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Liverpool 2008

Part 1 Visions and narratives

ECoC is a concept that was launched in 1985 and has been transforming over many years. The transformation process adapted to cultural developments in Europe. ECoC became a model for many initiatives worldwide in all continents and contexts (e.g. national capitals of culture, such as Lithuania and France or international capital of culture, such as the African capital of culture, an emerging initiative).

1.1 What is an EcoC (now)?

When it started, ECoC was more a one-year celebration of the arts and culture offer in a city, now it is a long-term (7 à 10 years) transformation process of a city, by the means of culture.

This process should be tailored to the city (not a standard process) and should be:

- Specific:
What could my city do that other cities cannot do? Can this only happen in my city? What cannot be done elsewhere?
- Sustainable:
The ECoC legacy is very important: what remains afterwards? E.g. capacity building and training, peer learning, new structures or organization(s), etc.
- Integrative:
Broad involvement and ownership by the stakeholders and citizens is necessary. ECoC is also a tool to activate people to go forward, to engage with citizens and communities.
- Future-oriented:
It is also future-oriented: it is not about past achievements (cultural traditions, heritage buildings, etc.), it is not about what the city was in the past or is now, but what will it be in casu in 2030 and afterwards.

- Example: in 2018 Liverpool celebrated 10 years of ECoC with a festive year. Liverpool 2008 was accompanied by a long-term study and research project on a.o. audience development, the impact of big events on a city, etc.

<https://www.cultureliverpool.co.uk/liverpool-08-timeline/>

1.2. Which narratives trigger attention?

There are ECoC's that are more traditional cities or other where cities cooperate with the surroundings or with the region, but there is always a core city. Narratives:

- It is always about a city and its story, about the past and the future of the city. What is specific? What is visionary? What do you want to tell your population and your network? What do you want to communicate to the European context? It includes the European narrative and it places the city's narrative in this context.
- It is important to understand the specific needs of a city and the development potential and opportunities.
- The artistic and creative program of the city is part of the narrative and includes artistic messages, even if difficult to predefine them in advance. Usually the artistic program and experiments are directed by an ECoC artistic director. The artistic element should be balanced with the role of arts in the transformation of cities.
- There should be a link to European integration relevant for people in Europe. This can be developed on many levels, e.g. new forms of European integration. There are many possibilities to tell the European story of the project. The European historical background is something else to present and can be a starting point to tell the 'European story and narrative' behind the project.
- Investigate also in common narratives/ideas with other ECoC's.
 - Example ECoC 2025 Nova Gorica - Gorizia: after WW2, Gorizia was attributed to Italy and a new city - Nova Gorica - was born in Slovenia. Starting question for this ECoC: what will be the change in 2025?

1.3. How to achieve long term legacy and empowerment?

The ECoC-year should leave a long term legacy in the city and contribute to its empowerment and that of the stakeholders in many aspects:

- Cultural ecosystem:
How can we empower the cultural and creative stakeholders in our city? On this very moment: how to overcome the pandemic effect on the Cultural and Creative Sector (CCS)?
- Social transformation:
Inclusivity, diversity, tolerance, openness, new narratives: how to reach out to those who are not easy to reach and do not participate in cultural and creative activities, urban projects and urban transformation? How to address non-audiences and who are these non-audiences? Hot topic for the moment is also 'decolonisation' and new related narratives.
- Economic development:
How to strengthen economically the CCS in my city? How to come up with more sustainable cultural tourism? Here also the effects of the pandemic are an important issue.

- Urban and infrastructural elements:
In general, to update cultural infrastructures, not only how to build new emblematic buildings, as it was in many past ECoC's. But also the revitalization of quarters and neighborhoods can be included. Pay attention to ecological transformations and sustainable effects!

For which topics the city is standing? It should be the result of a long process, and not a brand or a slogan. You should try to come up with a structure of impact measurement, even if impact is not predictable.

- o Example Rijeka 2020's project on 27 neighborhoods that will connect with neighbors in the 27 EU member states.
<https://rijeka2020.eu/en/dogadjanja/>

Questions and answers

Importance of the legacy and how to give it a place in the bidding phase:

The legacy is transversal and is the result of a long-term process. Use your strength and opportunities to go for it all the way and to become an inspiring model. Of course the future is unpredictable and therefore resilience is needed.

E.g. Leeuwarden chose sustainability.

E.g. of unpredictability: three weeks after the opening of Rijeka 2020, the pandemic exploded and the country went in lock down.

The legacy of Lille 2004: <https://www.lille3000.eu/portail/en/presentation>

Place and role of the arts in an ECoC?

The city must find an adequate balance between the artistic project/content and cultural management. The specific context of the city must be a guide to meaningful answers. Art must play a role in the envisaged transformation.

Art can be involved on many levels and should also contribute to the European dimension.

E.g. involvement of art in the design of the bid book; artistic cooperation on European level like exchange, residences, etc.

Link between culture and wellbeing?

Very relevant in the current European context. Can be an important issue to work on in the future.



Aarhus 2017

Part 2 Concept elements

The criteria for pre-selection and selection - with questions to be answered- are similar. Pre-selection is about highlighting the general ideas of the main bid. If pre-selected, you need to answer more specific questions per criterium. Each criterium has sub-topics with questions. A final bid book is about 100 pages overall, with a nice design.

1.1. Long-term cultural strategy:

- It is about the long-term *cultural* strategy, not the overall municipal strategy:
It deals with the plans of the city re culture for the next 10-15 years. It has to be decided before the final bid at the latest. Your ECoC is part of this strategy, you must demonstrate how both interlink. Your strategy is the platform on which you build your ECoC a.o.
- The cross-sectoral links and capacity building:
Describe and deal with the cross-sectoral links you have built.
Pay attention to capacity building and training activities tailored to the needs of the cultural sector on the long term, but also specifically for the ECoC. E.g. trainings for the city stakeholders to learn how to manage co-funded EU projects in view of your ECoC
- Impact monitoring, evaluation, exchange on results:
To monitor and measure the positive cultural, social, economic transformation effects of the ECoC partnerships with universities and/or other research institutes, local or not, are recommended.

2.2. Cultural and artistic content:

Key-elements are:

- Artistic vision:
The artistic program should be forward looking and should show vision.
A thematic approach is important.

- Strategy and artistic program:
The artistic program is part of a strategy for culture in which parts of it are already implemented before the official year of ECoC, e.g. between 2025 and 2030 for Gent.
- Involvement of local artists and cultural organizations:
Involvement of artistic side, curators, dramaturgs, of the local cultural scene as a whole, is of course obvious! ECoC should be interwoven in the municipal cultural landscape.
- Artistic quality and diversity of activities:
Quality and diversity are key. It is not only about exhibitions and/or performing arts, but also about creative workshops, festivals, lectures, discussion formats, etc.
Flagship projects pay special attention to the transformation in the city and visualize the narrative
- Past-future connection:
E.g. currently the shift to the digital is high on the agenda. But all other kinds of reflections on culture are important. E.g. how future could be build with arts and culture.

2.3. European dimension:

Questions to deal with/to be answered in this section are:

- European narrative:
What can Europe get from Gent2030, and what can Gent get from intensive debate with European partners? What are the topics for the city, its partners and for Europe? Some cities are able to develop some kind of messages to Europe.
- Cultural diversity of Europe:
Should be present in intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding. What are common aspects? How to further enhance European integration? Good example of a project: Rijeka 27 neighborhoods project (cfr supra).
- Highlighting of common aspects of European culture and heritage:
What are the actual European themes? How integration can be enhanced?
- Involvement of European partners:
Strong involvement is required of European partners: artists from different countries, city to city cooperation, ECoC to ECoC, transnational partners, etc.
- European and international audiences: .
Ask yourself the questions: why would people come to ECoC Gent? What could motivate them? And who would be motivated to do so?

2.4. Outreach:

Main aspects are:

- Outreach to civil society and citizens involvement:
Should start already in the bidding phase. The education sector must be part of the outreach strategy. This workshop is an example of an outreach activity.
- Enhanced cultural participation:
How to reach non-served audiences? Accessibility of culture in all its aspects: physical, communication, content, etc.
- Audience development:

What is the current situation? What would you like to change? Which methods and tools will you use for audience development?

2.5. Management:

To be decided and described:

- Budget, financing plan, budget for legacy:
The different sources of funding for example. The budget needs to be realistic. You need to show that the proposed budget is adequate to what you propose. Although the legacy plan will be revised and refined during the process, a budget must be put in place.
- Governance structure and settings:
Links between the ECoC-structure and the municipal – and in case the regional - governance structures must be clarified and described from the beginning.
- Appointment settings for general and artistic director:
From search for (...) to concrete working relations should be decided in an early stage.
- Marketing and communication strategy:
Messages, target groups, communication plan, etc.
- Appropriate organisational settings, staff, risk mitigation :
Organogram, decision making process and roles, risk mitigation is now very important, after the Covid-19 outbreak

2.6. Capacity to deliver:

Means:

- Strong political involvement and sustainable commitment:
As the main aim is a long-term transformation, strong political support and sustainable commitment of all governance levels - city, regional, national - is crucial.
- Adequate and viable infrastructures:
Adequate and viable infrastructure is needed. This relates to cultural infrastructure - buildings that can host the proposed activities – but also to transport connections to reach the city, accommodation, etc.

Questions and answers

Place of tourism in developing bid book and in European dimension/outreach? Requirement or recommendation?

It is not a formal requirement but all good bid books include cooperation with tourism. Today it is more important than ever since culture and tourism are in the same boat due to the pandemic.

In an ECoC context international audience development is of course very important. But it is about more, it is about many target groups that can differ according to the local context an existing networks. E.g. a university in a city brings an international dimension through international/Erasmus students.

Most ECoC's use tourism fairs and cooperation with tourism operators for their promotion.

How to involve the academic world?

There are many possibilities, related to the criteria:

- Cooperation in setting up a long term strategy
- Capacity building
- Evaluation
- The future program/legacy

The importance of cross-sectoral linking and some good examples?

The importance cannot be underestimated. Transformation on the long term will be cross-sectoral per definition, and so will be the impact of it. Read a few recent bid books and you will find many good examples:

- The cooperation between different artistic disciplines
- The cooperation with tourism or the academic world (see above)
- With IT companies in your city

One example: Galway 2020 focused on people with disabilities and has set up a sustainable cooperation with the social sector

A budget for the legacy: to be foreseen in bid book? How?

The legacy has to be highlighted in the final bid book. What are the plans? What is an adequate budget to realize these plans?

During the monitoring activities in the preparation phase this will be refined.



Lille 2004

Part 3 Bidding preparation

3.1. (Political) commitment:

- Remember that is a long term project with lasting effects, both positive and negative.
- You need a professional stakeholders management that works integrative. Many different stakeholders and many different types of stakeholders are involved, e.g. citizens, cultural organisations, the political level, the business community, etc.
- Based on the transformation that is envisaged you have to think in a “investment for the future” logic.
- Management of communication is very important. From the bidding phase on it has to mobilise for the project. Communication should from the beginning on be in different languages.

3.2. Capacity building:

- Basis for capacity building is the understanding of the specificities of the cultural system, its needs and shortcomings, its opportunities.
- Capacity building should already start in the bidding phase. Here connecting with other ECoC's can be useful.
- The “future program” has to be part of the bid book. It is about empowerment and creating legacy, it is about helping people to take their future in their own hands.

3.3. Integrative approach:

- A sound understanding of local diversity is needed to be able to involve a wide variety of communities and different audiences. Surveys during the bidding phase are recommended.
- Sustainable cross-sectoral networks should guarantee long term engagement.
- The art and culture program has to reflect an integrative logic.
- A consistent narrative and a dedicated artistic director are needed.

3.4. Timing:

- Take an early start!
- A long-term cultural strategy is not a bid book. These are different documents with a different logic. Quite many bidding cities have developed at the same time the bid and the long-term strategy, which is challenging for the city as for some of the stakeholders. Having already a long-term cultural strategy in place is an advantage

3.5. European dimensions:

- ECoC is not a national project, the European dimension is crucial. You should think about the European dimension(s) in a transversal way along all the criteria. In every step of the process you should ask yourself: what is here the European dimension, how can we include this?
- Important is also to understand the potential and/or the needs of your city related to the European dimension(s). What is there already to further develop? What isn't and would be good to set up?
- Don't forget to liaise with the ECoC family, all people preparing current ECoC's or involved in past ECoC's.

Questions and answers

Capacity building in the bidding phase: whom for and what?

Depends on the needs and shortcomings of your cultural eco-system. The needs can go from tools for audience development to how to work and network on an international level. Capacity building must be tailored to your municipal context.

Budget for an ECoC: size and breakdown?

The breakdown follows a format. The size is very diverse and related to the local context. Is it a big or a smaller city? What is the national governance structure alike? Is there a regional level or not? E.g. Austria and Germany have very strong regional levels, Finland not. Important also is the level of development of cultural governance in the city and the country. All of that will play a role in the budgetary framework for an ECoC. Talking about the size of the budget is therefore very difficult.

The political context. In Belgium we have elections in 2024.

In general: that will be a critical moment but is cannot have any influence on the pre-selection or selection. You will have to ensure yourself of a strong and long lasting commitment so that things are not slowed down, for instance the budgeting process.

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