



European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) 2020-2033

Guidelines for the cities' own evaluations of the results of each ECoC

1. Background and context

Own evaluation by the cities – A new obligation for European Capitals of Culture

The European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) were created in 1985 as an intergovernmental initiative and transformed into a European Union action in 1999. The rules were renewed from 2007, developing the effectiveness of the action further. In accordance with these rules, the European Commission ensures the external and independent evaluation of all 2007-2019 ECoC. In addition, a number of ECoC so far have initiated and carried out their own evaluations of the title year, following different models and approaches.

Decision No 445/2014/EU¹ (the "Decision") lays down new procedures for the implementation of the ECoC action for the period 2020 to 2033. Regarding more particularly evaluation, the Decision introduces a key modification, i.e. the obligation for all ECoCs 2020-2033 to carry out their own evaluations of the results of the title-year. As part of this new obligation, cities bidding for the title will have to indicate in their application the plans for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the title on the city as well as for disseminating the results of the evaluation.

More precisely, Article 16 of the Decision defines the cities' and the Commission's responsibilities and obligations as follows:

1.
 - Each city concerned shall be responsible for the evaluation of the results of its year as European Capital of Culture.
 - The Commission shall establish common guidelines and indicators for the cities concerned based on the objectives and the criteria [of the ECOC action] in order to ensure a coherent approach to the evaluation procedure.

¹ Official Journal of the European Union, OJ L 132 of 3 May 2014: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32014D0445>

- The cities concerned shall draw up their evaluation reports and transmit them to the Commission by 31 December of the year following the year of the title.
- The Commission shall publish the evaluation reports on its website.

2.

- In addition to the cities' evaluations, the Commission shall ensure that external and independent evaluations of the results of the action are produced on a regular basis.
- [These] evaluations shall focus on placing all past European Capitals of Culture in a European context, allowing comparisons to be drawn and useful lessons to be learned for future European Capitals of Culture, as well as for all European cities. Those evaluations shall include an assessment of the action as a whole, including the efficiency of the processes involved in running it, its impact and how it could be improved.
- The Commission shall present to the European Parliament, the Council and the Committee of the Regions the following reports based on these evaluations, accompanied, if appropriate, by relevant proposals:
 - (a) a first interim evaluation report by 31 December 2024;
 - (b) a second interim evaluation report by 31 December 2029;
 - (c) an ex-post evaluation report by 31 December 2034.

This document explains the benefits for ECoC to carry out their own evaluation of the results of the title-year. It also provides cities with a set of common indicators to use as well as common guidelines in the form of a list of questions cities should ask themselves when deciding to bid as an ECoC and planning their evaluation procedures.

The document is largely based on the expertise resulting from the external and independent evaluations of the ECoCs produced for the Commission since 2007 (in particular the post script on "measuring impacts" included in the final report of the evaluation of the 2012 ECoCs) as well as on the EU-funded work of a Policy Group of former ECOC, set up in 2009-2010 to share good practices and produce recommendations for research and evaluation by cities hosting the title.

Further reading:

You can access the external ECoC evaluations and the report of the ECoC Policy Group from the following links: following European:

- http://ec.europa.eu/culture/tools/actions/capitals-culture_en.htm
- <http://ecocpolicygroup.wordpress.com/category/case-studies-ecocs>

2. Key motivations and purposes

Reasons and motivations WHY the cities should evaluate the results of their year as ECoC

Started in 1985, the "European Capital of Culture" action has grown in scope and size to become one of the most prestigious and high-profile cultural events in Europe, and one which is very dear to the citizens of the European Union. Over the years the initiative has also successfully contributed to the sustainable development of cities and their surrounding areas, bringing them – if well prepared – long-term impact, in cultural, social and economic terms. As a consequence, ECoC are now more and more recognized as laboratories for a strategic investment in culture at local and regional level.

However, there is still a shortage of a coherent evidence-base that would enable to better grasp the benefits of hosting the ECoC action and the title's medium-to-long term cultural, social and economic legacy in host cities, and would also allow for meaningful direct comparisons between cities.

The new evaluation obligation introduced by the Decision is a way to remedy this situation.

The first recipients of the evaluation results will – of course – be the cities hosting the title themselves. But this obligation will also bring benefits to other cities across Europe, willing to learn from the ECoC experience and better understand the multi-faceted impact of a huge investment in culture. Finally it will help the European Union Institutions in better assessing the cumulative impact of the ECoC action, in particular as the evaluations carried out by the cities will also feed into the external and independent evaluations that will be produced for the European Commission.

More precisely, **at local level**, the new obligation will contribute to help ECoC improve delivery against the objectives set for the title-year. Experience shows that planning evaluation (and evaluation tools) well in advance helps indeed cities to clarify their vision of their strengths and weaknesses, to analyse what they can realistically strive to achieve through the ECoC title and thus refine their objectives, to establish clear milestones towards the achievement of their goals and, as a result, to improve the end result of the year.

A more consistent approach to evaluation should also enable them to better demonstrate the impact of the title-year and the ways in which they have optimised cultural, social and economic benefits as well as the effect the title has for the development of the city. It would also be instrumental in fostering local ownership of targets, assisting cities in planning and negotiating with partners (in particular sponsors and public authorities at local, regional or national levels) and providing an incentive for future ECoC to set meaningful and achievable targets. Finally, findings can also support the city's future cultural strategies.

At the European level, this will help better understand how individual ECoC contribute to the objectives of the action, whether they have broadly achieved their objectives, whether implementation has proceeded in line with the original application and how the ECoC action as a whole could be improved. Very importantly, the new obligation – in making it possible to get a more comprehensive view of the results of the ECoC – can also further encourage knowledge transfer between cities as more consistent data should enable comparisons between cities and the identification of strong performance. It would reinforce the existing evidence-base on the ability of the ECoC action and – more generally – of cultural initiatives to support the revitalisation of urban economies or affect social change as well as contribute towards the wider goals of the European Union.

3. Common indicative core indicators

Minimum set of indicators that should be common to all evaluations carried out by the cities

The basis for a coherent approach to the cities' own evaluation of the results of the title-year is the definition of common core indicators. Cities holding the ECoC title are therefore invited to use the common core indicators presented below (Table 2) when carrying out their respective evaluation.

These indicators correspond to the general and specific objectives of the ECoC action as laid down in the Decision, which can further be translated into more concrete operational objectives at city level (Table 1). They are also based on the criteria laid down in the Decision for the assessment of the applications of the cities bidding for the ECoC title.

Table 1- Hierarchy of ECoC objectives

General Objectives								
Safeguard and promote the diversity of cultures in Europe, highlight the common features they share, increase citizens' sense of belonging to a common cultural space, and foster the contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities								
Specific Objectives (SO)								
SO1: Enhance the range, diversity and European dimension of the cultural offering in cities, including through transnational co-operation	SO2: Widen access to and participation in culture			SO3: Strengthen the capacity of the cultural sector and its links with other sectors			SO4: Raise the international profile of cities through culture	
Operational Objectives								
Stimulate extensive cultural programmes of high artistic quality	Ensure cultural programmes feature a strong European dimension and transnational co-operation	Involve a wide range of citizens and stakeholders in preparing and implementing the cultural programme	Create new opportunities for a wide range of citizens to attend or participate in cultural events	Improve cultural infrastructure	Develop the skills, capacity and governance of the cultural sector	Stimulate partnership and co-operation with other sectors	Promote the city and its cultural programme	Improve the international outlook of residents

The indicative core indicators suggested below reflect this hierarchy of objectives and are intended to capture their essence whenever possible in a quantified form.

They would probably need to be further developed in the light of developments and evolving circumstances.

Quantitative data should take account of baselines (i.e. data at application stage, start of title year, end of title-year) and regional or national comparators where available.

Data should also be analysed and contextualised, to understand what contribution the ECoC is likely to have made, and identify other factors and phenomena likely to have had an influence.

On top of these common indicators, cities are of course invited to define any additional indicators informed by their own context, priorities and activities for the ECoC year and reflecting their own performance targets.

All indicators should be consistent with SMART principles (i.e. be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timed).

Table 2 - Overview of ECoC objectives and criteria with corresponding indicative common indicators and possible sources of data collection

Criteria	Objectives	Type of indicator	Indicative indicators	Possible sources of data collection
Six categories of criteria, relevant across all General and Specific Objectives: 1. Long term strategy 2. Capacity to deliver 3. Cultural and artistic content 4. European dimension 5. Outreach 6. Management	General objective 1: To safeguard and promote the diversity of cultures in Europe, to highlight the common features they share and to increase citizens' sense of belonging to a common cultural space	Impact	Citizens' awareness and appreciation of the diversity of European cultures Citizens' sense of belonging to a common cultural space	Surveys of local residents, e.g. undertaken or commissioned by municipalities or agencies managing ECoC
	General objective 2: To foster the contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities	Impact	National / international recognition of cities as being culturally vibrant and having improved image Increase in GDP and employment in cities' cultural and creative sectors	Surveys of tourists and visitors to host cities; international surveys of tourist opinions; opinion of national or international cultural experts; other authoritative published sources Statistical data provided by municipalities, national statistical offices, sector bodies, etc.
	Specific objective 1: To enhance the range, diversity and European dimension of the cultural offering in cities, including through transnational co-operation	Result	Total n° of events € value of ECoC cultural programmes N° of activities highlighting European diversity, based on European themes or based on transnational cooperation	Programme data provided by the agencies managing ECoC

Criteria	Objectives	Type of indicator	Indicative indicators	Possible sources of data collection
	Specific objective 2: To widen access and participation in culture	Result	Attendance at ECoC events % of residents attending or participating in events, including young, minorities or the disadvantaged Number of active volunteers	Programme data provided by the agencies managing ECoC Surveys of local residents, e.g. undertaken or commissioned by municipalities or agencies managing ECoC Programme data provided by the agencies managing ECoC
	Specific objective 3: To strengthen the capacity of the cultural sector and its links with other sectors	Result	Strategy for long-term cultural development of the city € value of investment in cultural infrastructure and facilities Sustained multi-sector partnership for cultural Governance	Statistical data provided by public bodies at local, provincial or regional level Published documents of ECoC legacy body, municipalities and/or other relevant body Published documents of ECoC legacy body, municipalities and/or other relevant body
	Specific objective 4: To raise the international profile of cities through culture	Result	Increase in tourist visits Volume and % of positive media coverage of cities Awareness of the ECoC among residents	Statistical data provided by tourist boards or relevant public authority Data provided by authoritative media monitoring organisations Surveys of local residents, e.g. undertaken or commissioned by municipalities or agencies managing ECoC

4. Explanatory comments on the common indicative core indicators

Understanding how the common core indicators should be understood and how they could be measured

The general objectives set out for the ECoC action concern longer term impacts and contributions in areas where the ECoC action is only one of many activities, developments and phenomena exerting an influence.

Cities could collect information on **citizens' perceptions of being European** and/or **awareness and appreciation of the diversity of European cultures**. Local residents could be asked about their subjective views on feelings of "Europeanness" and awareness of cultures in Europe, comparing views at key stages (i.e. before and after the title year) or

asking a question about the impact they felt the ECoC has had on their perceptions or level of awareness.

Another indicator in this area is the level of **national and international recognition of cities** as being culturally-vibrant and having an improved image. Cities could collect a range of data in this area, reflecting the varying objectives of individual ECoC (i.e. put the city on the European map, address a negative image, increase local pride). Individual ECoC could use complementary indicators in this area.

Statistics could also be collected from municipalities, national offices or sector bodies regarding **any increase in GDP, in employment figures** in cities' cultural and creative sectors.

To assess the range of activities and diversity of the cultural offering, cities could collect information on the **total number of events** and the **budget of the ECoC cultural programme**. In terms of the number of events, cities could focus on the difference between the number of events in the title-year (and ideally in the lead-in period), compared with a baseline period (e.g. an estimate of the total number of cultural events available in the city at application stage). The budget of the cultural programme is generally provided as an overall figure and as a proportion of total expenditure. This could be compared with the annual culture budget / public subsidy for culture at the application stage, to ensure that this is placed in its proper national and local context. Another interesting piece of evidence could be to collect information on the **additional financial contributions obtained from public, private and third sector partners**.

In terms of the **European dimension**, cities could provide details of the number of events with a European theme or involving international collaborations throughout the cultural programme, not only looking at the events programmed as specifically European or international. The numbers of **new cross-border collaborations, co-productions and exchanges involving local and international operators** (artists, operators or organisations) across the entire programme could also be interesting indicators. Cities could report on the numbers of local and international artists included in their cultural programme, but probably a more interesting indicator could be the number of new transnational partnerships.

To assess the access and participation in culture, cities could provide an estimate of the **total audience size** for events that took place during the title-year. It would be of interest to compare this figure with a baseline estimate of the total audience for cultural events at application stage or at various stages during the development phase.

Cities could undertake surveys to calculate **the proportion of local residents attending or actively participating in events**. Instead of simply aggregating attendance data it could be of interest to undertake such research at key stages (i.e. application, start and end of title year). Data could also be compared with national or international comparators. It is likely to be more problematic to collect information on the proportions of key target groups taking part, and it may be good for each city to develop their own additional specific targets, informed by local priorities. Cities could collect data on numbers of schools taking part in the programme and numbers of people attending events targeted specifically at under-represented or disadvantaged groups.

The **number of active volunteers** is a key indicator of access to and participation in culture.

Some of the most relevant measures to assess the extent to which the ECoC cultural programmes contribute towards increasing the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors are the existence of **a sustained multi-sector partnership for cultural governance** and a **strategy for long-term cultural development of the city**.

Cities could also collect information on the **value of investment in cultural infrastructure and facilities**. This would be a key indicator of longer-term sustainability, although some agencies responsible for delivering the ECoC programme do not have direct responsibility for investments and it is often difficult to disaggregate this information from general budgets.

To assess improved international profile, the cities could provide a variety of information on tourism impacts. The key performance measure here would probably be **the increase in all tourist visits** (day visits and overnight stays), both overall and broken down by domestic/international where possible. This should be collected at key stages of the process and contextualised against wider tourism trends.

Data on both **the volume and tone** (% positive/neutral/negative) **of coverage across media channels** could be collected and such data would make good indicators of the effectiveness of awareness raising efforts.

As with attendance, cities could report on **levels of awareness of amongst local and national residents**. This could be done as part of the same resident survey, at key stages of the process and ideally for both local and national audiences.

5. Planning and implementing evaluation procedures

A few useful questions cities should ask themselves

When starting the process?

It is important to ensure that planning for the evaluation starts early on during the process. In this context, cities need to take a number of organisational parameters into account, including the duration of the evaluation, how much funding should be allocated to it, and allocating responsibility for undertaking it. A decision must be made at an early stage about what kind of evaluation is needed. Cities that have hosted the title previously have approached this in different ways. For example, Liverpool's 2008 research programme started in 2005, Stavanger 2008 started its evaluation programme in 2006 and Luxembourg 2007 started undertaking research in 2005. Some cities start their evaluation programme about a year before the start of their cultural programme e.g. Essen for the Ruhr 2010 and Turku 2011. Guimarães 2012 started implementing an evaluation programme just before the start of the title year. Timely implementation of the evaluation helps to ensure that appropriate organisational arrangements are put in place, the funding is planned and allocated and it also allows time to establish data collection and analysis frameworks as well as the baseline position.

Which period to cover?

Deciding how long the evaluation process should last is also an important aspect of the planning phase. ECoC aim to create long-term impacts for the city development, but often the research focus is on observing short term effects. Only two ECoC, Liverpool 2008 and Turku

2011, have undertaken longitudinal research lasting several years after the end of the title year. In most cities, evaluation procedures are completed around six to 12 months following the end of the title year and this, at least in part, reflects the need at local level to demonstrate the results of the year as early as possible. The balance between pressures to demonstrate quick results and the need to undertake thorough analysis and quality evaluation should therefore be weighed carefully and taken into account at the planning stage. The ECoC Policy Group suggested in their 2010 report that the evaluation programme should be in place for between one and two years after the title year to ensure a thorough assessment and a three to four year evaluation would be needed in order to properly observe longer-term impacts.

What budget for the evaluation?

Securing the necessary funding for evaluative research is often a challenge in many cities. However, in the long term, investing in research is likely to bring a number of benefits such as the ability to demonstrate the impact of the cultural offer in terms of attracting additional funding, justifying the value of public spending and understanding what initiatives and/or projects make a difference to the city. It is therefore important to identify and secure funding for the evaluation, early in the development phase.

Who to choose to carry out the evaluation?

Establishing which organisation will undertake the evaluation is another decision that should be taken during the development phase. Independence, transparency and avoiding any conflict of interests are important criteria in this respect. It should therefore be considered good practice to commission an organisation not related to the agency in charge of the delivery of the ECoC year. Local universities or other public or private research organisations could undertake this role. Defining clear roles and responsibilities between the organisation undertaking evaluation and delivery agency should be given due consideration, especially in relation to collecting output data, communication and other issues.

What type of evaluation?

Decisions concerning the type of evaluation that should be undertaken will also be a significant consideration at an early stage. Questions to consider would include for example: Should the evaluation focus only on the city or cover a wider region? What thematic areas and issues should the evaluation cover? Should the evaluation focus on quantitative, qualitative research or a mixture of both research tools? What indicators would be particularly interesting and appropriate for each ECoC?

While an evaluation brings significant benefits, efforts should also be made to avoid a number of potentially negative aspects. Increasing the importance of the evaluation can have an impact where, in developing the cultural programme, tried and tested activities might be prioritised over more ambitious and experimental ones. Similarly, it is important to avoid the situation where the programme is developed to achieve 'easy wins' instead of addressing more challenging issues.