



EUROPEAN CAPITAL
OF CULTURE

Timisoara
European Capital of Culture 2021

First Monitoring Meeting

Report by the panel of independent experts

Brussels
October 2017

Introduction

This report follows the meeting in Brussels on 11th October 2017 between the panel and Timisoara, one of the three European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) in 2021¹. Timisoara was nominated as the European Capital of Culture 2021 on 25th October 2016 on the basis of the panel's Selection Report²; its bid-book is available on Timisoara website³. This monitoring report is addressed to the Timisoara 2021 team - TM2021Association and will be published on the European Commission's website⁴.

Attendance

The panel members:

Sylvia Amann, Cristina Farinha and Agnieszka Wlazel (Rapporteur), appointed by the European Parliament 2015-17

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

Beatriz Garcia, Jiří Suchánek (Chair of monitoring panel) and Suzana Žilič Fišer, appointed by the European Commission 2017-19

Alain Hutchinson, nominated by the EU Committee of the Regions 2016-18

Valentina Iancu and Raluca Velisar appointed by the Romanian Ministry of Culture and National Identity

For Timisoara:

Simona Neumann, Executive Director TM2021

Christopher Torch, Artistic Director TM2021

Simona Fit, Planning and Monitoring Coordinator TM2021

Dan Diaconu, Vice Mayor of Timisoara

Romanita Jumanca, Timis County Counsellor

Also in attendance were Sylvain Pasqua and Gérald Colleaux from the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture) and Mrs Irina

¹ The European Capitals of Culture action is governed by Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and the Council for the titles 2020 to 2033, which provides for three formal monitoring meetings between designated cities and the panel. See:

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2014.132.01.0001.01.ENG

² See selection report at:

https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/files/ecoc-2021-report-romania_en.pdf

³ http://www.timisoara2021.ro/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Bidbook_EN_digital_secure.pdf

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

Ouatu from the Romanian Ministry of Culture and National Identity (European Capital of Culture Unit).

Report from Timisoara 2021

TM2021 submitted a very detailed and comprehensive written report together with a series of annexes in advance of the meeting. The report outlined the activities of the Association since 25th October 2016, date of the official nomination by the Romanian Ministry of Culture.

At the meeting TM 2021 made a presentation which included the following points:

- TM2021 benefits from an unabated, strong and wide political support at local and regional levels. The ECoC was declared a priority by the Timisoara municipal Council.
- The ECoC was also declared a national priority by the Romanian Ministry of Culture in its strategy⁵, which is a positive development. However, due to several Cabinet reshuffles and the national legislation in force, TM2021 is facing delays in the adoption of the Government decision regarding its financial contribution to the ECoC project as well as a challenging legislative framework (with financing on an individual project basis, annual funding and no funding for staff costs).
- The Municipality has started adapting its policies and structures in line with its new cultural development strategy, i.e. a new structure within the city administration has been set up to manage the infrastructure connected with the ECoC project, new funding streams are being implemented for NGO projects (with an increasing budget allotted to them), new spaces for cultural projects have been opened and procedures to get permission for organising events in the public space are being simplified. The development of the cultural infrastructure is progressing according to schedule and everything should be ready by 2019 while the urban and tourism infrastructure is planned to be in place by 2020. The County is also allocating budgets for financing developments in the cultural infrastructure.
- Timisoara is working currently on its tourism strategy; the integrated urban development Strategy for the Timisoara Growth Pole is now updated and the Municipality is part of the Agenda 21 for Culture as a Pilot City.
- The ECoC timeframe is divided into three phases: 2017-2018 is the StartUp phase with capacity building, testing some activities and engagement of the public; 2019-2021 is the Action/Production phase, when co-creation of the cultural programme with international partners will be accelerated; 2022 and beyond is the Legacy phase.
- TM2021 has continued its extensive work with partners: 102 partners' meetings for the cultural programme at local level and 84 meetings with other stakeholders were held; 16 letters of intent for long-term partnership have been signed so far.

⁵ http://www.cultura.ro/sites/default/files/inline-files/_SCPN%202016-2022inavizare.pdf (see pages 12,125, 129 and 131).

- The programme for the existing Stations and Trails planned in the bid book will be developed through local and international invitation-based commissions and partnerships; and a first open call for proposals for the remaining 30 % of the programme will run by the end of 2018.
- Chris Torch has been appointed Artistic Director of TM2021. The priority of the StartUp phase is to build capacities of the local cultural sector through training and mobilities (the capacity building Power Station strand is already put in action) and to mobilize European networking. The cultural programme's clusters have been revised with the view to simplifying the overall structure. New ideas have been added such as 'Xtensions' and 'Generators'. The Engagement Unit is an important part of the programme team.
- Preparations for monitoring and evaluation have been initiated – a task force within Timisoara West University, supported by European expertise (i.e. P. Sacco (to be confirmed) and Robert Manchin), has already established core indicators of success while first monitoring mechanisms are being applied. It is important to note that partners are committed to being involved in data collection, not only for evaluation of their own activities but also for the general evaluation.
- Regarding budget, the financial contribution from the Municipality is confirmed (20M EUR) through funds allocated to programme implementation and a membership fee (already partly paid to TM2021). Timis County committed to contributing 5M EUR in the long term and paying a membership fee (not paid yet to TM2021). For the time being, the Ministry of Culture has not provided information about its overall contribution to the ECoC project. It requires TM2021 to apply on a project by project basis or on a portfolio basis (but the meaning of what is a portfolio of projects is still unclear). TM2021 has consequently prepared applications, for one project in 2017 and six further projects in 2018. This procedure entails extra (and time-consuming) tasks for the delivery team.
- The statutes of TM2021 are being updated to correspond to the current situation and its bodies are being reshaped – with a new Supervisory Board and new independent expert bodies – to ensure local involvement.

Discussion

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

- **Governance and staffing** – The panel sought clarification on staff recruitment: 18 out of the 20 positions planned for 2017 are already filled in, with the recruitment for the two vacant positions expected to happen by end 2017. In the view of the panel, the teams for production and engagement are too small. Regarding more precisely engagement, the panel underlined that community involvement was crucial in the ramp up years and that this work was very consuming in terms of human resources. TM2021 explained that the production unit would not produce directly but coordinate production done by other cultural organisations. The panel got confirmation from the current Artistic Director that he would be available to stay in office up to 2022. It learnt that the engagement

function was also implemented by the units dealing with volunteering and power station.

- **Recommendation 1:** TM2021 should revise its organisational structure and strengthen the production team as it is clear from the programme that the Association will produce some projects. It may also prove useful to have more staff members to support engagement activities as well as the Artistic Director's role in the preparation phase. TM2021 should clarify its organisational chart and – in doing so – better specify teams' functions and interactions, as well as reflect the relationships existing between TM2021 and the various external bodies. The updated organisational structure should also include greater clarity as to who is responsible for extending and sustaining international partnerships (beyond the networks of the artistic director).
- **Budget flow** – The panel is extremely concerned that the Ministry does not see the ECOC project as one multi-layered project but as a collection of smaller individual projects and – as a consequence – requires from TM2021 that they apply for funding (and – it seems – also subsequently produce evaluation reports) on a single project or a 'portfolio' basis. According to the panel, the bid book itself should be considered by the Ministry as a portfolio of projects. Additional problems are caused by the current funding procedure which is not clear enough. The Ministry's financial contribution is not specified and multi-year funding at the moment is not possible. Similar problems exist at local and county levels, however, both Municipality and County promised to fulfil their financial commitments.
 - **Recommendation 2:** ECoC is to be seen by all levels of territorial governance (Municipality, County and State) as one single large-scale and multi-faceted project and not as a collection of smaller individual projects. Hence, as already recommended in the panel's final selection report in 2016 (p. 18), the national Government (but this is also true for the Municipality and County) should not require the ECoC to bid (and report) on a project by project basis as this creates financial insecurity, impedes the smooth implementation of the ECoC project, creates unnecessary additional workload for the delivery team and sets unclear conditions for funds allocation (due to unclear interpretation of the law in force). As TM2021 already publishes all its expenditures according to the national procurement provisions in force – which guarantees full transparency of its financial decisions – the panel recommends that clear procedures are put in place by relevant public authorities to allow a smooth financing and reporting of the whole ECoC (or its phases). Good practices from past ECoC (for example Marseille-Provence 2013) could be a useful source of inspiration in this respect.
 - **Recommendation 3:** Ensuring suitable multiannual financial flows from all public partners is to be seen as top level priority. Financial frameworks should also ensure that all cost categories inherently related to the

implementation of an ECoC are eligible. This applies especially for the payment of staff costs. In this regard, the panel recommends to the public authorities (County and Government) to formally declare the TM2021 as a "cultural priority programme" (in line with the wording stated in the Ministry of Culture's strategy – p. 131 – by adopting executive document(s)/decision(s) in this respect, according to the Romanian legislation in force, following the example set by the Municipality⁶).

- **Recommendation 4:** The panel needs to get reassurance from the State that its support to the Timisoara 2021 is robust, multidimensional and immune from any future change at Government level. It also expects to receive information about the amount of the Ministry's financial contribution to ECoC in Timisoara.
- **Programme** – The panel got confirmation that TM2021 was in touch with the upcoming Romanian Presidency of the EU (in 2019) and that a project was also planned in connection with the Centennial Grand Union Romania (in 2018). TM2021 also mentioned a connection with the European Year of Cultural Heritage in 2018 as well as the intention to cooperate with the Francophonie space. The panel was interested in the (somewhat less visible now) "light" motive of the programme and TM2021 explained that the light theme would be embodied in each of the seven clusters. The panel was also concerned with the downgrading of the theme and projects connected with the memories and archives of Timisoara while this was a very important element in the bid book (i.e. under the "People" territory, station 1: "Reflections"). TM2021 responded that the University was currently collecting such information and that there was therefore no need for TM2021 to replicate this work. However, some small projects in this regard would be implemented. Asked about how the current political situation in Romania would be reflected, TM2021 responded that the ECoC2021 programme was intimately connected with the 1989 Revolution and its impact on today's Romania.
 - **Recommendation 5:** The panel recommends to activate (or re-activate) the collaboration with the University regarding archiving and to find artistic ways to give visibility to memories' collection processes and, subsequently, archived material. Clarity as to who, within the University, is undertaking this task should be ensured. In the panel's view, the history of Timisoara is an important element of Timisoara's identity – distinguishing the ECoC in Timisoara from all other ECoCs and contributing to an increased reflectiveness on the history of European transformations in this part of the continent.
 - **Recommendation 6:** The panel would like to receive a progress list of all projects with indication of international partnerships (not just driven by networking opportunities). This list will function as an indicator for the "European dimension" of the overall programme.

⁶ All the more so because TM2021 appears in the Government's strategy as being considered as such

- **Recommendation 7:** The panel wants to know how multiculturalism and diversity (i.e. the inclusion of the Roma and LGBT communities was an important feature in the bid book) are approached now and would like to receive the list of all relevant projects.
- **Recommendation 8:** The panel acknowledges already well-elaborated ECoC project development processes but draws the attention of TM2021 to the need to ensure a continuous focus on the content of projects which is in line with the principles of the bid book. In the panel's view, in comparison to the bid book, the programme starts looking too "universal". The panel recommends that a good balance should be sought between universal values and Timisoara's unique identity.

Next Steps

The panel is very pleased with TM2021 work and progress (apart from financial issues) since nomination. It appreciates the team spirit that is an important asset and considers the criteria used for project selection as a very good practice. The panel acknowledges also the work devoted to building up strong foundations for the ECoC2021 while also investing in the development of the cultural sector's capacities and local partnerships, thus investing in the project's long-term sustainability. It however wants to draw again the attention of all relevant public authorities to the need for them to do their best to ensure smooth financial flows.

The panel therefore invites TM2021 to submit by the end of April 2018:

- 1/ updated information on the financial situation with a description of the procedures in place;
- 2/ a progress report on the panel's recommendations (from both post-selection and monitoring reports) explaining how TM2021 is acting (or plans to act) on each recommendation. The recommendations' numbers, as included in the reports, should be maintained.

The panel puts itself at the disposal of TM2021 for any questions, through the Commission services.

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

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