



# EUROCITIES STATEMENT ON THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN CAPITALS OF CULTURE

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26 EUROCITIES members have been designated European Capitals of Culture since 1986 and many more have or are currently bidding for the title. We strongly support the European Capitals of Culture initiative and are willing to help shaping its future by answering key questions from the European Commission's consultation on the future of the initiative.

## 1. Towards a strong European Capital of Culture initiative

- Over the years European Capital of Culture (ECoC) has become a very successful initiative among cities and the competition to be awarded the title is now fiercer than ever.
- Bidding for or being ECoC is a boost to greater international experience and exchanges.
- ECoC gives political value to culture. The momentum it brings is often used by cities as a way to include culture and the arts in other policy fields.
- Even cities that have unsuccessfully bid consider preparing an application to be a useful and stimulating experience that can be a starting point to develop long term cultural policies.

## 2. Objectives of the future European Capital of Culture initiative

- The future ECoC scheme should contribute to sustainable integrated urban development where culture is connected to other policy areas.
- The objectives proposed in the consultation should be organised under three overarching goals:
  - **Intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity**, covering the following objectives proposed in the consultation: 'Better awareness of European culture(s)', 'Social inclusion through culture', 'More favourable view of Europe and the EU'.
  - **Wider participation in culture for citizens**, covering the proposed objectives: 'Social inclusion through culture', 'Wider participation in/access to culture for citizens', 'More vibrant cultural scene in the city'.
  - **Urban development**, covering the proposed objectives: 'Economic benefits, European exchange and networking', 'Better international profile and image for the city', 'Sustained increase in tourist visits'.

These three objectives are in line with current developments in both the cultural policy of cities and the EU (cf. EUROCITIES response to the consultation on the future of the Culture programme and the new European Council's work plan for culture).

- The overall objective of the ECoC programme "to highlight the richness and diversity of European cultures and the features they share, as well as to promote greater mutual understanding between European citizens" is still valid, but should include clearer references to:
  - the role of local culture and citizen involvement
  - the catalyst role of the initiative in terms of creating sound long-term cultural strategies for the city

### 3. Criteria to become ECoC

In general, future selection criteria should help cities find the right balance between the different objectives of the initiative.

Criteria should also take into account difficult policy choices a city has to make when preparing a bid. Indeed, as mentioned in the consultation document, political objectives and artistic choices can be contradictory, impeding a programme supported by all local stakeholders. Furthermore, the balance between economic objectives and local citizen involvement is sometimes difficult to achieve. This is often linked to high expectations cities attribute to the ECoC title in terms of economic development and urban renewal, which can risk overshadowing the grassroots cultural objectives of the initiative. Similarly, a balance has to be found between flagship projects, which increase visibility and are ideal to highlight the European dimension of the initiative, and grassroots initiatives that enable real ownership by the local population and a long-lasting societal and cultural legacy.

Providing clearer criteria, also regarding their relative importance, is essential. Therefore, introducing a transparent **scoring system** would be useful.

We believe that the two current categories of criteria 'European dimension' and 'City and citizens' are coherent. However, in the future ECoC initiative, both criteria should be better defined and explained, enabling a clearer vision for cities on how to meet the requirements to become ECoC.

We therefore suggest the following **new criteria**:

- Successful cities should be able to demonstrate a strong commitment to develop sustainable policies for culture
- Applicants should present a good balance between the involvement of local population and cultural stakeholders and the long term cultural, social and economic development of the city
- When bidding for the title cities should commit to achieving the three objectives proposed in point 2: Intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity; wider participation in culture for citizens; urban development
- Cities are expected to create a programme that is original, inspirational and innovative, but there are currently no selection criteria linked to this. This could be introduced in the future initiative under a new "**innovation factor**" heading that would include creativity and innovation in the cultural programme, openness to artistic laboratories and to new kind of artistic forms and productions
- Special emphasis should also be put on cultural cooperation between cities

### 4. Selection procedure

- Any future selection system should guarantee transparency and equality.
- In the future initiative cities should have equal opportunities to compete for the

title, ideally without having to wait too long to be eligible.

- During the pre-selection meeting candidate cities only have 30 minutes to present their application. Such a short time makes it difficult to present a concept developed during many years. This also applies to the questions and answers session when the selection panel visits the candidate city.

5. The current duration of the event (one year) is suitable.

6. In terms of the territory covered we believe that the title, currently awarded exclusively to cities, could be extended to metropolitan areas, with cities remaining the responsible body.

It would be a way to facilitate and strengthen cities' scope for cooperative cultural planning and joint strategies that link visibly with their wider hinterlands.

7. From 2011 the ECoC title will be awarded to cities from Member States of the EU only.

We think the ECoC title after 2019 should be open to third countries in Europe. This is European Capital of Culture and not European Union Capital of Culture.

8. New measures to be implemented by the European Commission to support cities applying for or holding the ECoC title could include:

- Further support the exchange of experience between cities. Although support for candidate cities has improved considerably in the last years (i.e. through infodays), cities' still experience a lack of extensive, accessible and centralized information.
- Collecting information on how past ECoC have met challenges and making this information easily accessible would help cities create genuine inclusive and qualitative programmes that will leave behind a legacy. A single and user friendly dedicated website should include practical information on procedure and material on current and future ECoC, applications and reports from previous ECoC, as well as contact persons in cities. That would be in line with the 2006 decision<sup>7</sup> stating that a website should be set up, constantly maintained and regularly updated by the Commission on the subject of European Capitals of Culture.
- During the year after cities have been pre selected it would be useful to have a mechanism for selected cities to communicate with the selection panel, for example having scheduled meetings in order to discuss the panel's recommendations.
- The mandate of the monitoring and advisory panel could be extended both in terms:
  - of tasks: the panel could analyse the delivery of the programme as well as its budget as presented in the bid
  - of timing: the panel could run since the moment the city is awarded and continue during the build up years, during and after the ECoC year
- The current financial contribution from the European Commission currently

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<sup>7</sup> Decision establishing the ECoC initiative for the years 2007 to 2019

represents a tiny percentage of the average total budget of an ECoC. This contribution should be increased and should go beyond the Culture programme. Additional funding stream from other European sources should also be available.

- Support from the European Commission would be useful to evaluate the cultural, economical, social and environmental impacts of ECoC and to further research on the legacy of the event.

### Conclusion

In order to help build the future ECoC initiative we can offer cooperation and partnership and provide:

- A direct line of contact to politicians and technical experts within an established network of cities
- A EUROCITIES network of cities that can identify good practices implemented in cities
- EUROCITIES Culture Forum meetings as a platform for discussion and exchanges between representatives of the European Commission and elected politicians and high level officers in charge of culture in Europe's major cities