



EUROPEAN CAPITAL
OF CULTURE

Plovdiv
European Capital of Culture 2019

First Monitoring Meeting

Report by the Monitoring and Advisory Panel

Brussels
October 2016

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Introduction

This report follows the meeting¹ in Brussels on 12 October 2016, between Plovdiv, one of the two European Capitals of Culture (ECOC) in 2019, and the monitoring and advisory panel (the "panel"). Plovdiv was selected in May 2015;² its bid-book is available on the Plovdiv 2019 website.³ There was an informal meeting between Plovdiv and the panel on 16 September 2015. This was the first formal monitoring meeting.

The report is addressed to the Foundation Plovdiv 2019 (the "Foundation") and will be published on the European Commission's website.⁴

Attendance

The panel members:

- Sylvia Amann and Cristina Farinha, appointed by the European Parliament 2015-2017
- Jiří Suchánek and Tamás Szalay, appointed by the Council of the European Union 2016-2018
- Ulrich Fuchs (Chair) and Dr Suzana Žilić Fišer, appointed by the European Commission 2014-2016
- Dr Elisabeth Vitouch, nominated by the Committee of the Regions 2016-2018

For Plovdiv 2019:

- Ivan Totev, Mayor of Plovdiv and Chairman of the Board
- Stefan Stoyanov, Deputy Mayor on European Policies, Education and Business Development and Deputy Chairman of the Board
- Valeri Kyorlinski, Executive Director
- Svetlana Kuyumdzhieva, Artistic Director
- Gina Kafedzhian-Boycheva, Project Manager for the Artistic Team

Also in attendance were observers from the European Commission (Directorate-General Education and Culture) and from the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture.

Report from Plovdiv 2019 and presentation

The Foundation Plovdiv 2019 submitted a detailed and comprehensive written report in advance of the meeting. The report outlined the progress made since the first informal meeting and outlined current strategic priorities, questions relating to governance and management and the up-to-date situation of the Foundation's flagship programmes. The report also provided an overview of the programme schedule for the period 2016-2018 and a summary of resources.

1 In accordance with Article 10 of Decision 1622/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council.<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1476455600669&uri=CELEX:32006D1622>.

2 https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/files/ecoc-2019-report-bulgaria_en.pdf

3 <http://plovdiv2019.eu/en/about-us>

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

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

- As the first Bulgarian city ever to have been awarded the title of ECOC, the title has helped to draw attention to the city at a national level, not only in terms of culture and tourism, but also for economic development.
- There have been several changes to the governance structure including the appointment of the Mayor of Plovdiv, Ivan Totev, as Chairman of the Board and the current Deputy Mayor on European Policies, Education and Business Development, Stefan Stoyanov, as Deputy Chairman of the Board.
- While the Municipality has regularly paid its contribution to the budget, the Foundation is still awaiting payment of 10 MM € from the State. There has been direct communication with the Ministries of Culture and Finance to try to speed up the transfer of funds.
- With regard to infrastructure, there has been some support from the State which invested more than 2 MM € in the rehabilitation of the city's theatre.
- With regional growth higher than forecasted, the Foundation is looking to create strong partnerships with the private sector and envisages an engagement of 9.2% of its overall budget from private sponsors.
- Crowd funding opportunities will be developed for community-led projects.
- On the programme side, the three main strategic priorities for 2016 were (i) the launch of open calls, (ii) the start of the flagship projects and, (iii) developing the capacity-building programme.
- Two calls for projects have been opened: one for the bid-book projects and another for new projects, which will have to stick to the overall ECOC concept. The calls will remain open until the end of 2016, after which the process of reassessment will be finalised. These calls have provided an opportunity to engage with partners and increase the European dimension of the ECOC project.
- Seven flagship programmes have been identified as planned in the bid-book - Mahala, Kosmos Cinema, Kapana Creative District, Adata Island and River Maritza, Tobacco City, Cyrillization and FORUM 2019 (previously known as CABADEPLO) – and work has begun on them. Positive results have already been gleaned, for example with the Kapana Creative District which has become one of the most visible symbols of change in the city, becoming one of its liveliest areas.
- Several of the flagship projects have faced serious hurdles, however, most notably with the demolition and then fire at several warehouses at Tobacco City. Nevertheless, the local community and warehouse owners have responded positively to the crisis and work is being done to find innovative solutions to adapt the original scheme following the example of the Kapana Creative District, notably with the already launched online platform.
- Capacity building and audience building, through the programme FORUM 2019, have begun and a number of forums on specific topics (such as audience development or accessing Creative Europe) have been organised for the cultural sectors in Bulgaria.
- Work has been done to strengthen the European dimension of the project, including through close collaboration with the Creative Europe desk in Bulgaria, participation in joint projects with other ECOCs including Matera and Donostia San Sebastián, participation in the School of Spectacle – a Creative Europe funded cooperation project - alongside Pafos 2017 and other partners and an exchange with city representatives of Dortmund on Roma integration.

Discussion

During the subsequent discussion, the panel sought clarification on a number of issues and offered experience and advice. The following topics were addressed:

- On the question of governance, the panel sought clarification regarding the distribution of power and responsibilities between the Board and the executive level. The Foundation explained that the executive's involvement is operational in nature, whereas the Board is responsible for monitoring, advice and budget. The Board's task is also to ensure a good connection between the Foundation and the city administration's services.
- The panel also inquired about the decision to appoint the Mayor as Chairman of the Board. The decision was motivated by the need for greater support from local government as the project grows and to better synchronise programme and capital investment processes.
- Regarding the new appointment for Deputy Mayor for Culture, Amelia Gesheva, after the local elections in 2015, the Mayor stressed that no individual Council member is responsible for ECOC, instead that each is focused on different priorities of the project. He feels that the team he has appointed reflects individual strengths.
- With regard to finance and budgeting, the panel was interested in staffing numbers for 2019 and questioned whether the percentage of the total budget dedicated to wages (8%) is too low.
- In terms of infrastructure, the panel asked which steps would be taken over the next two years. The Foundation reiterated that Plovdiv 2019's main focus is not on new infrastructure projects, and instead that existing structures will be renovated such as Kosmos Cinema, for which a three-year development plan has been drawn up. A new multi-functional venue is also in the pipeline.
- The potential new project for the creation of a new opera house was also discussed with the team. Its funding as well as its future sustainability remain to be defined and are under discussion. Concentrating on the core business of the ECOC would be preferable.
- The panel inquired about the evaluation and monitoring process. The Plovdiv 2019 team explained that the experts who were originally contacted were sociologists from the University of Plovdiv, and although they provided some useful evaluation, there was a lack of focus on the business dimension of the project. The Foundation has not yet made a choice on the next evaluation committee, but the panel suggested a more targeted approach for evaluation to be more cost and time efficient.
- On the programme side, the panel asked for an update of the situation of several of the flagship projects in the bid-book, including Mahala and Adata Island. The Foundation explained the impossibility of investing in a permanent infrastructure there and said that new possibilities are currently being discussed, including the creation of artistic residencies about Adata Island and the idea of turning the island into a digital reality. Regarding Mahala, the team explained that the strategy is to move tactically as the goal is to contribute to the sustainable development of this community, not to make it a public project. Researchers are now integrated into the neighbourhood and will prepare a guidebook to facilitate intervention with such communities. An international seminar also took place in

this area as well as a project conducted by Donostia San Sebastian's embassy touring project.

- The team's marketing strategy was also discussed. The panel questioned the feasibility of producing a marketing strategy in time for February 2017 as suggested in the timeline and inquired about the key message which will be sold to marketing directors. Despite the steady media interest, the Delegation expressed their concern for the fact that the ECOC concept is not clearly understood.
- Furthermore, the team explained that they are preparing an international promotion campaign in articulation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and culture institutions and embassies.
- Regarding the European dimension, the panel was keen to know how Plovdiv was collaborating with Matera. The Foundation explained that it has had fruitful exchanges with Matera and that joint projects, including the Bread Route and space-related exhibitions, are being worked on. Both cities also plan to start a joint crowd-funding project for community-led initiatives and the cities will join forces at tourist fairs in 2018.
- The panel asked the model for production and the extent of involvement by partners. The Foundation envisaged that 70% of the projects would be conducted by partner organisations and 30% produced in-house.

The panel opinion

The panel welcomes the explanations on the development of the programme and the strong engagement shown by the Foundation. It congratulates the Foundation on the progress made between the last informal meeting in September 2015 and October 2016.

The panel notes with pleasure the strong political backing to the project shown at a local level.

The panel welcomes the pragmatic approach shown by the Plovdiv 2019 team and its ability to adapt to unforeseen circumstances such as the burning-down of the Tobacco factory.

The panel is concerned, however, that the content of the programme is very intellectual i.e. not easily communicable to different audiences. The organisers of the project need to find clear messages which can be understood by different audiences and develop campaigns which will attract also those audiences who are not engaged in culture at all. The panel urges the team to make this a priority for 2017. A simplification of the message will help to make the project more attractive to marketing teams, media and tourists.

The panel is preoccupied with the slow progress made since 2014 on a number of flagship projects including Adata Island and Kosmos Cinema. It would like to draw attention to the need of producing a clear delivery table for cultural programmes and of advancing certain projects so that the production phase may begin within 6 months. The panel reminds the Plovdiv 2019 team of the necessity of stronger involvement of the local cultural scene in the programme.

The panel would like to see greater attention paid to the marketing strategy and a greater engagement by the communications team.

There is also concern with the lack of developments on the infrastructure front. The panel would like to see a realistic milestone schedule drawn up for the next two years and reminds the Foundation of the delays often associated with infrastructural developments. Questions regarding legacy also need to be considered, in particular relating to the maintenance of new infrastructure projects post-2019.

Recommendations

In view of preparations of the ECOC year, the panel would like to make the following recommendations to Plovdiv 2019:

- The panel recommends that the Plovdiv 2019 team identify its key priorities for 2017 and provide a more detailed strategic document of its milestone activities than that presented on p. 25 of its progress report (by the end of January 2017).
- Regarding the governance structure, the panel recommends that roles and individuals responsibilities be clearly defined.
- The panel suggests drawing up a clearer budget and making realistic forecasts for wages.
- With regard to infrastructure, the panel recommends the elaboration of a milestone schedule for key infrastructure projects for 2017-2019, including plans for Kosmos Cinema and Tobacco City (the panel would like to receive this document by the end of January 2017).
- On the marketing side, the panel advises the simplification of the message of Plovdiv 2019 to attract marketing teams, media and tourists. It suggests doing so in the coming months in order to avoid a dent on the project's credibility.
- The panel suggests that the Plovdiv team update its marketing strategy as soon as the projects have been defined.
- On the programming side, the panel recommends giving a greater focus to its flagship projects and taking concrete actions to bring the projects into being.
- With regard to promoting Plovdiv 2019 at tourist fairs, the panel recommends that the team develop cooperation and obtain funding from the national government, given that such ventures can be extremely costly and that the ECOC is a national project and Plovdiv 2019 will represent Bulgaria.
- The panel suggests continuing collaboration with existing partners which have specific knowledge in certain areas of culture such as opera and theatre in order to strengthen the audience development dimension of the project.
- The panel urges caution with the allocation of grants to organisations to launch their own open calls for smaller cultural operators.
- The panel recommends that the model of production be specified and the number of in-house and external projects calculated. It is now time to start moving from the conception to implementation and production phase.
- With regard to evaluation, the panel suggests that the Plovdiv team should decide on very specific criteria for evaluation and select a new monitoring team on the basis of these needs.
- Finally, the panel recommends that Plovdiv publishes regular progress reports on their website.

The panel would like to make the following recommendation to the government of Bulgaria:

- The panel recommends that the government of Bulgaria provide Plovdiv 2019 with the 10 MM € grant as soon as possible.

Next steps

The panel asks the Foundation to submit a more detailed plan for infrastructure by the end of January 2017, outlining a realistic timetable, hurdles to overcome, potential alternatives to planning and the key players responsible for infrastructure projects.

The panel would also like to see a more detailed strategic document of its milestone activities for 2017 by the end of January 2017. This should include concrete steps to be achieved on the programming side.

The panel thanks the Foundation's delegation for their report and the open discussion and looks forward to following the progress of Plovdiv 2019.