation questions	Judgement criteria and indicators of success	Data collection methods
<p>To what extent is the selection procedure considered fair and transparent by the cities?</p> <p>Do the cities understand the selection criteria?</p>	<p>The timing of the selection process and of the designation of the title-holding cities is sufficient for the cities to develop strong bids as well as for the panel to thoroughly evaluate them and provide useful recommendations.</p> <p>The four-year time between the designation and the implementation of the ECoC year is sufficient for title-holding cities to fully develop the cultural programme, do the required infrastructural works and preparation activities (including, for example, promotion) and successfully implement the ECoC event</p> <p>The selection process is considered adequate and does not pose particular challenges to cities and Member States (independently on the size of the Member State)</p>	<p>Quantitative evidence from analysis of panels pre-selection and selection reports on the extent additional time would benefit the development of the bids</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from the focus group with members of the panel on whether the time allocated to the selection process is enough to thoroughly evaluate the bids and provide useful and comprehensive recommendations</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations suggesting that the four-year time allowed for the implementation of the ECoC event was not sufficient</p> <p>Concrete examples of activities that could not be implemented due to lack of time</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research, focus groups, public consultation and interviews on whether the selection process and timing pose specific challenges to cities and Member States, and whether these challenges are linked to specific characteristics of the MS (e.g. size)</p>
How timely and efficient is the selection process (timing, guiding documents and reports) to prepare the ECOC event? Is the timing of designation 4 years before the title year relevant?	As above	As above

<p>What was the impact of the new selection procedure on the overall quality of the bids?</p> <p>Are there significant differences between years/Member States? What is causing them?</p> <p>Have any inefficiencies been identified?</p> <p>To what extent is the selection procedure sustainable over time, in particular in smaller Member States?</p>	<p>The panel managed to execute their tasks within the timeline foreseen and with the resources required.</p> <p>Title-holding cities and bidding cities not selected generally agree that the process worked well, without delays and bottlenecks.</p> <p>Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected on whether the selection and monitoring processes could be made more efficient</p>	<p>Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research, focus groups, public consultation and interviews on whether the selection process could be made more efficient</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from interviews and focus groups with Title-holding cities on whether the process worked well, without delays and bottlenecks</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from the focus group with bidding cities on whether the process worked well, without delays and bottlenecks</p> <p>Concrete examples of ways in which the processes could be improved</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from the validation workshops on potential measures and changes to improve the efficiency of the Action</p>
<p>To what extent has the panel been efficient and delivered a quality output during the selection procedure? For example, has the panel assessed the bids against the ECOC criteria and objectives? Has the panel taken other elements into account? On the quality of panel pre-selection and selection reports: are they clear and precise enough?</p> <p>Are they useful for the cities concerned, notably the parts on assessment and recommendation?</p>	<p>The panel overall delivered quality outputs during the selection procedure. Pre-selection and selection reports were based on a rigorous and transparent assessment of the bids against the ECoC criteria and objectives. Other elements considered were clearly indicated and justified.</p> <p>Pre-selection and selection reports are sufficiently clear and detailed to represent helpful guidance for the cities concerned.</p>	<p>Qualitative and quantitative evidence from analysis of expert panel's pre-selection and selection reports and recommendations</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from interviews with bidding and Title-holding cities on whether the pre-selection and selection reports and panel's recommendations were sufficiently clear, precise and overall containing helpful guidance</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from interviews with bidding and Title-holding cities on how the pre-selection and selection reports and panel's recommendations could be improved</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on what could be done to further improve their pre-selection and selection reports and panel's recommendations</p>
<p>To what extent has the panel been efficient and delivered a quality output during the monitoring procedure? Does it deliver relevant support and guidance to the titleholding cities during the event's</p>	<p>The panel overall delivered quality outputs during the monitoring procedure providing the Title-holding cities relevant and useful support and guidance, demonstrated by the clear acknowledgement reaction by title-holding cities.</p> <p>The panel's recommendations are based on evidence and full stock-taking of the progress made in the preparation for</p>	<p>Qualitative and quantitative evidence from analysis of expert panel's monitoring reports and recommendations</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from interviews with Title-holding cities on whether the monitoring reports and recommendation were sufficiently clear, precise and overall containing helpful guidance</p>

<p>preparatory years? In particular, to what extent does it take stock of the preparations for the event? To what extent does the panel check that the criteria are fulfilled? Are there other elements the panel has taken into account? On the quality of panel monitoring reports: are they clear and consistent enough? Are they useful for the cities concerned, notably the parts on assessment and recommendation?</p>	<p>the event. In its assessment, the panel checks and clearly report on the fulfilment of the ECoC criteria. Other elements considered are clearly indicated and justified. Monitoring reports are sufficiently clear and detailed to represent helpful guidance for the cities concerned.</p>	<p>Qualitative evidence from interviews with Title-holding cities on how the monitoring reports and recommendation could be improved</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on what could be done to further improve their monitoring reports and recommendation</p>
<p>To what extent is the scheme of co-funding through the Melina Mercouri Prize adapted to the legacy of the ECOC, in particular regarding the time schedule for delivering the Prize? Has it been an efficient way of improving the quality of the preparation of the legacy plans in general? Is the use of the Melina Mercouri Prize planned in advance in the budget of an ECOC?</p>	<p>The definition of clear criteria for the award of the Melina Mercury prize strengthened the value of the panel's recommendations and further ensured the success of the title year</p> <p>--</p> <p>The Melina Mercouri Prize is used by title-holding cities to ensure the legacy of the ECoC year. The prize value is clearly allocated to legacy actions, and it manages to leverage additional co-funding.</p> <p>The delivery of the prize three months after the start of the year ensures that the prize is available for legacy activities at the same time avoiding the risk it is used for the ECoC Event itself.</p>	<p>Qualitative evidence from interviews with Title-holding cities whether the new criteria and timing of award of the prize influenced the way panel recommendations are considered</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on whether the new criteria and timing of award of the prize influenced the way panel recommendations are considered</p> <p>--</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations on the use of the Melina Mercouri Prize</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from interviews and focus groups with Title-holding cities on whether the timing of the delivery of the Melina Mercury Prize allows its timely allocation to legacy activities</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative evidence from focus group with the members of the panel on whether the Melina Mercouri Prize scheme is the most efficient way to ensure and improve the quality of the preparation of the legacy plans</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from interviews and focus groups whether the current payment modalities of the prize are</p>

<p>To what extent has the Commission been efficient in facilitating and supporting the selection process? To what extent does the Commission set up and update regularly the ECOc website? To what extent are documents prepared by the Commission to inform the bidding cities about the selection process and explain and illustrate the objectives and criteria helpful? To what extent are documents produced by the Commission to guide the title-holding in the preparation of the ECOc event helpful? To what extent are the documents and actions prepared by the Commission to guide the Ministries in the management of the competition helpful? To what extent does the Commission foster the exchange of good practices? Which initiatives has it taken to that purpose?</p> <p>How could the Commission go further to support the preparations of the Capitals?</p>	<p>The Commission set up and update the ECOc website regularly, ensuring relevant information are available timely and in a format easily accessible by interested parties.</p> <p>--</p> <p>Ministries have access to all required information in order to successfully and effectively manage the competition. No additional information would be required</p> <p>--</p> <p>Cities have access to all required information in order to understand the process and selection criteria and prepare a bid that is in line with them. No additional information would be required</p> <p>Title-holding cities have access to all required information in order to successfully and effectively prepare the ECOc event No additional information would be required</p> <p>--</p> <p>Title-holding cities have the opportunity to meet and exchange good practices.</p> <p>Good practices are identified and promoted/shared.</p> <p>--</p> <p>Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected as to additional activities that could be implemented to support the preparations of the Capitals</p>	<p>aligned with the cities' needs and the ECOc objective of ensuring the legacy of the Action</p> <p>Qualitative and quantitative evidence from analysis of the ECOc website, including KPIs as:</p> <p>n. of visits</p> <p>n. of single users</p> <p>time spent on the website</p> <p>n. of downloads</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from interviews and focus groups with bidding and Title-holding cities on whether the website, the information and material published were useful</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from interviews and focus groups with bidding and Title-holding cities on whether additional information or material would be needed to be published on the website</p> <p>--</p> <p>Qualitative and quantitative evidence from analysis of documentation provided to Member States</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from interviews with representatives of Member States on the quality and usefulness of material provided by the Commission and how it could be improved</p> <p>--</p> <p>Qualitative and quantitative evidence from analysis of documentation provided to cities</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from interviews and focus groups with bidding and title-holding cities on whether the material provided is adequate in order to understand the process and selection criteria and prepare a bid that is in line with them</p>
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Relevance

Evaluation questions	Judgement criteria and indicators of success	Data collection methods
To what extent did the scope and objectives of the action remain relevant over time?	The objectives and scope of the intervention are still relevant to the needs of the EU, its regions, cities and citizens. Changes introduced in 2014 (e.g. opening of the	Qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research, the public consultation and interviews on the extent the ECoC intervention corresponds to the needs

<p>How well do the objectives still correspond to the needs across the EU, in particular in the context of the Green Deal and the digital transition? How did the objectives correspond to wider EU policy goals and priorities? To what extent do the needs/problems addressed by the intervention continue to require action at EU level?</p> <p>Has there been adaptability to unexpected developments? How relevant is the intervention to cities/ regions/ people?</p>	<p>Action beyond Member States) increased the relevance of the intervention.</p> <p>Changes introduced to face unexpected developments (e.g. COVID-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine, etc.) ensured the Action remained relevant in light of new emerging needs.</p> <p>ECOC foster the role of culture as a catalyst and accelerator of sustainable development in line with the needs identified by the Green Deal and stressed by the digital transition.</p> <p>--</p> <p>The intervention objectives, criteria and processes are relevant to the cities needs and overall objectives.</p> <p>The Cultural programme of the title-holding cities is developed within and coherently with the wider cultural strategy of the cities and support them in meeting their needs in terms of city regeneration, development of quality tourism, image enhancement, social inclusion, environmental sustainability etc.</p> <p>Cultural programmes of title-holding cities cover not only the cities but their broader region indicating that the intervention is relevant beyond the title-holding cities.</p> <p>Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected as different degrees of relevance in covering an area broader than a city and the factors that influence them (e.g. size of the city and region, cultural diversity of the region, characteristics of the region (e.g. cultural development), etc.)</p>	<p>across the EU, in particular in the context of the Green Deal and the digital transition</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from desk research, the public consultation and interviews with EU level stakeholders, title-holding and bidding cities on the new needs that the ECOC intervention should address</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on the new needs that the ECOC intervention should address</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from past ECOC evaluations, desk research, the public consultation and interviews on the extent the changes introduced in 2014 ensured the continued relevance of the Action</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from past ECOC evaluations, desk research, the public consultation and interviews with title cities from 2020 onwards on the extent the changes made to adapt to unexpected developments ensured the continued relevance of the Action</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from the validation workshops on advantages, disadvantages and impacts of adding additional flexibility to the Action structure</p> <p>Qualitative evidence with EU level stakeholders on the complementarities and overlaps with other parallel actions implemented by the EU (in particular by DG NEAR)</p> <p>--</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from desk research, public consultation, and interviews on whether intervention objectives, criteria and processes are relevant to the cities needs and overall objectives</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from title-holding cities' cultural strategies on whether there are needs that are not addressed by the cultural programmes developed under the Action</p>
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<p>Has the chronological list of Member States entitled to host the event affected (positively or negatively) the implementation of the ECOC objectives? Has it been adapted to the potential of any Member States in terms of number of cities with the capacity of hosting such an event?</p>	<p>The chronological criterion of Member States ensured a fair and constant turn taking of the countries hosting the event and contributing to meet the objective of safeguarding and promoting the diversity of cultures in Europe. It also ensured that all countries would have equal opportunities to host the event in line with the need to foster the contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities.</p> <p>Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected as to whether the criterion might lead to issues in relation to the potential of any Member States in terms of number of cities with the capacity of hosting such an event and whether adjustments to the criterion might be needed</p>	<p>Qualitative evidence from desk research, the public consultation, the focus group and interviews on whether the chronological criterion of Member States entitled to host the event is relevant to the ECOC objectives</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from desk research, the public consultation, the focus group and interviews on whether the chronological succession of Member States impacted the ability of the Action to adapt to changing circumstances and achieve its full potential in terms of results and impacts</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from desk research, the public consultation, the focus group and interviews on advantages and disadvantages of the chronological criterion</p>	<p>Qualitative evidence from desk research, the public consultation, the focus group and interviews on whether the chronological criterion of Member States entitled to host the event is relevant to the ECOC objectives</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from desk research, the public consultation, the focus group and interviews on whether the chronological succession of Member States impacted the ability of the Action to adapt to changing circumstances and achieve its full potential in terms of results and impacts</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from desk research, the public consultation, the focus group and interviews on advantages and disadvantages of the chronological criterion</p>

		Qualitative evidence from the validation workshops on advantages, disadvantages and impacts of keeping of changing the chronological criterion Quantitative evidence from statistics on whether the chronological criterion might lead to issues in terms of number of cities with the capacity of hosting such an event and whether adjustments to the criterion might be needed
Are the selection criteria laid down in the 2014 Decision relevant to the objectives of the ECOC action? To what extent are the criteria requested in the 2014 Decision for appointing panel members relevant to carry out the selection and monitoring procedures?	The criteria determined by Art. 6 of the 2014 Decision for the selection of the panel members are relevant to the role, tasks and responsibilities linked to the assessment, evaluation and selection of the bids and monitoring of the event implementation.	Qualitative evidence from desk research, public consultation, and interviews on whether the criteria determined by Art. 6 of the 2014 Decision for the selection of the panel members are relevant to the role, tasks and responsibilities linked to the assessment, evaluation and selection of the bids and monitoring of the event implementation or whether changes to the criteria would be required Qualitative evidence from focus group with panel experts on their role, key challenges faced and needs in terms of skills and competences Qualitative evidence from the validation workshops on advantages, disadvantages and impacts of changing the panel selection criteria
To what extent is the ECOC brand visible? Do ECOC use the title in a relevant way (during the selection process and after their designation until the end of the actual title-year)? Which actions do the designated cities implement to make clear that the event is an EU initiative? Do people understand that it is an EU initiative?	The ECOC brand in visible during the ECOC event and, where relevant, in the years before and after the event. Cities (bidding and title year) use the title to promote their participation in the EU action highlighting the European dimension of the initiative. People recognise the ECOC brand and understand it is an initiative organised and funded by the EU. The ECOC brand is also recognised as quality mark for the title-holding city and the level of the cultural activities implemented. Evaluative judgment on the basis of evidence collected on good practices put in place by cities to make clear the event in an EU initiative.	<input type="checkbox"/> Qualitative evidence from past evaluations, interviews and focus group on whether title-holding cities use the title in a relevant way (during the selection process and after their designation until the end of the actual title year) <input type="checkbox"/> Qualitative evidence from past evaluations, interviews and focus group on good practices implemented by title-holding cities to make clear the event is an EU initiative <input type="checkbox"/> Qualitative evidence from past evaluations, interviews and public consultation on whether people are aware of the EU nature of the initiative <input type="checkbox"/> Qualitative evidence from interviews, focus group and public consultation on whether new measures should

<p>To what extent does the relevance of the action vary across Member States? With a number of increasingly smaller cities bidding for the ECOc title, how does this fit into the brand? What are potential consequences of making size a criteria for selection? How could such a criteria be implemented without bias to smaller Member States? Is there a risk of a shortage of candidates in some Member States?</p>		<p>be implemented to ensure more visibility of the ECOc brand and awareness of the EU nature of the initiative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ Qualitative evidence from the public consultation on whether the ECOc brand is recognised as a seal of quality for the title-holding city cultural programme and activities ☐ Qualitative evidence from the validation workshops on advantages, disadvantages and impacts of implementing new measures to ensure more visibility of the ECOc brand and awareness of the EU nature of the initiative
<p>Although to different degrees, the intervention is relevant to all Member States. Degree of relevance changes depending on specific factors.</p> <p>--</p> <p>ECOc objectives and selection criteria, in particular criterion 5 of Art. 5 of the 2014 Decision, are conducive and in line with the EPSR and the need to ensure inclusiveness and the Action and promote gender equality. Cities cultural programmes have specific strategies in place to promote gender equality and ensure inclusiveness.</p> <p>--</p> <p>The city size does not affect the extent the ECOc action is relevant to cities, being perceived as a relevant opportunity by cities of different dimensions.</p> <p>The size of the cities did not impact the final results and impact of the Action (being this influenced by other factors, e.g. the existence of a strong cultural strategy).</p> <p>ECOc implemented in smaller cities saw a stronger involvement of the surrounding areas/regions widening the reach of the Action and its results.</p> <p>Evaluative judgment and simulation on the basis of statistical data collected on the changes to the potential pool of candidate cities should a size criterion for selection be introduced.</p>		<p>Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECOc evaluations, desk research, the public consultation and interviews on the extent the ECOc intervention is relevant to different Member States and what factors influence the degree of relevance of the intervention</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from interviews with representatives of Member States and interviews and focus groups title-holding cities on whether there are needs that the ECOc is not addressing and whether the Action would have the potential to address them</p> <p>--</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from past ECOc evaluations on the degree the objective of ensuring inclusiveness and equal access to the Action and culture were met</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from past ECOc evaluations, desk research, the public consultation and interviews on the extent the objectives and criteria of the Action promote gender equality as well as inclusion of all, in particular people with disabilities, people belonging to minorities and people being socially marginalised</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from the public consultation, interviews and focus group with panel experts on whether there is a need to establish stricter criteria within the Action in order to strengthen the promotion of gender equality and inclusion</p>

	<p>Qualitative evidence from the validation workshops on advantages, disadvantages and impacts of adding new stricter criteria linked to gender equality and inclusion</p> <p>--</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past evaluations, desk research, the public consultation, the focus group and interviews on the scale of the trend (of larger cities seemingly passing over the opportunity to bid for the title) and potential reasons and solutions</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past evaluations, desk research, the public consultation, the focus group and interviews on whether the size of the title-holding city impacted the achievement of the Action results and impacts</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past evaluations, desk research, the public consultation, the focus group and interviews on whether the size of the title-holding city affected the level of engagement and involvement of surrounding areas/regions</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from desk research, the public consultation, the focus group and interviews on whether the increasingly smaller cities bidding for the ECoC title has the potential to affect the ability of the Action to achieve its full potential in terms of results and impacts</p> <p>Qualitative evidence for the pre-selection and selection reports on whether the size of the bidding cities affect the overall quality of the bid</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative evidence from desk research, the public consultation, the focus group and interviews on whether the relevance of and interest in the Action are affected by the city size</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative evidence from desk research, the public consultation, the focus group and interviews on whether bidding and title cities have been using more creative approaches to their candidacy (e.g. group bid) and changes in this sense to the legal basis could be required</p>
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	Quantitative and qualitative evidence from desk research, the public consultation, the focus group and interviews on advantages and disadvantages of introducing a size criterion for the selection of the cities Qualitative evidence from the validation workshops on advantages, disadvantages and impacts of keeping of introducing a size criterion for the selection of the cities Quantitative evidence from statistics on whether a new size criterion might lead to issues in terms of number of cities with the capacity to host such an event
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Coherence

Evaluation questions	Judgement criteria and indicators of success	Data collection methods
To what extent are the objectives of the title-holding cities supporting the objectives of the action (as specified in the 2014 Decision)? To what extent is the action supporting the cities' own objectives? Which balance do cities strike between the EU objectives and their local socio-economic objectives? Does this balance change after designation?	The six criteria listed in Art. 5 of the 2014 Decision are relevant to the general and specific objectives of the intervention specified in Art. 1 of the Decision.	Qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research, the public consultation, the focus group and interviews on whether the six selection criteria are relevant to the objectives of the intervention Qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research, the public consultation, the focus group with panel experts and interviews with title-holding cities on the extent the selection criteria laid down in the 2014 Decision ensure that action remains relevant to the identified needs Qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, cultural programmes and cultural strategies on the extent the culture programme of the title-holding cities is developed within and coherently with the wider cultural strategy of the cities and support them in meeting their needs Qualitative evidence from focus groups of panel experts on the extent the culture programme of the title-holding cities is developed within and coherently with the wider cultural strategy of the cities and support them in meeting their needs

	Qualitative evidence from the public consultation, interviews and focus group with panel experts on whether there is a need to change/add/remove some selection criteria Qualitative evidence from the validation workshops on advantages, disadvantages and impacts of changing/adding/removing some selection criteria
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EU Added value

Evaluation questions	Judgement criteria and indicators of success	Data collection methods
What is the EU added value and visibility of the ECOC action? Does being an ECOC facilitate the access to other EU programmes/funds, in particular other actions of the Creative Europe programme (for example Culture Moves Europe or the cooperation projects under the Culture strand)?	Being ECoC not only facilitate accessing other EU programmes/funds in view of the title year, creating synergies with the Action, but it grants the city with know-how, international partnership and a structure to access funding opportunities also after and beyond the ECoC event	Qualitative evidence from interviews and focus groups with title-holding cities on whether hosting the ECoC event facilitated access to other EU funding opportunities due to: developed knowhow in relation to applying to EU funding related to culture developed international partnerships and cross-border cooperation developed competences in attracting private co-funding / being in a stronger position (e.g. due to new infrastructures developed for the ECoC year) Qualitative evidence from focus groups with bidding cities on whether taking part in the application process helped them develop competences and network useful to apply for and secure other EU funding opportunities
What would be possible consequences if the action were not organised or funded at EU level?	The ECoC outputs, results and impacts in terms of cultural diversity, access to and participation in culture, Cultural capacity, and International profile of the title cities would have been at much lower scale (or not existing at all) if the Action was not implemented at EU level. The ECoC intervention addresses needs and problems that require EU level action and should the intervention not be organised or funded at EU level alternatives measures put in	Quantitative and qualitative evidence from past ECoC evaluations, desk research, focus groups, public consultation and interviews on: the overall EU added value of the initiative advantages, disadvantages and impacts of not organising or funding the Action at EU level

	<p>place by Member States individually would have different scope and more limited European dimension, strongly impacting the achievement of the first general objective of the initiative (i.e. 'Safeguard and promote the diversity of cultures in Europe and to highlight the common features they share as well as to increase citizens' sense of belonging to a common cultural area')</p>	<p>Quantitative and qualitative evidence from evaluations of other similar initiatives (e.g. the Italian capital of culture initiative)</p> <p>Qualitative evidence from the validation workshops on advantages, disadvantages and impacts of not organising or funding the Action at EU level</p>
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	EU Administration		ECoC Candidates		ECoC Hosts/National, regional, local public bodies		Citizens/Consumers/Businesses/ Private sector	
	Quantitative	Comment	Quantitative	Comment	Quantitative	Comment	Quantitative	Comment
ECoC Bidding Process (Recurrent)				<p>Administrative costs linked to the bidding process and meeting the eligibility requirements.</p> <p>Figures do not exist on the cost of submitting a bid, although cities taking part in a focus group established for the evaluation estimated that it took between 6 and 8 months to prepare a bid.</p> <p>[Source: Supporting study]</p>		<p>Administrative costs linked to the bidding process and meeting the eligibility requirements.</p> <p>Figures do not exist on the cost of submitting a bid, although cities taking part in a focus group established for the evaluation estimated that it took between 6 and 8 months to prepare a bid.</p> <p>[Source: Supporting study]</p>		

<p>ECoC year (Recurrent)</p>	<p>Melina Mercouri Prize: EUR 1.5 million per host city.</p> <p>Representing between 2% and 7% of the overall ECoC budget.</p> <p>[Source: Supporting study]</p>				<p>Looking at the local evaluations undertaken by the ECoC held between 2013 and 2022, a typical ECoC has a budget of around EUR 50 million in the preparation and implementation of its cultural year.</p> <p>Between 2013 and 2022, Approximately 30% of the typical ECoC budget comes from national funding, 24% from local funding, and 17% from regional funding.</p> <p>[Source: Supporting study]</p>		<p>Data from local evaluations shows Private funding accounts for about 11% of the total budget across the 2013-2022 timeframe.</p> <p>[Source: Supporting study]</p>	<p>In total, data from local evaluations shows that 24,261 volunteers were involved in the ECoC delivered between 2013 and 2022, meaning on average an ECoC had around 1,300 volunteers each.</p> <p>[Source: Supporting study]</p>
<p>ECoC Action implementation and coordination (Recurrent)</p>	<p>EUR 450 000 per year for project selection and implementation.</p>							

Table 2. Overview of BENEFITS identified in the evaluation								
	EU Administration		ECoC Candidates		ECoC Hosts/National, regional, local public bodies		Citizens/Consumers/Businesses/ Private sector	
	Quantitative	Comment	Quantitative	Comment	Quantitative	Comment	Quantitative	Comment
ECoC Bidding Process (Recurrent)				Gains in terms of experience. The bidding process itself was mentioned by stakeholders as being a useful moment of reflection for cities with culture ranking up in the public discourse and the political agenda. A moment and opportunity to redesign (and in some cases, to design for the first time) the city-level cultural strategies and policies in the field of culture. Initiatives such as CultureNext show that there is interest in and willingness to		Gains in terms of experience.		

<p>ECoC year (Recurrent)</p>				<p>still build on the work done by non-selected cities. <i>[Source: Supporting study]</i></p>	<p>Significant increase in investments in cultural activities across host cities: between 2013 and 2022 shows that the Action has collectively stimulated around €900 million in funding towards the cultural agenda across the EU. Stakeholders' consultations highlighted that cultural budgets of host city administrations were often around five times larger as a consequence</p>	<p>Strengthened local CCS in host cities. Stronger international collaboration that took place between stakeholders found in the host city and those found in other countries. <i>[Source: Supporting study]</i></p>	<p>Looking at the local evaluations undertaken by the ECoC held between 2013 and 2022, a typical ECoC year consists of around 1,000-1,200 separate cultural activities. Attendance figures of the 2013-2022 ECoC set out in local evaluations show that around 38.5 million people participated in ECoC-supported cultural</p>	<p>Non quantifiable: A widening out of the type of culture on offer in the host city. Non quantifiable: Stimulating cross-border collaboration among EU cultural players with artists based outside of the EU. Non quantifiable: According to stakeholder consultation, ECoC widened the</p>	
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				<p>project included in their cultural programme.</p> <p>Raising the title-holding cities' international profile through culture.</p> <p>Analysis in the supporting study from those ECoCs which collected relevant data (for the 2013-2022 period) shows that an ECoC year can increase visitor numbers in a host city by around 30-40%.</p> <p>Most of the ECoC cities assessed as part of the supporting study often noted that their ECoC year had helped stimulate their</p>		<p>that it increased access to and participation in culture.</p> <p><i>[Source: Supporting study]</i></p>	<p>cultural ecosystem.</p> <p>ECoC greatly helped to strengthen local talent within the local CCS.</p> <p><i>[Source: Supporting study]</i></p>
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<i>[Source: Supporting study]</i>

TABLE 3: Simplification and burden reduction (savings already achieved)								
	EU Public Bodies/Panel members		Candidate cities		Host Cities/National, regional, local public bodies		Citizens/Consumers/Businesses/Private sector	
	Quantitative	Comment	Quantitative	Comment	Quantitative	Comment	Quantitative	Comment
Simplification and burden reduction measure: Online holding of monitoring meetings								
Type: Recurrent		Accessibility, efficiency, sustainability gains.				Accessibility, efficiency, sustainability gains.		
		Reduction of implementing costs.						
PART II: II Potential simplification and burden reduction (savings)								
Identify further potential simplification and savings that could be achieved with a view to make the initiative more effective and efficient without prejudice to its policy objectives ⁴⁹ .								
	Citizens/Consumers/Workers		Businesses		Administrations		[Other...] _ specify	
	Quantitative	Comment	Quantitative	Comment	Quantitative	Comment	Quantitative	Comment
Description:...								
Type: One-off / recurrent (select)								

⁴⁹ This assessment is without prejudice to a possible future Impact Assessment.

The consultation strategy targeted the action’s interested stakeholders through targeted interviews, Online Focus Groups, as well as the wider general public through the Open public consultation. The consultation strategy and the results obtained are detailed below.

Focus Groups:

A series of six focus groups were organised, with four in the first half of July 2024, and two at the end of August 2024, with the following breakdown of participants:

- three focus groups were organised with national and European expert panel members, for a total of 21 participants;
- three focus groups with cities, two with ECoCs, and one with preselected cities, with a total of 19 participants (12 ECoC representatives and 7 from preselected cities).

A summary report was produced after each focus group, which fed into the body of evidence analysed for this final report. Overall, participation was lower from preselected cities due to difficulties in securing relevant participants from this category of stakeholder. To compensate for this, interviews with the CultureNEXT, a network bringing together cities that were not selected to become ECoC, were conducted.

Interviews with key relevant stakeholders:

A total of 64 interviews were conducted with EU and national representatives as well as representatives of local authorities and organisations. The list is detailed below:

	Stakeholder organisations consulted	Number of interviews conducted
EU-level stakeholders		Target: 10 interviews Achieved: 12 interviews
Polymakers	European Commission (JRC; DG NEAR) Council of the European Union European Parliament/ Committee of the Regions European External Action Service	7 interviews
EU-level organisations and networks	University Network of the European Capitals of Culture (UNeECC)	5 interviews

National level stakeholders	European Network of Cultural Centres	
	European Union National Institutes of Culture (EUNIC)	
	Culture Action Europe	
	Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research / CECCUT Project ('Capitales européennes de la Culture et Cohésion Urbaine Transfrontalière')	
		Target: 49 interviews Achieved: 52 interviews
City-level interviews (ECoC 2013-2019)		Total: 27
Marseille (FR)	Provence Tourisme Marseille Tourism, Leisure and Convention Bureau Friche la Belle de Mai	3 interviews
Košice (SK)	Creative Industry Košice (CIKE) Tabacka	2 interviews
Riga (LT)	Riga 2014 Foundation	1 interview
Umeå (SE)	Umeå municipality Umeå Art Gallery (Umeå Konsthall)	2 interviews
Mons (BE)	Foundation Mons 2025 (former Foundation Mons 2015) Mons museums network ('Pôle muséal de la Ville de Mons')	2 interviews
Plzeň (CZ)	Plzeň city administration DEPO 2015 (former Plzeň 2015 Foundation)	2 interviews
San Sebastián (ES)	San Sebastián City Council Donostia Kultura	2 interviews
Wrocław (PL)	Department of City Promotion and Tourism of the City Hall of Wrocław National Forum of Music	2 interviews
Aarhus (DK)	Former Aarhus Foundation	1 interview
Paphos (CY)	Former Paphos 2017 Foundation	2 interviews
Leeuwarden (NL)	Leeuwarden municipality Arcadia	2 interviews
Valetta (MT)	Valetta Cultural Agency Malta Tourism Authority	2 interviews
Matera (IT)	Fondazione Matera 2019	2 interviews

Plovdiv (BG)	La Scaletta Plovdiv 2019 Foundation Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts 'Prof. Asen Diamandiev'	2 interviews
City-level interviews (ECOC 2022-2023)		
Novi Sad (RS)	Association Kulturanova	Total: 6 1 interview
Kaunas (LT)	Kaunas 2022	2 interviews
Elefsina (EL)	Lithuanian Council for Culture Elefsina 2023 Youth ECoC Association CultTerra	3 interviews
National public authorities interviews		
Austria	Ministry of Culture	Total: 19 1 interview
Belgium	Ministère de la Communauté française ; Department Cultuur ; Jeugd and media	1 interview
Croatia	Ministry of Culture	1 interview
Cyprus	Ministry of Culture	1 interview
Estonia	Ministry of Culture and Permanent Representation in Brussels	1 interview
Finland	Ministry of Culture	1 interview
France	Ministry of Culture	1 interview
Greece	Ministry of Culture	1 interview
Hungary	Permanent Representation in Brussels	1 interview
Ireland	Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport, and Media	1 interview
Luxembourg	Ministry of Culture	1 interview
Lithuania	Ministry of Culture	1 interview
Norway	Ministry of Culture and Bodo representatives	1 interview
Poland	Ministry of Culture	1 interview
Portugal	Cultural Strategy, Planning, and Evaluation Office (GEPAC)	1 interview
Romania	Romanian Cultural Institute in Brussels ²	1 interview
Slovakia	Ministry of Culture	1 interview

Slovenia	Ministry of Culture	1 interview
Sweden	Swedish Arts Council	1 interview

Source: Ecorys, 2024.

Open Public Consultation:

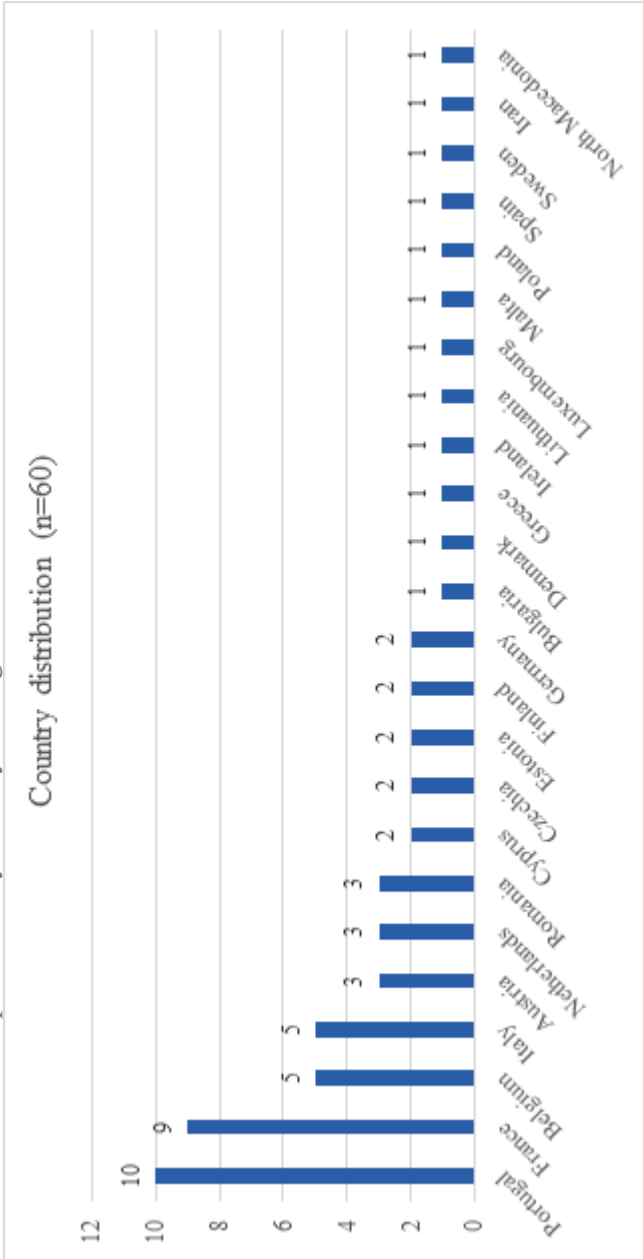
Objectives of the consultation

The aim of the Public Consultation was to gather feedback from a wide range of stakeholders on the performance of the stages of implementation, management and delivery of the European Capitals of Culture Feedback The questionnaire gathered feedback according to the evaluation criteria used to evaluate the agencies particularly focusing on relevance, effectiveness, coherence and EU added value. The Public Consultation was available from 18 June 2024 to 24 September 2024 in all official EU languages. Its purpose was to collect all relevant stakeholder feedback in relation to the effectiveness, coherence, relevance, and EU added value of the ECoC action work through closed and open-ended questions.

Who replied to the consultation?

A total of 60 respondents took part in the Public Consultation. Almost all the respondents (58 out of 60) came from within the EU, encompassing 22 Member States. An additional two respondents came from Iran and North Macedonia. The highest number of responses came from Portugal (10 out of 60), France (9 out of 60) and Belgium and Italy (5 out of 60 each).

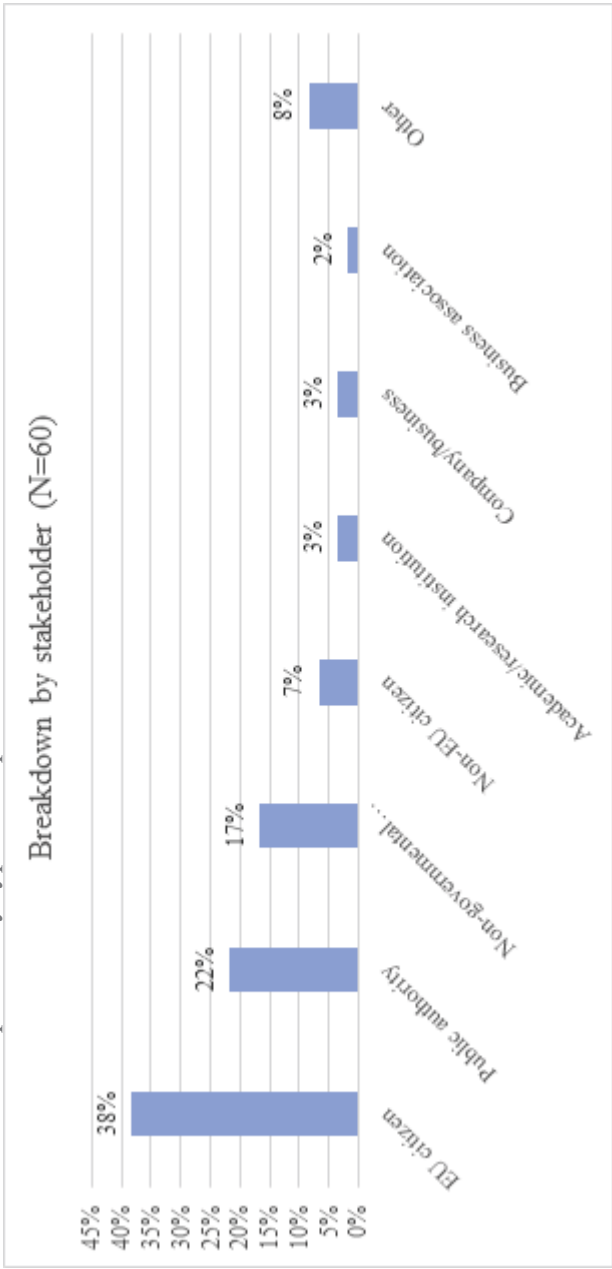
Distribution of respondents by country of origin



Source: Ecorys, 2024.

The Public Consultation received replies from a wide range of stakeholders. In particular, this Public Consultation targeted individuals involved in the implementation, management or delivery of the ECoC action and those interested and/or involved in culture. The highest number of respondents were EU Citizens (23 out of 60), followed by those working in public authorities (13 out of 60), and those working for non-governmental organisations (10 out of 60). The remaining respondents included non-EU Citizens (4 out of 60), individuals working for academic or research institutions (2 out of 60), members of companies/businesses (2 out of 60), representatives of business associations (1 out of 60) and others (5 out of 60).

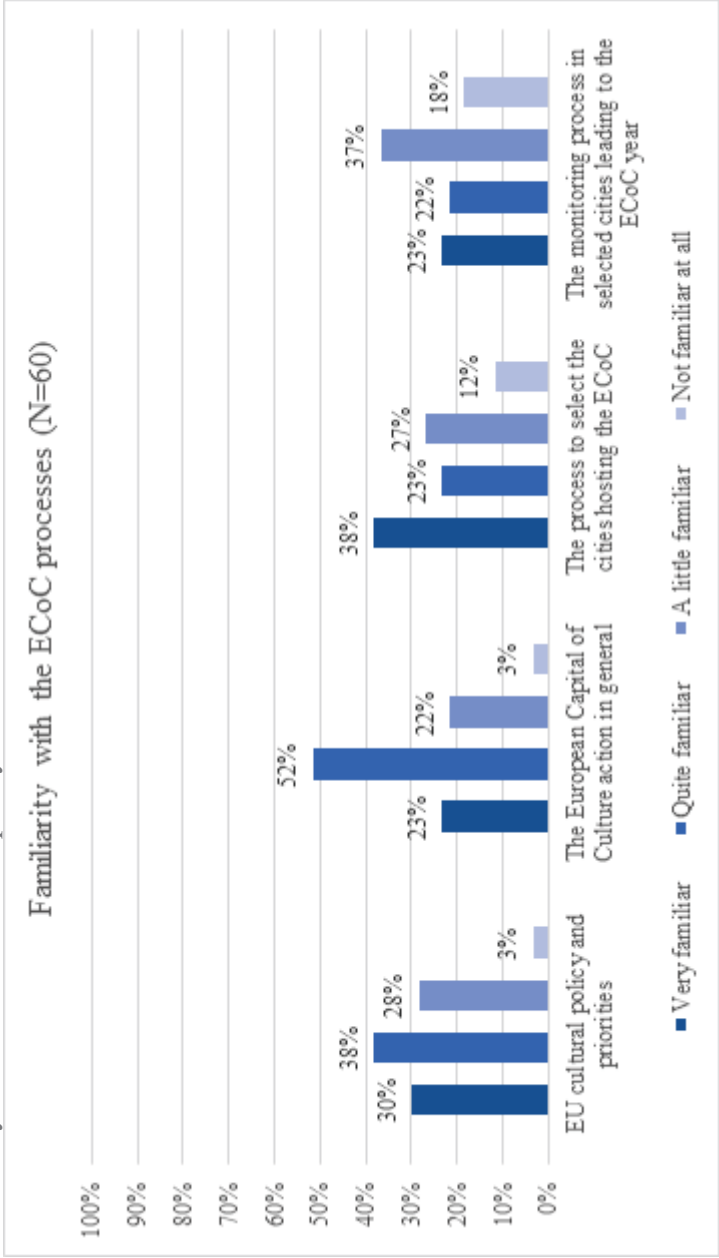
Distribution of responses by type of respondent



Source: Ecorys, 2024.

Respondents were asked to provide an overview of their familiarity with broader EU cultural policy and priorities, the ECoC action in general and its processes of selection and monitoring. They were most aware of the ECoC action in general, with 75% of them being either quite or very familiar with it (45 out of 60), followed by EU cultural policy and priorities (68%; 41 out of 60). Respondents were less familiar with the selection process of the cities hosting the ECoC, with 12% of them not being familiar at all with the process (7 out of 60) and 27% of them having little familiarity with it (16 out of 60). Respondents were least knowledgeable about the monitoring process. Over 18% were unfamiliar with the process (11 out of 60) while 37% were only a little familiar with it (22 out of 60).

Familiarity with the EU cultural policy and the ECoC

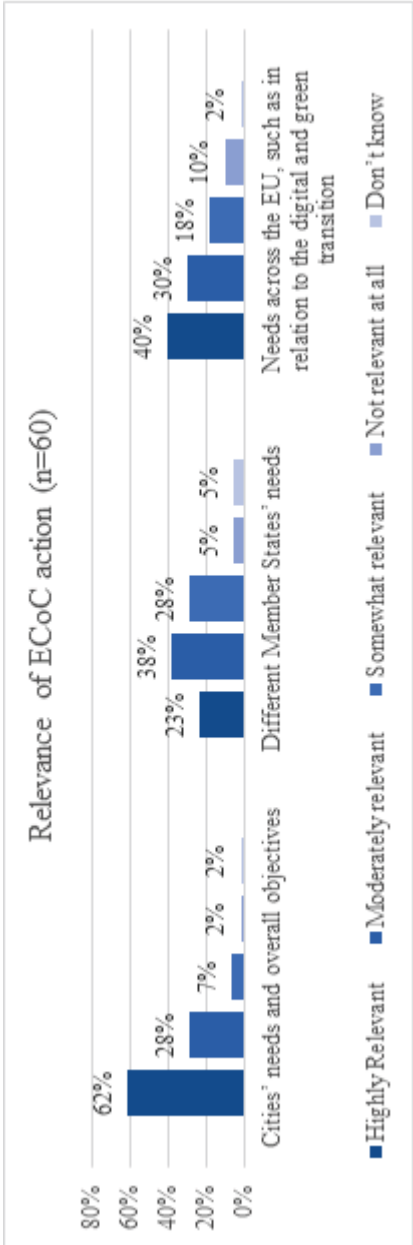


Source: Ecorys, 2024.

Main findings of the consultation
Relevance

Respondents were asked to evaluate the relevance of the ECoC action at a range of scales. Overall, they found the ECoC action to be most relevant to cities needs and overall objectives, with 62% of respondents agreeing that action is highly relevant (37 out of 60) and 28% as moderately relevant (17 out of 60). Only 7% of the respondents (4 out of 60) believed that the Action is only somewhat relevant, and 2% (1 out of 60) deemed it not relevant at all. Relevance at EU level, such as in relation to the digital and green transition was perceived to be the second strongest, with 40% finding the ECoC action to be highly relevant (24 out of 60) and 30% as moderately relevant (18 out of 60) to needs across the EU. 18% of the respondents (11 out of 60) deemed the Action to be only somewhat relevant, and 10% (6 out of 60) believed it was not relevant at all. Respondents felt that the ECoC action was the least relevant to Member States’ needs, with 23% evaluating the ECoC action as highly relevant (14 out of 60) and 38% as moderately relevant (23 out of 60). Meanwhile 28% (17 out of 60) indicated that the Action was only somewhat relevant, and 5% (3 out of 60) deemed it not relevant at all.

. Relevance of the ECoC action



Source: Ecorys, 2024.

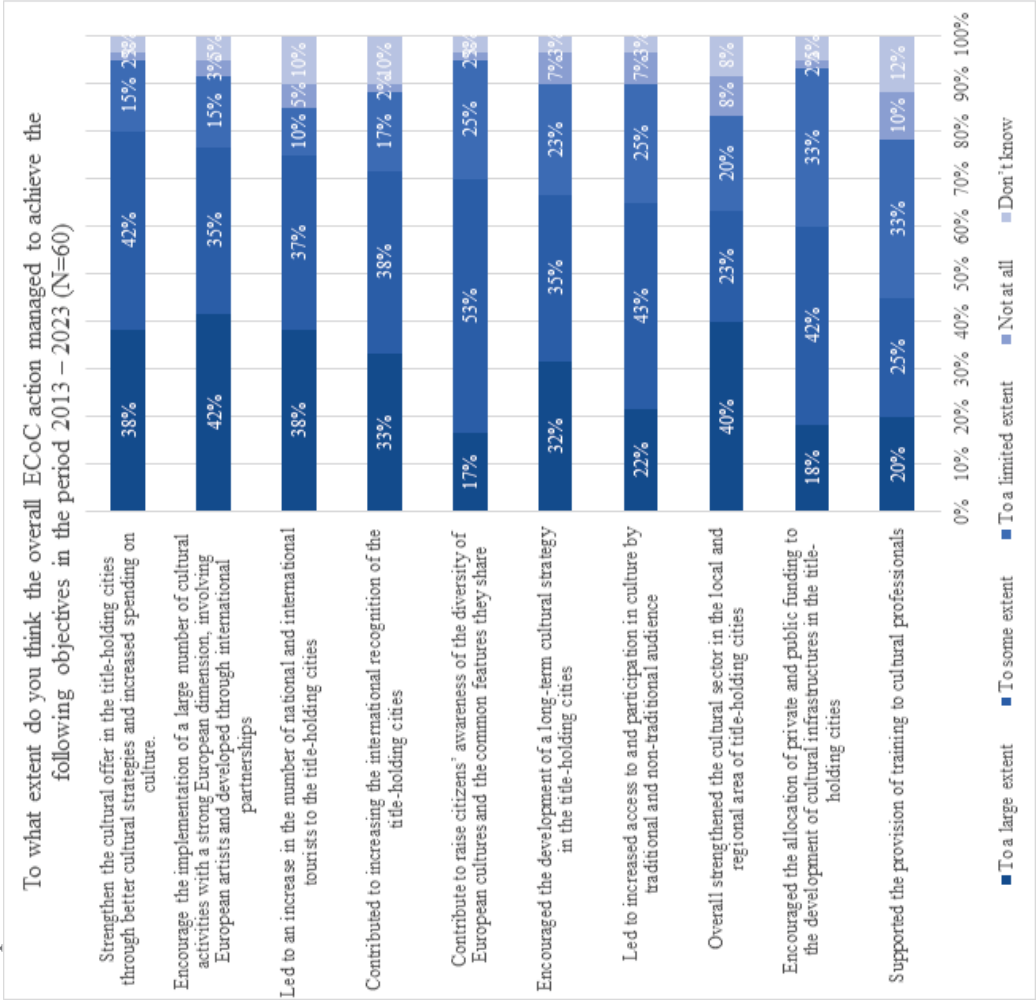
Effectiveness

Respondents were asked to evaluate the extent to which the ECoC action has been able to achieve its objectives from 2013 to 2023. The vast majority felt that the Action had achieved them to at least some extent, with only the support for the provision of training to cultural professionals falling below 50%¹⁴⁸ (45%; 27 out of 60).

Strengthening the cultural offer in title-holding cities was deemed the most successful objective, with 80% of the respondents noting the achievement of the objective to a large or to some extent (43 out of 60). Encouraging the implementation of cultural activities with a strong European dimension was also very successful, with 77% of the respondents believing the objective was achieved to at least some extent (46 out of 60). Respondents also evaluated positively the extent to which the ECoC action was able to increase the number of tourists to the title-holding cities and to raise the recognition of the title-holding cities internationally with 75% (45 out of 60) and 72% (43 out of 60) respectively saying it had done so to a large or some extent. Moreover, 70% felt the Action had contributed to raise citizen's awareness of the diversity of European cultures to some or to a large extent (42 out of 60).

Respondents also noted that certain objectives were only partially achieved, or in some cases, not fully realised. The support to the provision of training to cultural professionals (43%; 26 out of 60), the encouragement of the development of private and public funding to the development of cultural infrastructures (35%; 21 out of 60), and increased access by traditional and non-traditional audience in culture (32%, 19 out of 60) were less successful objectives.

Respondents' assessment of the effectiveness of the ECoC action



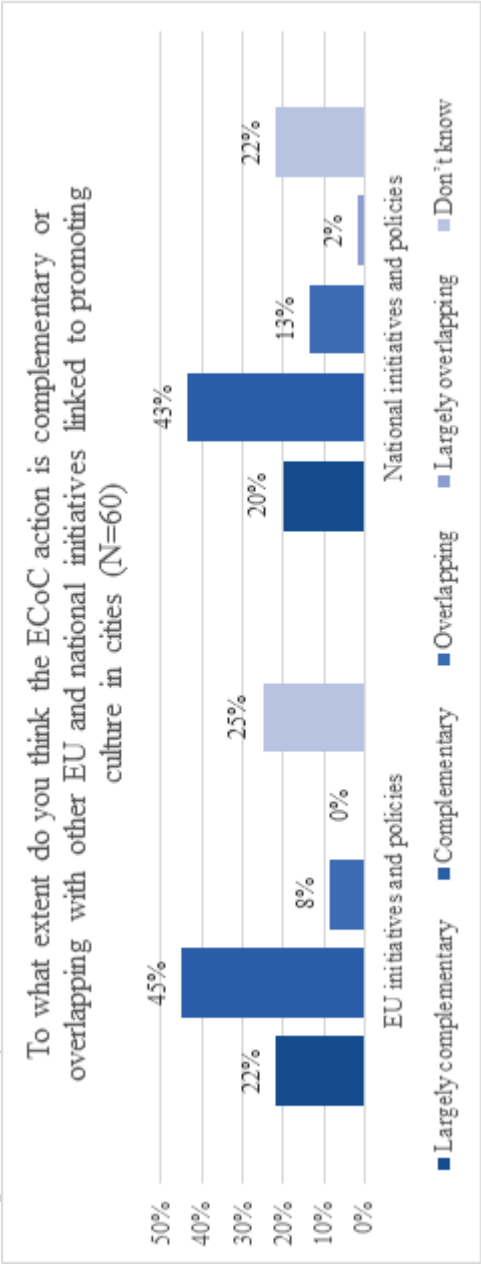
Source: Ecorys, 2024.

Coherence

Respondents generally agreed that the ECoC action is complementary to other EU and national initiatives and policies linked to promoting culture in cities. Figure 6 shows similar findings for complementarity across both EU and national initiatives. Approximately one fifth of respondents deemed the ECoC

action to be largely complementary with both EU and national initiatives and policies (respectively, 22%; 13 out of 60 and 20%; 12 out of 60), and slightly less than half of the respondents rated the ECoC action as complementary to both EU policies (45%; 27 out of 60) and national initiatives (43%; 26 out of 60). Respondents were more likely to find the ECoC action to be overlapping with national initiatives (13%; 8 out of 60) than with EU initiatives (8%; 5 out of 60).

Complementarity of ECoC with other EU or national initiatives



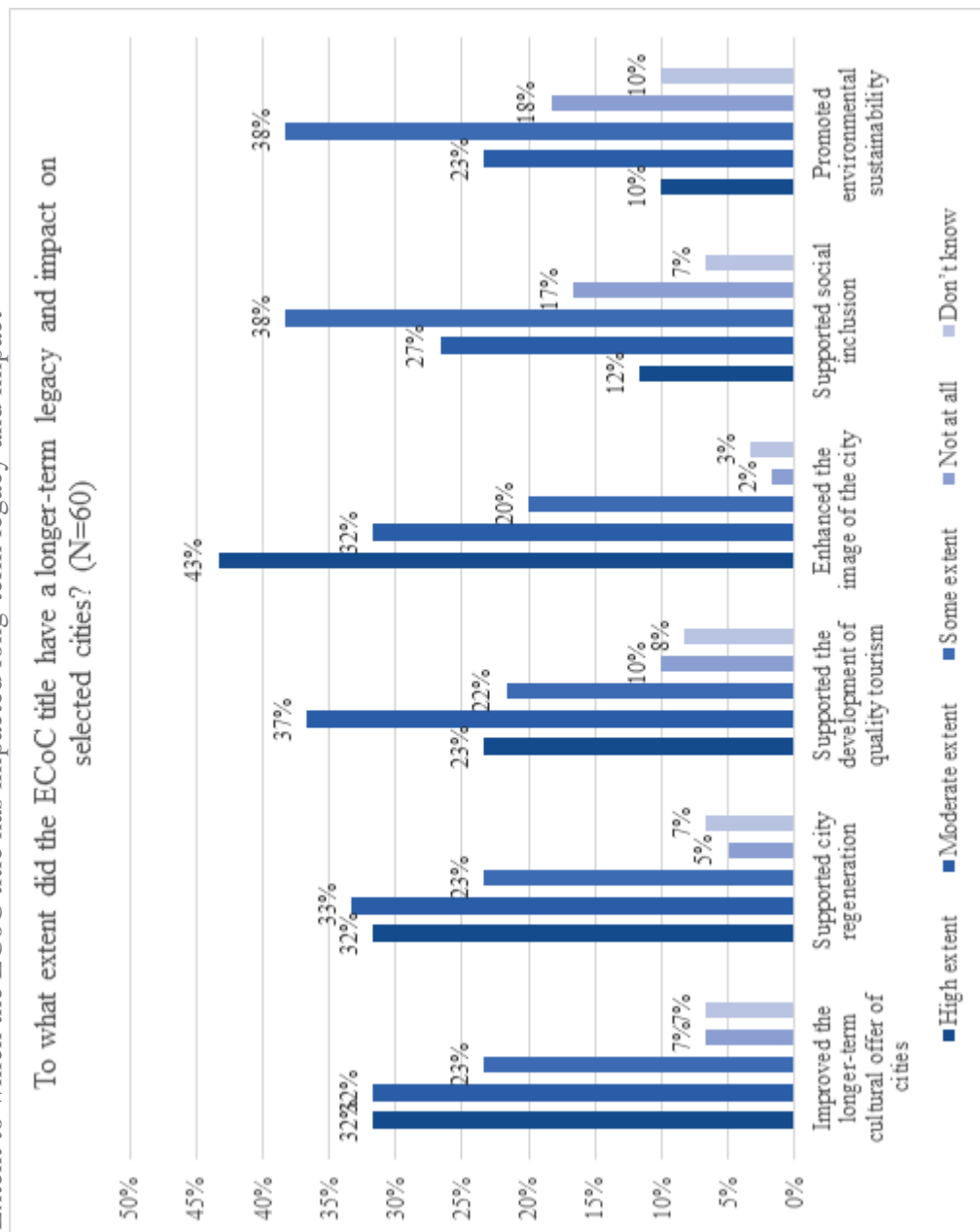
Source: Ecorys, 2024.

EU added value

Figure 13 analyses the impact of the ECoC title on longer-term legacy and other long-term objectives such as sustainability, social inclusion, and city regeneration. Respondents felt that the ECoC title was the most successful in enhancing the image of the city, with 43% (26 out of 60) saying it had done so to a high extent. Nearly a third of the respondents believed that it has also supported the city regeneration and improved the longer-term cultural offer of cities (32%; 19 out of 60 for both) to a high extent.

It is worth noting that in most cases at least half of the respondents rated the impact on the objectives as moderate or small (on average, 58%; 35 out of 60). Respondents were most skeptical about the impact of the ECoC title on environmental sustainability and social inclusion. For both these objectives, 38% of respondents (23 out of 60) felt that the impact was minimal. Meanwhile, 18% of respondents (11 out of 60) said the ECoC action had no impact on environmental sustainability at all, while 17% (10 out of 60) said the same about the impact on social inclusion.

Extent to which the ECoC title has impacted long-term legacy and impact



Source: Ecorys, 2024.

ANNEX VI: EUROPEAN CAPITALS OF CULTURE 2020-2033 INTERVENTION LOGIC

