

European Capital of Culture

Eleusis 2021

ECOC Expert Panel's Letter in follow-up of an in-situ visit by members of the Panel

July 2018

To Maria Philippi, CEO, Eleusis 2021

Brussels, 27th July 2018

Dear Maria Philippi,

In October 2017, a delegation of Eleusis 2021 presented its first progress report to the European Union's Expert Panel in charge of the European Capitals of Culture selection and monitoring in Brussels. In its monitoring report sent to Eleusis 2021, the Panel stated its assessment and recommendations and invited Eleusis 2021 to submit: 1/ an updated governance, organisational and staffing plan; 2/ an updated cultural programme with related budgetary overview and key milestones; 3/ a document referring to the Panel recommendations by end of March 2018. We acknowledge and thank receiving the requested documents.

On 5th of July 2018 a monitoring visit to Elefsina took place. It was attended by the two Panel members, Cristina Farinha and Pauli Sivonen, as well as by a representative of the European Commission, Gérald Colleaux. We thank you for hosting this delegation and providing further insight in the current status of preparations of Eleusis 2021 – European Capital of Culture.

Building on these backgrounds, the Panel would like to draw the attention of Eleusis 2021 on the following feedback and recommendations.

GOVERNANCE

- **Composition and role of the Board**

We welcome the intended changes in the Board and willingness to soon integrate five new members (out of a total of 11) with diversified profiles, coming from outside of Elefsina, including Athens and

abroad. We regret however that there is still no representative from the region of Western Attica (as there is one from the Ministry of Culture), which would be in line with the region's funding contribution and the planned programme participation from neighbouring cities; as well as the relevant legacy expectations.

While the Panel understands the need for transparency and control on the use of public funding, the CEO and the team should have enough room to deal with day-to-day decisions and projects. We felt that the Board still acts too much as an executive body and might not have yet acknowledged the need to assume a strategic function instead. We are confident that the planned change in the Board will speed up the still needed transition from an executive role to a strategic and advisory one.

Recommendations

- An official representative of the Western Attica region should be sought to be integrated in the Board;
- The Board should now concentrate on interacting with the national Government, networking and developing strategic partnerships, notably in view of fundraising, overall control of the major operations and strategic discussion for the legacy of Eleusis 2021. It should leave the daily management and implementation of the artistic and cultural programme to the executive team.

• **Integration of the CEO in the Board of Directors**

Though we were told by the Board that the CEO keeps a good balance and is able to distinguish the different roles she assumes, the Panel reaffirms that the unusual fact that the CEO of Eleusis 2021 is acting simultaneously as a Board member may put into question the independence of both sides, i.e. the implementation team and the Board.

Recommendations

- The Board decision-making process and working procedures should be formalised to ensure transparency and clarification on the roles, functions, responsibilities and relationships among the diverse entities represented. A clear privacy and ethics policy code for all the Board discussions should be defined and approved.
- The law should be reviewed to remove the double function of the CEO as also a member of the Board and/or in the meanwhile include ad-hoc working procedures to ensure the specificities of having the CEO within the Board.

• **Public procurement obstacles**

We are very pleased for the dedicated involvement of the Ministry of Culture and its recognition of the national relevance of the ECOC 2021 and consequent willingness to facilitate connections and to work

in cooperation with the city in order to find solutions to the legal framework and public procurement obstacles.

Several constraints, however, still remain and require continued work by the Ministry of Culture alongside the rest of the Government to create the necessary framework conditions to allow more efficient and flexible operations for the whole ECOC programme implementation. The complex public procurement procedures consume time and resources, which is very demanding for a small team. We would like to add that this issue has been common to several other recent ECOCs, and we would suggest to further analyse the best practices developed in the cases of ECOCs Pilsen 2015 and Donostia San Sebastian 2016, in making exemptions for the ECOC implementation within the corresponding regulatory frameworks. Of course, each country faces its specific conditions and therefore solutions are often different.

Recommendations

- Consider the ECOC as a multi-layered large-scale project to which all the exemptions usually granted to artistic projects should apply, regardless of the type of activity/project pursued;
- Introduce the necessary changes in the national and municipal regulatory frameworks as well as in the Company statutes to allow flexibility and adapted conditions for Eleusis 2021 to operate, such as: capacity to hire more staff (to the minimum total of 40 members planned); ensure the CEO autonomy to approve projects and transactions, notably up to 20,000 EUR; enable commercialisation, provision of services and sponsorship; allow the involvement of volunteers in the ECOC programme implementation; make smaller scale renovation permissions easier; as well as facilitate the making of project contracts, including to eliminate the required financial guarantee imposed to all promoters.

CULTURAL STRATEGY AND LEGACY

We were overall disappointed by the fact that we did not see any further developments in the implementation of the city's cultural strategy. We witnessed a systematic gap: the lack of a political appointee in charge of culture within the city Council. Such a role is a key to put forward and implement the city's cultural strategy – which is the city's own responsibility – as well as to make the necessary liaison with the ECOC team when both ECOC strategy and city strategy of culture interconnect. These elements are crucial regarding the potential legacy of Eleusis 2021.

Recommendations

- The municipality of Elefsina should consider nominating a Deputy Mayor in charge of Culture to ensure the implementation of the city's cultural strategy and the articulation with the Eleusis 2021 team for ECOC operations as well as for the legacy prospects.

INFRA-STRUCTURES

We are sorry for the lack of concrete plans and visions for the infra-structure at this stage, most notably regarding the two main venues that are supposed to become the ECOC legacy. Despite the relevant diligences of the Ministry of Culture regarding ownership, the feasibility to make use of and ensure the necessary conditions in these venues for the ECOC programme is still doubtful. Clear urban masterplans for the surrounding areas are also missing. A close relationship between the team and the official responsible for urban planning, is crucial to implement this agenda and ensure the legacy as well as work closely with the Eleusis 2021 team.

We appreciated the alternative venues proposed by the team, however these potential locations also need to be secured, otherwise they constitute no plan B and will end up demanding more resources at human and financial levels.

Recommendations

- Final decisions need to be taken until early autumn 2018 at the latest on the feasibility of using the two main infra-structures planned for the ECOC programme implementation. Accordingly, building works need to be started and proceed fast – if not, feasible and secured plan B's need to be put into place;
- Urban masterplans of the planned interventions regarding the surrounding public space need to be completed as soon as possible to orientate the works and future legacy as well as to give stronger basis to the sponsorship plans. Moreover, it is crucial that the City nominates a representative to liaise and coordinate the works alongside the Eleusis 2021 team;
- The Eleusis 2021 headquarters are already at this moment too limited for the current number of staff members. Thus something has to be made in order to increase the working space in the old railway station (or any other alternative location) in view of the expected increase in staff. The prospects to use the former town hall building for the ECOC at a later stage should be decided soon and the necessary works should start;
- The accessibility to Elefsina during the ECOC year should be improved. Mobility plans should be considered at regional level to ensure frequent, regular and direct connections to and from Athens as well as to and from the international airport;
- Legacy discussions regarding the infra-structures should also be continued, including the development of feasibility and business model plans to ensure that teams and programmes may be in place after the ECOC.

PROGRAMME

The programme combines in a relevant way the city history, its traditions, myths, and diverse communities with contemporary visions of very topical local and European challenges. The team is embodying the vision of the bid-book and implementing it in the right direction. The programme structure with its three strands is now much easier to understand and to communicate. It is, of course,

relevant that even more international connections will be sought in order to keep on ensuring the European dimension of the overall project. We are pleased that every individual project has European partners.

The plans for the projects Culture 2030; the celebrations of Greek revolution “Local European histories”; as well as an exhibition of an international acclaimed artist were convincing and seem to be going in the right way.

We welcome the start of the multi-annual programmes, despite the blockage in making contracts provoked by the demand of 5% of the project net value guarantee to the promoters. We are happy that despite these blockages, 80% of the programme is already sketched and that the team has got plans to have the programme closed in September 2019, which is sound.

Yet the participation of the neighbouring cities from the region in the artistic programme as well as in the cultural and creative industries strategy was unfortunately not clarified.

Recommendations

- Clarify and integrate the neighbouring cities of the Western Attica region in the programme notably in the cultural and creative industries strategy efforts;
- Ease and settle the legal procedures so that contracts can be made and the team moves on from planning to production.
- Ensure that the independence of the artistic team and the ECOC programme is secured.

AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

The dedicated team has started operating in March this year. The suggested strategic mapping as well as conversations with target audiences are being developed, including the necessary articulations with the artistic programme. Some initiatives have been already implemented, notably those in collaboration with other ECOCs (comprising visits of citizens to other ECOC cities).

On the other side, we express our concerns regarding the impediments to involve volunteers in the ECOC programme due to strict national regulations on this matter, and hope this issue may be solved in due time. Well prepared volunteers are integral part of audiences' engagement strategy in ECOCs.

Recommendations

- Prepare specific audience development strategy and plans that include: 1/ clear audience development and engagement aims 2/ capacity building for the art sector and the ECOC team; 3/ artistic, educational and communicational components;
- Clarify the status of volunteers and the possibility of implementing the city charter instead of the national regulations for the case of the ECOC in order to proceed to recruitment and preparation.

STAFFING

We congratulate the achievement regarding the special law from end of 2017 to allow an increase in the Eleusis 2021 staff up to 20 members, with the support from the Ministry of Culture. Additionally, the possibility set by the Government to associate approx. 100 more front line personnel to the Eleusis 2021 company is a relevant advantage. Yet staffing still needs a clear plan. The division of roles and responsibilities among the new four creative directors and the artistic director became clear during the meeting.

Recommendations

- The hiring of further staff should continue at fast pace to fulfil the 20 posts. All relevant authorities should continue studying all possibilities, including adaptations of law, to help the team to reach the planned 40 members. The delays in recruiting provoke delays in planning and implementation at several levels. As already said above, the facilities of the team should follow the increase in the staffing;
- A detailed staffing and human resources plan is needed to clarify the gaps and needs as well as to serve as a basis for discussion with the Government for the necessary changes in the regulatory frameworks to be pursued.
- The role of the 100 expected front-line personnel needs to be clarified;
- We would like to stress the need to recruit the financial and communications directors very soon in order to free the CEO from time-consuming financial coordination functions, considering the complexity of the public procurement procedures, as well as to proceed with the due communication plans.

FUNDING

Planned instalments are on tracks and the cash flow situation is positive. We welcome the funding increase from 2.5 to 6.5 M€ announced by the Ministry of Culture. Prospects for private sponsorship are good: 2.3 M€ contributions from big Greek companies are agreed and expectations to reach up to 5 M€ might be realistic.

Recommendations

- Counting on the fast integration of the new financial and communication directors, move on with further development and implementation of fundraising strategy as well as with making contracts with planned sponsors.

OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATION

We welcome the diligences and the start of relevant work in the area of communication, despite the missing in-house staff. Once in place, the implementation of the strategy should proceed at fast pace.

We were happy that the strategy to improve the social networks dynamics is moving forward, notably starting to use paid posts.

Recommendations

- Once the new communications director is hired, proceed with the development of a comprehensive strategy and its implementation, notably moving on with due negotiations and contracts with media partners and main sponsors;
- Find a clear message for the programme and work on the identification of the target audiences that will be interested in this specific offer as it reflects transforming Elefsina into a new cultural destination for national and international tourists and visitors, including audiences from Athens;
- Make the necessary liaisons to the regional tourism board and Ministry of Tourism as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in order to get the necessary support for international outreach (including the Greek diaspora);
- Clarify the use of the logo and name of the ECOC Eleusis 2021. It is not clear for the general public, most especially outside of Greece, when to refer to Eleusis or Elefsina.

EVALUATION AND MONITORING

The prospects presented by the selected contractor from the University of Athens are promising: an extensive survey is being conducted to ensure the baseline provisions; and the methodology being designed to measure impacts is considering the notions of culture development and cultural capital.

Next steps

The second monitoring meeting between the Eleusis 2021 delegation and the Panel will take place in late spring or early summer 2019.

We invite the team to continue working on the 12 recommendations from the first monitoring report and also on the complementary recommendations contained in this letter and to report about all the relevant measures taken in the second progress report that will be due before the second monitoring meeting.

In the meanwhile, the Panel would like to stress, with special concern, the relevance of the following areas which will be certainly subject to our special attention in the next monitoring meeting:

- Final Board composition and role, confirming that there will be a move from executive to strategic functioning
- Infra-structures plan,
- Staffing plan,

- Improvements to public procurement, notably regarding our worries concerning guarantees and volunteers.

We would like to thank again the competent city visit organisation by the hosts, the Eleusis 2021 team and Board, as well as the dedicated presence of the Ministry of Culture staff, including the Deputy Minister for Culture.

We recognise all the efforts made so far and wish you a fruitful and successful continuation of the preparation of the European Capital of Culture 2021 in Elefsina.

(Signed) Cristina Farinha
Rapporteur of the European Capital of Culture Expert Panel

(Signed) All members of the ECOC Expert Panel