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Ex-post evaluation of the 2019 European Capitals of Culture

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► **To cite this version:**

Maria Elena Buslacchi, Luca Mobilio, Sergio Goffredo, Tim Fox, Assya Pavlova. Ex-post evaluation of the 2019 European Capitals of Culture. European commission. 2020. hal-03867391

HAL Id: hal-03867391

<https://hal.science/hal-03867391v1>

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Ex-post evaluation of the 2019 European Capitals of Culture

Final report October 2020

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2020

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Abstract

This final report presents the findings of the ex-post evaluation of the European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) Action for 2019 undertaken by Ecorys. The cities of Matera (Italy) and Plovdiv (Bulgaria) were the two ECoC cities for 2019. The evaluation describes how these cities developed their application and cultural programme, how they delivered their ECoC year, the benefits and impacts that were gained and any legacy issues they experienced. The evaluation also provides an assessment of what the cities actually delivered over 2019 and describe the themes, priorities and key projects that made up their ECoC cultural programme. Finally, the evaluation also puts forward conclusions, recommendations and lessons for future ECoC titleholders, applicants and EU institutions. This report starts with an introduction explaining the aims and methodology of the evaluation and a brief policy history and context of the ECoC. It is then followed by a chapter each for Matera and Plovdiv which sets out the main findings and observations of the evaluation for each of the 2019 host cities. It concludes with overall findings and recommendations.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the report

Ecorys is pleased to present this draft final report for the *Ex-post Evaluation of the 2019 European Capitals of Culture (ECoC)*. The report provides final findings for the two ECoC based on evidence gathered during the course of the study.

The cities of Matera and Plovdiv were the two ECoC cities for 2019. The evaluation has focused on how these cities developed their application and cultural programme, how they delivered their ECoC year, the benefits and impacts that were gained and any legacy issues they experienced. The evaluation also highlights what the cities actually delivered over 2019 and describe the themes, priorities and key projects that made up their ECoC cultural programme. Finally, the evaluation also puts forward conclusions, recommendations and lessons for future ECoC titleholders and applicants as well as EU institutions to learn from.

This report starts with an introduction giving a brief policy history and context of the ECoC and explaining the aims and methodology of the evaluation. It is then followed by a chapter each for Matera and Plovdiv which sets out the main findings and observations of the evaluation for each of the 2019 host cities. It concludes with overall findings and recommendations.

1.2 The ECoC Action

1.2.1 Objectives of the ECoC Action

The overall objective of the ECoC Action is to: “Safeguard and promote the diversity of cultures in Europe, highlight the common features they share, and foster the contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities”.

In achieving these objectives, the ECoC Action is interested in helping host cities to enhance the range, diversity and European dimension of their cultural offer, widen participation in culture among residents and strengthen the capacity of the cultural sector. The ECoC also aims to raise the international profile of host cities and help promote and celebrate different European cultures. As also highlighted in previous evaluations, the ECoC therefore aims to do more than ‘put on a year of culture’ and the benefits of hosting the year reach further than those directly associated with culture.

In evaluating the 2019 ECoC Action it is important to recognise the overall objective of the ECoC as stated in the 2006 Decision but updated from previous evaluations as laid out in the table overleaf to reflect the content of the new legal basis for ECoC post-2019. The general and strategic objectives are taken directly from Article 2 of the new legal basis, with the operational objectives flowing logically from these. They are also informed by the selection criteria detailed in Article 5 of the 2014 Decision.

1.2.2 The 2019 ECoC Action

Matera in Italy and Plovdiv in Bulgaria are the ECoC for 2019 that add to the 60 cities that previously held the ECoC title. By 2020, all 28 (original) Member States have hosted an ECoC. It is over 30 years since the Greek Minister of Culture, Melina Mercouri, put

forward a European resolution to establish the European Capital of Culture in 1985 (the Action was originally called the European City of Culture).

The ECoC Action safeguards and promotes the diversity of cultures in Europe, highlights the common features they share, and fosters the contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities. In achieving these objectives, the ECoC Action is intended to help host cities to enhance the range, diversity and European dimension of their cultural offer, widen participation in culture among residents and strengthen the capacity of the cultural sector. The ECoC also aims to raise the international profile of host cities and help promote and celebrate different European cultures. The ECoC therefore aims to do more than 'put on a year of culture' and the benefits of hosting an ECoC reach further than those directly associated with the cultural sector.

The special role that cities play in culture was recognised by a 1985 Resolution¹ that introduced the "European City of Culture" concept, later transformed by a 1999 Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council into the European Capital of Culture (ECoC). This sought to create a more predictable, consistent and transparent rotational system for the designation of the title, taking as its legal base Article 151 of the Treaty (now Article 167), which calls on the EU to "contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore". The 1999 Decision was later amended in 2004 in order to integrate the Member States that newly acceded to the EU.²

A further Decision was made in 2006, which introduced new processes for selection, co-financing and monitoring for ECoC for the years 2013-19³. Under the selection procedures, host countries maintain responsibility for selecting a city, though they must implement a national competition. The relevant authorities in the host countries publish a call for applications 6 years before their turn to host and cities interested in winning the title must submit their proposal by replying to a questionnaire, within around 10 months. A panel of independent experts in the cultural field (thirteen independent experts, of whom seven are nominated by the EU institutions and six by the Member State concerned) meets approximately 5 years before the year to assess the initial proposals against the criteria and to issue a short list of cities (pre-selection). The short-listed cities are invited to submit more detailed applications using a template supplied by the European Commission.⁴ The panel then meets approximately 9 months after the pre-selection meeting to assess the final proposals against the criteria and to recommend one city per host country for the title.

¹ European Commission (1985). Resolution of the Ministers Responsible for Cultural Affairs Concerning the Annual Event European City of Culture (7081/84).

² European Parliament (2005). Decision 649/2005/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 April 2005 amending Decision No 1419/1999/EC establishing a Community action for the European Capital of Culture event for the years 2005 to 2019.

³ European Parliament (2006). Decision 1622/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 2006 establishing a Community action for the European Capital of Culture event for the years 2007 to 2019.

⁴ European Commission (2017). Template for the call for applications including the selection questionnaire. Accessed from: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/default/files/library/capitals-culture-call-applications2019_en.pdf

Monitoring procedures require the designated cities to submit two monitoring reports (respectively 27 months and 11 months in advance of the title year). Submission of the reports is followed by formal monitoring meetings organized by the European Commission with the panel (made off those seven members nominated by EU institutions) respectively 24 months and 8 months in advance of the title year. The aim is to check on progress, ensure that cities are fulfilling their commitments and provide them with guidance on implementation. It is also possible to arrange under the auspices of the Commission additional informal meetings between members of the panel and representatives of the city should this be required.

The 2006 Decision also introduced the "Melina Mercouri Prize": a conditional prize of €1.5m to be awarded to designated cities before the start of the year, on the basis of a recommendation delivered by the monitoring panel. This prize has been awarded for all titles between 2010 and 2019.

The selection, monitoring and EU co-financing procedures introduced by Decision 1622/2006/EC have also been the subject of a specific evaluation undertaken by Ecorys⁵. That evaluation concluded that the procedures represented a considerable improvement on those that operated within the context of the 1999 Decision, which the 2009 ex-post evaluation had found to be insufficient to identify problems systematically and prescribe remedial action. It also found that the monitoring process had played a part in strengthening the ECoC, in particular their focus on the European dimension, while providing EU funding in the form of a prize rather than a grant has reduced the administrative burden and increased flexibility in the use of the funding.

In addition to the formal activities mandated in the ECoC Decision, European Commission's Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC) implements a range of informal accompanying measures, including a guide for candidate cities, guidelines for cities' own evaluations, studies, progress meetings held between the panel and cities six months after designation, information days, and the opportunity for cities to contact and discuss with DG EAC any issues or questions they may have and receive assistance and advice. This support has generally been found by applicants and designated ECoC to be useful, as evidenced by the evaluation of application and selection procedures and the consultation on European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) post-2019.⁶ The Commission also takes steps to promote the successes and lessons learned from the ECoC, including via its website and through publications, such as a compendium of the recommendations made in previous ex post evaluations or a brochure celebrating the 30 years of ECoC and showcasing successful projects.⁷

In 2012, the European Commission proposed a new legal basis for the 2020 titles onwards, informed by the findings of previous evaluations, consultations and studies.⁸ This proposal was subject to extensive discussions and negotiations, which culminated

⁵ Ecorys (2011), Interim Evaluation of Selection and Monitoring Procedures of European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) 2010-2016. Accessed from: http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-programmes-and-actions/doc/ecoc/ecoc_assignment_final_report_en.pdf

⁶ Ecorys (2011) The European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) Post-2019 -Online consultation. Accessed from: http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-programmes-and-actions/doc/ecoc/online_consultation_executive_summary.pdf

⁷ European Commission (2015) European Capitals of Culture. Accessed from: <http://bookshop.europa.eu/en/european-capitals-of-culture-pbNC0215840/>

⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-programmes-and-actions/capitals/capitals-beyond-2019_en.htm;

in Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 'establishing a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2020 to 2033' that repealed Decision No 1622/2006/EC. Several key elements of the Action remained unchanged, such as the chronological order of entitlement, the two-stage selection process based on year-long cultural programmes created specifically for the event, and the fact that cities will remain title holders (though bids may continue to involve the surrounding region). Among the emerging changes from 2020 are:

- removal of the need for confirmation at EU level, with ECoC title holders designated directly by the Member State concerned;
- partial opening of the action to candidate and potential candidate countries (with the European Commission responsible for official designation in these cases); and
- stricter and more specific selection criteria, including stronger emphasis on the long-term impact of the action and reinforcement of the European dimension.

An important change that happened since the adoption of the 2014 Decision is that the UK is not eligible anymore to host the 2023 ECoC as it left the EU in 2020 and does not meet the requirements for participating as a third country.

Table 1.1 ECoC hierarchy of objectives

General objective			
Safeguard and promote the diversity of cultures in Europe, highlight the common features they share, 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 offer in cities, including through transnational co-operation	SO2: Widen access to and participation in culture	SO3: Strengthen the capacity of the cultural and creative sector and its links with other sectors	SO4: Raise the international profile of cities through culture
Operational objectives			
Cultural impacts	Access and participation	Cultural capacity	International profile
<p>Stimulate a diverse range of cultural activities of high artistic quality</p> <p>Implement cultural activities promoting cultural diversity, dialogue and mutual understanding</p> <p>Implement cultural activities highlighting (shared) European cultures and themes</p> <p>Involve European artists, promote cooperation with different countries and transnational partnerships</p> <p>Combine traditional art forms with new types of cultural expression</p>	<p>Create new and sustainable opportunities for a wide range of citizens to attend or participate in cultural events</p> <p>Involve local citizens, artists and cultural organisations in development and implementation</p> <p>Provide opportunities for volunteering and foster links with schools and other education providers</p>	<p>Improve cultural infrastructure</p> <p>Develop the skills, capacity or governance of the cultural sector</p> <p>Stimulate partnership and co-operation with other sectors</p>	<p>Attract the interest of a broad European and international public</p>

1.3 Evaluating the European Capital of Culture

1.3.1 Methodology for the 2019 ECoC Evaluation

The methodology for the evaluation of the ECoC closely followed the approach adopted in previous assessments of the Action. The focus of the evaluation methodology has been on research at the city level and in particular the gathering of data and stakeholders' views from Matera and Plovdiv. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak in late February-early March, the methodology was revised and initially planned visits to both cities did not take place and face-to-face interviews were replaced by remote ones and online meetings with stakeholders. As agreed with the client, for safety reasons interviews were conducted over the telephone, Skype or Microsoft Teams.

Key evaluation sources were as follows:

- EU-level literature: this included higher level EU policy and legislative briefings, papers, decisions and other documents relating to ECoC. This mainly focused on pre-selection and selection reports, reports produced by the monitoring and advisory panel, and the original bidding guidance to understand how the two ECoCs developed in the early days. Academic research was also consulted regarding the ECoC Action and the role of culture in the development of cities which is mainly set out earlier in this section.
- ECoC-level literature from Matera and Plovdiv: this included the original bid books and applications, annual reports and other internal documents of governing bodies in Matera and Plovdiv, application packages for Calls for Proposals and numerous pieces of literature collected on the cultural programme itself. Key monitoring data and in particular local evaluation reports were also collected and analysed.
- Quantitative data: where available, evidence linked to each ECoC was collected in relation to budgets and expenditure, number of projects and events, participation levels and audience figures, social media data, statistics from AirBnB and Vrbo rental properties, number of domestic and international tourists, as well as other pieces of quantitative data to show and describe the work and benefits of the ECoC.
- Interviews with key stakeholders: a total of 60 interviews were conducted:
 - ▷ Interviews with managing teams: those responsible for the design and day-to-day implementation of the ECoC were interviewed remotely in the period from April to June 2020. All of the key staff within the delivery agencies were interviewed, including those responsible for the executive management, artistic direction, marketing and communication, international relations, project implementation and financial management.
 - ▷ Interviews with key stakeholders: remote interviews were also undertaken with stakeholders both directly and indirectly involved in either the planning or delivery of the ECoC, along with those more widely

linked to the cultural, social, economic or political agenda of the host cities. Stakeholders included those working in cultural organisations, local authorities, representatives of the business sector and tourism agencies, media organisations, as well as voluntary and community organisations. Managers of individual projects and activities supported through the ECoC that made up the cultural programme of each city were also interviewed. In addition, some international partners of the host cities were interviewed, which provided an external perspective on the ECoC.

- ▷ Interviews with EU-level stakeholders: one member of the selection and monitoring panel was interviewed.
- Survey among project leaders and cultural operators in Matera: in order to corroborate evaluation findings, a survey among project leaders and cultural operators in Matera was conducted. Unfortunately, the response rate to this survey has been extremely low (5% response rate). This lack of responses is most likely due to survey fatigue as the same stakeholders had been already surveyed by the Foundation and other research organisations. Also, the survey was disseminated during the summertime, when cultural operators could finally re-start their activities after the COVID-19 lockdown, this most likely left little time for the target group to fill in our survey. The survey aimed to collect evidence of impact of the ECoC on the cultural sector and the capacity of cultural operators. To assess this aspect in absence of representative results from the survey, the study team used: 1) data on the capacity building activities implemented; 2) qualitative evidence from interviews (including projects); 3) statistical data on cultural sector. Triangulation of three sources indicated a positive impact on the sector, which was confirmed by the few survey responses (although not representative, the answers collected were used to verify and triangulate findings from the mentioned other sources).
- In Plovdiv, in the period from 2017 until 2020, several surveys (i.e. a representative survey among the adult population of Plovdiv, a poll among visitors of ECoC events and a survey among Roma households in Stolipinovo) as well as 50 interviews with cultural institutions were conducted by the private consultancy company commissioned to monitor the ECoC. As there was already extensive data collected and in order to avoid duplication of stakeholder consultation activities, no survey was launched in Plovdiv within the ex-post evaluation of ECoC 2019.

1.3.2 Evaluation evidence base

This sub section discusses the content and limitations of the evidence which the 2019 ECoC evaluation utilises. It highlights the nature and scope of the methodology upon which the final results of the evaluation are based.

- The methodology as set out in the original agreed tender is focused on collecting the views of various stakeholders through interviews. Despite this method giving mainly qualitative evidence, this is a very useful approach to understand the various questions as set out in the Request for Service.

Gaining the views of stakeholders who have delivered the ECoC often over several years, or stakeholders who have worked in the cultural field in the cities for most of their careers or have been closely involved in issues such as bid development, legacy planning and community development is key to understanding the work of the ECoC and also the benefits that it has brought about. These stakeholders hold relevant and useful views that the evaluation should collect and use as much as possible.

- The methodology used in the European evaluation is in line with the resources made available for the study. The budget allowed for a substantial number of interviews with stakeholders and analysis of secondary data collected from various sources. The evaluation resources including its budget did not allow for any detailed modelling, economic impact assessments or large-scale surveys. This means that the evidence used outside of the interviews is dependent on the local evaluation and other research commissioned by the ECoC cities. If the cities have commissioned large and ambitious evaluations which provide quantitative data on impacts, economic benefits and population surveys before, during and after the ECoC year then the European evaluation will greatly benefit from this information.
- The evaluation was commissioned to run from December 2019 until October 2020. The timing meant that the evaluators began their work at the end of the ECoC year and therefore did not undertake any primary research prior to the ECoC year. This means that any baseline information and assessment prior to the ECoC year relies on secondary evidence supplied by the ECoC cities.
- As requested in the original invitation to tender, the method used for the 2019 ECoC evaluation is largely the same as for previous years. Previous European evaluations have therefore used a similar approach based on stakeholder interviews and the collection and analysis of secondary data.
- The global COVID-19 pandemic evidently impacted the study and obliged the evaluation team, in agreement with DG EAC, to revise the original methodology. In particular, it was not possible to visit the title cities and conduct face-to-face interviews. While this was largely compensated by an increased number of telephone interviews, it also limited the ability of the evaluation team to reach out to some stakeholders (i.e. projects representatives). However, the evaluation is built on strong quantitative foundations through data collected by the title cities and European and national statistics. This data is then reinforced by qualitative evidence collected by reaching out to a large variety of stakeholders (e.g. representatives of title cities, projects, local, regional and national authorities, cultural operators and citizens).

1.3.3 Data gaps and limitations

This sub-section explores the key gaps in data and evidence which the 2019 ECoC evaluation has considered which will be relevant when reading the final evaluation reports.

1.3.3.1 Matera

The limitations of the evidence base for Matera is mainly related to the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) collected by the Foundation on an annual basis from a range of different sources. A key source of quantitative evidence for this evaluation was supposed to be the monitoring information from over 100 KPIs which the delivery agency collected on an ongoing basis. These KPIs relate to measurements linked to five key themes:

- Cultural access and participation,
- Economy and tourism,
- Cultural vibrancy and sustainability,
- Image and perception,
- Governance and delivery process.

Although this existing information is a useful source for the European evaluation, it is worth noting that there are a few key limitations to this data:

- A few indicators relate to macro-level issues, such as the share of regional funding allocated to new cultural programmes or the number of training opportunities offered to entrepreneurs in the creative industry sector. For this reason, some of the indicators go beyond the influence of the ECoC and relate to issues that the ECoC cannot hope to truly change.
- Some of the indicators were not fully updated before the deadline of the draft final report for the European evaluation. In particular, data concerning cultural citizenship and governance and delivery process had not yet been uploaded on the open data portal of the Foundation.
- As mentioned above, the survey of project leaders and cultural operators was not successful in collecting a sufficient number of answers. While this was mostly due to survey fatigue, there were additional limitations to be taken into account. Due to a parallel survey among the same target group, the Foundation could not provide support in disseminating the evaluation survey. Furthermore, due to GDPR, the Foundation could not provide the contact details of the target group, hence the contacts had to be sourced through publicly available information.

1.3.3.2 Plovdiv

The limitations of the evidence base for Plovdiv are mainly related to the indicators, set in the monitoring framework of the bid book and collected by an external provider in the period from 2017 to 2019 through a range of surveys. A key source of quantitative evidence which the European evaluation can utilise is the monitoring information from 39 indicators, which relate to four key assessment areas:

- Cultural sector transformation,
- Identity and image impacts,

- Social impacts,
- Economic impacts.

Although this aspect of existing information is a **useful** source for the European evaluation, it is worth noting that there are three key limitations that the European evaluators note associated with this data:

- Some of the indicators seem beyond the influence of the ECoC and relate to issues that the ECoC cannot hope to truly change. For instance, there are indicators related to 15% decrease in illiteracy rates and school dropouts in the Stolipinovo neighbourhood or increased level of tolerance and acceptance of vulnerable groups in society. The ECoC could contribute to achieving these targets but other external factors would be the main drivers of change for these types of indicators. This means that the European evaluation will use some of the indicators as contextual rather than direct indicators of success for the ECoC.
- Some of the indicators do not have a quantitative element attached to them, either in terms of the main indicator or a target. For example, indicators related to quality of life and happiness index or environmental appreciation do not have any quantitative element. This means that although the indicators could be useful, some of them will only give qualitative rather than quantitative information to the European evaluation.
- There are some challenges related to the sources of information for the indicators related to growth in tourism. For the number of domestic and international visitors, as well as for the number of overnight stays, the most reliable source of data is the National Statistical Institute, which only tracks tourist accommodation establishments with 10 and more bed places. As these establishments account for about 30% of the visitor flow, reported data for these indicators is only a rough estimation.

2.0 Matera

2.1 Background

2.1.1 City

Matera is a relatively small city of 60,000 inhabitants located in the Basilicata region of Southern Italy. It is the capital of the Province of Matera and is also known as the “Cittá Sotteranea” (The Underground City). Today, Matera is known worldwide for its historical centre, known as “I Sassi”. This area includes two districts (Sasso Caveoso and Sasso Barisano) with ancient cave dwellings inhabited since the Palaeolithic period. In 1993, I Sassi was awarded a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, representing “an outstanding example of rock-cut settlement, adapted perfectly to its geomorphological setting and ecosystem”, and also “an outstanding example of an architectural ensemble and landscape illustrating a number of significant stages in human history”⁹.

Matera has a strong rural focus and tradition, and agriculture has represented the main economic activity for many centuries. Today Matera is characterised by a diversified economic sector, largely impacted by the rise of the tourism, handcraft and research sectors which are replacing the local “furniture district” emerged in the last decades of 20th century.

Matera is a perfect example of urban rebirth and regeneration. Until the 1950s, Matera was affected by high levels of poverty and infant mortality rates, partly due to the uninhabitable conditions of the Sassi. Carlo Levi, an Italian intellectual exiled by the Fascist regime in a city close to Matera, described in his famous book *Christ stopped at Eboli*, the difficult conditions of people living in the dwelling caves. In 1952, after the complaint of this situation by the secretary of the Communist Party, Palmiro Togliatti, which named the city as a “national shame”, the Italian Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi proclaimed a state of emergency and in 1964 thousands of people were forcibly relocated from the Sassi to the newly erected neighbourhoods around the city. For conceiving and realizing these new neighbourhoods, the best architects and urban planner of the time were gathered in Matera, which still remains a model for social housing at an international scale also thanks to the collaboration of UNRRA-CASAS (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration). As a result of this forced resettlement, the Sassi were abandoned and quickly became a ghost town.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, a group of students and young professionals from Matera started caring about these abandoned structures. They explored both the urban ancient centre and some caves of the near highland plateau. As a result of this renewed interest, different studies contributed to raise awareness on the historical, social and cultural potential of the historical centre of Matera¹⁰. In fact, the studies highlighted how these dwelling caves could represent an example of a traditional human settlement that has maintained a harmonious relationship with its natural environment over time. This

⁹ UNESCO World Heritage List. The Sassi and the Park of the Rupestrian Churches of Matera. Accessed from: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/670>

¹⁰ Fabbri, M. (1971). *Matera dal sottosviluppo alla nuova città* (Vol. 6). Basilicata editrice. Concorso internazionale per la sistemazione dei Sassi di Matera, & Bertelli, L. (1974). *Indagine storico-urbanistica architettonica dei Sassi*.

changed attitude toward the city and the renovated urban environment led to the approval in 1986 of the Special Law 771, which finally enabled the citizens of Matera to repopulate the dwelling caves. Nevertheless, a large part of these caves had been ceded by their previous dwellers to the public property in return for modern flats and a plot of land at the time of the relocation: this changed the landscape of *I Sassi*, which were no more exclusively destined for residential usage, but could also include, for example, commercial, cultural and touristic uses.

Today, most of the ancient centre has been restored and the caves now host hotels, b&bs, restaurants, cafés as well as cultural spaces such as theatres, museums and exhibiting spaces. These activities turned the city into a regional capital for leisure and culture and helped Matera establish itself as a destination for regional visitors.

2.1.2 Cultural sector

As one of the most ancient cities in the world, Matera offers a large variety of ancient churches and archaeological sites. As mentioned above, Matera is also known as the subterranean city and the Ipogeo Materasum¹¹ represents an exceptional testimony of underground environment brought to light through a conservation restoration process. The Ipogeo Materasum consists of 1,200 square meters of roads, houses, cisterns, trade and places of worship.

Several theatres and museums can be found within the historical centre of the city, *i Sassi*. For instance, Casa Cava¹² is a peculiar example of a theatre found in the caves, which hosts concerts as well as other cultural and multimedia events. Several museums are also located in the centre of the city, such as the National Archaeological Museum "Domenico Ridola", featuring relicts from the Palaeolithic and Neolithic ages, the Museum of Medieval and Modern Art and the Museum of Contemporary Sculpture. Private exhibiting spaces also host temporary exhibitions in the caves. Finally, another peculiarity of Matera is represented by the large number of rupestrian churches scattered in and around the city, such as the Church of Santa Barbara and the Church of San Pietro Barisano.

Moreover, film productions played a key-role in spreading knowledge about Matera during the preparatory phases before 2019. Since 2014, about 30 movies and short films have been shot in Matera mainly thanks to the engagement of Lucana Film Commission, as *Veloce come il vento* (2016) by Matteo Rovere (shot on the evening of the proclamation of the winning ECoC for 2019), *Ben-Hur* (2016) by Timur Bekmambetov with Morgan Freeman, *Wonder Woman* (2017) by Patty Jenkins and finally *No Time To Die*, the most recent James Bond film shot in 2019 and released later in 2020. These productions contributed to raising the awareness of the city around the world and the Matera-Basilicata Foundation adhered to this trend and strategy by promoting relevant projects within the cinematographic domain, including:

- *MaTerre*, produced together with Rete Cinema Basilicata and Lucana Film Commission, was the result of an artistic residence in spring 2019 in Matera: the movie shows the city through the perspective of several Euro-

¹¹ Ipogeo Materasum. Official website. Accessed from: <https://www.ipogeomaterasum.com/en/>

¹² Casa Cava. Official Website. Accessed from: <https://www.casacava.it>

Mediterranean artists in dialogue with the local tradition and literature, also exploiting 3D technology;

- *Formula Cinema* was mainly aimed at the production of a movie by Mohsen Makhmalbaf, already known in Italy for his *Viaggio a Kandahar*. This production was coupled to a series of cinema workshops for the local community;
- *Il Nuovo Vangelo*, a movie directed by Milo Rau and entirely shot in Matera and in the migrants' reception centres of the region. The movie was part of the project *Topoi, teatro e nuovi miti*¹³ and was strongly characterised by the involvement of citizens and migrants to raise awareness on the issues faced by migrants and other marginalised groups;
- *Vado verso dove vengo* is a documentary that was produced in the context of the Storylines project¹⁴. The documentary describes the stories and lives of people who emigrated from Basilicata (both old and new emigration) and relate them to the stories of those who stayed.

2.2 Development of Matera 2019

2.2.1 Application

In line with Decision 1622/2006/EC, Italy was entitled to host a European Capital of Culture in 2019, alongside Bulgaria. The Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism was responsible for organising the competition, divided into two phases: pre-selection (shortlisting of bidding cities) and final selection (one city recommended for the title). An ad hoc **selection panel** of 13 members was set up: 7 members were nominated by various EU Institutions and bodies, and the remaining 6 were nominated by the Ministry, in consultation with the European Commission. The Ministry issued a call for submission of applications open to all Italian cities in November 2012 and received a record number of 21 applications. During the **Pre-selection meeting**, held in Rome a year later, the panel recommended the ministry to invite six cities to the final stage, namely: Cagliari, Lecce, Matera, Perugia, Ravenna and Siena.

The ECoC application submitted by the Matera Foundation¹⁵ highlighted the importance of the cultural renovation process, not only for Matera, but for the entire South of Italy, within a period characterised by an economic and social decline. In this context, the prospect of Matera being designated as 2019 ECoC became the central aspect of the 2020 Strategic Plan for the City of Matera¹⁶. This strategy was inspired by the strategic plans of other Italian and European cities and aimed to tackle the economic decline in the area (which is mainly focused on the production of furniture) by maximising the

¹³ Foundation Matera 2019. Official website. Accessed from: <https://www.matera-basilicata2019.it/it/programma-2019/temi/continuita-e-roture/1345-topoi-teatro-e-nuovi-miti.html>

¹⁴ Foundation Matera 2019. Official website. Accessed from: <https://www.matera-basilicata2019.it/en/programme-2019/themes/reflections-and-connections/1358-storylines-the-lucanian-ways.html>

¹⁵ The Matera-Basilicata 2019 Foundation is the body tasked with the implementation of the ECoC programme. It was founded on 3 September 2014 and will last until 31 December 2022.

¹⁶ Comune di Matera. Matera Comuni Energie – verso il nuovo piano strategico. Accessed from: http://www.comune.matera.it/images/utilita/piano_strategico/comuni%20energie-web.pdf

impact of cultural and creative industries, cultural heritage, social innovation and sustainable cultural tourism.

The decision to prepare an application was taken by the municipality of Matera in 2010, as a result of the growing interest towards this initiative within the city and among local cultural and youth associations. In particular, the citizens of Matera had a strong impact on the final decision of the municipality to bid for the ECoC status and an organisation of citizens called *AssociazioneMatera2019* was created to raise awareness on the opportunity such a status would bring among fellow citizens. *AssociazioneMatera2019* also collaborated with the Foundation in writing the first bid book. In addition to the direct involvement of the municipality in the application process, it is also important to mention the role and synergies developed in this period with regional administrators and cultural operators. In this regard, the ECoC application process contributed to the creation of a network of regional stakeholders and to fostering the collaboration between the two main cities in the Basilicata region (i.e. Matera and Potenza), whose relationship had always been characterised by a strong rivalry.

However, this bottom-up approach lost part of its importance and impetus during the application stages, as the application process was eventually managed directly by the municipality with the appointment of a specific committee, including managers and cultural operators with a strong experience in European and cultural projects, as well as key regional stakeholders (i.e. university, cultural department, tourism promotion office, etc.). Nevertheless, a number of activities were conducted to raise, among the local population, awareness about and interest in the initiative.

The Committee in charge of the application process was characterised by two different areas: a scientific committee and an administrative one. The administrative committee featured different types of stakeholders, such as the Mayor of Matera, the President of the Basilicata region, the dean of the University of Basilicata and the President of the Chamber of Commerce of Matera among others. The scientific committee included well-known members linked to the ECoC initiative.

2.2.2 Selection

Following the pre-selection meeting in November 2013, the panel produced a report. This report stressed that Matera presented a strong and clear concept aimed at addressing culture in a holistic way and at creating change through citizenship and participation. In addition to this, it appeared from the report that the panel appreciated the bottom-up approach to the application process.

The preselection report also highlighted a few critical points to be better addressed by all short-listed cities:

- broaden the awareness of their own citizens on the diversity of Europe's cultures;
- ensure clearer linkages with citizens from other countries;
- include accurate and realistic budgets within their bid books;
- strengthen the focus on evaluation and monitoring plans, by detailing their objectives and methodologies.

The preselected cities were then asked by the Italian Ministry to submit their revised applications by September 2014. A delegation of four members of the Panel visited the six shortlisted cities between 3 and 13 October, spending one day in each city. The **Final selection meeting** took place in Rome on 15–17 October 2014.

The cities presented their revised bids, and the panel provided their assessment in the Selection Panel's final report. The common feedback provided by the Panel was overall very positive, as it welcomed the considerable efforts of all the six cities between pre-selection and final selection. In particular, the Panel appreciated the close relationships established by all the six cities with their Bulgarian counterparts and the fact that the preparation of the final bid was considered a priority in city and regional development plans. After the first ballot, Matera was designed as the winner of the competition.

The final programme presented by Matera under the title "OpenFuture" was built on five themes (see section 3.1.5) and aimed to use culture as a driver for conceiving an open future, to strengthen the diversity of citizens involved in cultural activities and to build useful and sustainable cultural infrastructures. In order to deliver their programme, the presenters explained how the engagement of citizens and the support of 131 municipalities in the region had strengthened the bid, making it visionary but achievable at the same time.

In their assessment, the Panel acknowledged the focus on new technologies and learning in order to overcome the barriers to culture and appreciated what it considered to be quite a visionary approach. The Panel noted that the programme was ambitious and potentially risky in its implementation stages. Against this backdrop, it however welcomed the strong support from the Region, both in financial and administrative terms. Among the other strengths mentioned in its assessment, the Panel was impressed by the cultural activities and artistic approaches included in the programme, providing a strong potential to attract a wider and varied European audience.

The Panel appreciated the activities proposed to foster social and cultural inclusion, in particular the efforts aimed at bringing together those who are more frequently excluded from culture and notably the focus on youth and elderly people. The European dimension of the programme was met through the wide number of partnerships and co-productions planned with artists and operators from Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries. Finally, addressing the panel's concerns in relation to the feasibility of the large number of events and projects proposed, capacity building activities were included in the proposal to help the project managers overcome potential difficulties during the development and implementation phases of the ECoC.

In the Final report conclusions, the Panel provided its recommendation to Matera 2019. Before the First Monitoring Meeting, the city was asked to make progress on the following points:

- Ensure that the governance, administration structure and system is well established by appointing all the Board Members of the Foundation in charge of the programme and by recruiting through open competition the senior posts. The already established Foundation should also provide a detailed staffing plan up to 2020, including also the use of volunteers;

- Provide an implementation plan for monitoring and evaluation processes, also including the collection of base-year qualitative and quantitative data. This plan should run in parallel to the standard ex-post evaluation;
- Retain the momentum and engagement with citizens and cultural operators in the city through ad-hoc meetings and events in line with the citizens and city objective;
- Refresh and enhance the European Dimension of the programme by strongly highlighting the diversity of cultures in Europe.

2.2.3 Development

In May 2015, based on the recommendation of the Selection Panel, the Council of the European Union officially designated the city as European Capital of Culture for the year 2019¹⁷.

The **First Monitoring meeting** on the development of Matera 2019 took place in Brussels in October 2016. The following aspects needing further development / monitoring were underlined:

- **Governance:** the Panel suggested to simplify the governance structure by clearly defining roles, duties and hierarchical relationships of individuals in order to facilitate operations and decision-making processes. In addition to this, the Panel suggested to strengthen the role of the Chairwoman of the Foundation and to promptly fill senior management positions to define responsibilities and to avoid delays in the preparation of the programme;
- **Programme:** the Foundation should broaden its focus on the development of mid-term projects by drawing up a list of concrete and achievable milestones for 2017, and to be submitted to the Panel by the end of January 2017, as well as key points on the next steps in the programme delivery for the years 2017–2019;
- **Infrastructure:** the Foundation should draft a milestone schedule for key infrastructure projects for 2017–2019 in order to ensure that they are fully operational by 2019;
- **Logo:** the Panel recommended that the new designed logo makes clear reference to the European Commission;
- **Inclusion:** the Panel reminded the need to engage civil society and to foster their willingness to participate and hence suggested their inclusion in the organigram of the Foundation and in the governance structure;
- **Evaluation and monitoring:** the Panel suggested that Matera 2019 regularly publishes a public progress report on their website.

¹⁷ Council Decision (EU) 2015/809 of 19 May 2015 designating the European Capitals of Culture for the year 2019 in Bulgaria and Italy. Accessed from: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32015D0809>

The **Second Monitoring meeting** on the development of Matera 2019 took place in Brussels in April 2018. During the meeting, the Panel welcomed the improvements achieved within the development and implementation plan of the ECoC, especially in relation to the governance structure. The main aspects that needed further development or monitoring were highlighted in the recommendation section of the meeting report:

- **Governance:** the Panel recommended to accelerate the filling of vacancies and to update the tasks' description for the key staff members, in order to clearly indicate responsibilities and clarify the decision-making process;
- **Programme:** the Panel advised the delegation of Matera 2019 to provide a structured planning of the programme, covering own productions, co-productions and labelled projects and taking into account the relevant deadlines for subcontracting activities and projects. Moreover, for the activities organised through co-productions, the Panel suggested to build up a task force to properly assist the sub-contractors;
- **Opening weekend:** the Panel recommended to appoint an ad-hoc team for the organisation of this demanding event, in order to assist and guide the external contractors;
- **Communication:** in order to carefully take into account the different target groups and the two categories of 'new' and 'traditional' tourists, the Panel suggested to further reflect on meaningful communication messages and hospitality-related aspects;
- **Infrastructure:** the Panel recommended to find alternative solutions and locations in case of delays with the infrastructure implementation plan;
- **Legacy:** the Panel encouraged the Foundation to start planning and dedicate resources to the legacy of Matera 2019, by also involving the Scientific Committee and the stakeholders of the city and the region.

Finally, the Panel recommended the Commission to award the Melina Mercury prize to Matera 2019, in view of the strong compliance with the criteria of European Dimension and City and Citizens involvement.

2.3 Cultural programme

Matera 2019 started with an Opening Ceremony on 19 January 2019. The Ceremony consisted of a full day of celebrations throughout the city with different musical and artistic performances in the historical centre of Matera, together with the opening of the first main exhibitions at Palazzo Lanfranchi and Museo Ridola. These celebrations mainly consisted in:

- the gathering of 2019 musicians from all over Europe, who were welcomed in the surroundings cities and villages and then converged to Matera for playing together with local marching bands;
- at sunset, illumination of the whole city with candles, while musical and live performances took place;

- a parade throughout the city, following the traditional itinerary of the local procession for the patron saint (Madonna della Bruna) and closing with a performance in the main square;
- an official ceremony of inauguration involving the highest representatives of the city and region, the country and Europe (including Commissioner Navracsics) as well as of the foundation;
- an artistic performance broadcasted on the national channel at prime time.

The Opening event was seen as being successful in raising the awareness about the ECoC throughout the region and beyond.

As already mentioned, “Open Future” was the central motto of Matera 2019. The slogan was chosen because the ECoC was intended to represent “an opportunity to move towards openness in all of its multiple definitions: open, as in “accessible to all”; open, as in “freely available and unrestricted”; open, as in “not concealing one’s thoughts or feelings”; open, as in “still admitting of debate”.

Hence, the cultural programme aimed to “strengthen broad ranging, open and diversified citizenship; to enhance international relations and above all to transform Matera into the most important platform of open culture in Southern Europe”.¹⁸ For these reasons, each project and activity included in the cultural programme embraced three separate dimensions: the local dimension (Matera and Basilicata), the Southern dimension (addressing the cultural dimension of Italy’s *meridione* as a whole) and the European dimension (engaging cultural operators on a pan-European scale). Due to the peculiar and diversified civilisation heritage of Matera, the cultural programme aimed to explore the fragile harmony between mankind, city and landscape upon which the city was founded nine thousand years ago.

The cultural programme was organised around five different thematic lines:

- Ancient Futures: projects under this theme explored the relationship with nature and landscape. The activities under this strand tried to reconnect the visitors and citizens with experiences that have become unfamiliar in our cities, such as darkness, silence, solitude and isolation. Moreover, following in the footsteps of one of the most illustrious residents of the region, the mathematician Pythagoras who reportedly lived in the area around 500 B.C., the activities explored the beauty of mathematics and the endless possibilities of remote futures;
- Continuity and disruptions: the peculiar history of Matera, and its path to the present time, is a story of ingenuity and resilience. Projects under this theme offered an opportunity for a process of collective therapy aimed at understanding how to collectively give shape to our cities and how to find beauty in the spaces inhabited on a daily basis;
- Utopias and dystopias: projects under this theme tested new radical models that challenged specific assumptions (i.e. the assumption that technology is

¹⁸ Matera 2019 Committee (2014). Matera Candidate city European Capital of Culture. Accessed from: <https://www.matera-basilicata2019.it/en/news/550-the-bid-book-of-matera-2019-is-on-line.html>

the only possible mediator for relationships) through a series of games and urban/rural sports that will transform Matera in a playground aimed at changing attitudes and mentality;

- Roots and routes: building from the local tradition of 'transumanza' (annual ritual herding of the cows), the activities under this strand focused on mobility and explored the culture of mobility that brings together European citizens;
- Reflections and connections: storytelling, cinematic narratives and oral histories were the main activities under this theme, which aimed at re-examining identity and providing citizenship with a new model of 'everyday life' based on art, science and the widespread practice of cultural citizenship.

Two infrastructural projects were at the heart of the programme and explored across these five overarching themes:

- I-DEA (Institute of Demo-Ethno-Anthropological Archive): the aim of this project was to digitize the existing archives of the Basilicata region and make them publicly available and easily accessible for all. The archive collected a large number of public documents, but also material from private collections and cultural associations. The project aimed to be a prototype for a new conception of local European cultural institutions of the 21st century. In fact, I-DEA collated already existing documents and files from the local area, with the view to maximising the potential of existing heritage resources. Another interesting feature of this project related to the mapping of oral memories from the city and the region, which contributed to document the cultural aspects of the region, such as the rituals, festivals, dialects, gastronomy and other aspects of Basilicata' tangible and intangible cultural heritage. In practical terms, the Institution did not physically centralise these collections but instead linked them to a central network working as a point of access for all citizens. The ambition was also to end up stimulating future collaborations and exchanges with other European institutions. It built up, through three artistic residencies (with the photographer Mario Cresci, the design studio Formafantasma and the choreographer Virgilio Sieni), some keys for selecting objects, documents and records and presenting them in a dynamic exhibit form;
- Open Design School: building on the experience of Matera as the "distretto del salotto" (furniture design district), Open Design School was the first European design school founded on the principles of open culture, as it brought together authors, bloggers, designers, craftsmen, hackers, graduates, students and professionals. The aim of this open school was to transform Matera and Basilicata into an area of radical innovation in the arts, science and technologies, due to its focus on learning and experimenting without strict hierarchies, where everyone learns from the other. Finally, the school worked as a laboratory for the co-creation of scenes settings and equipment for the implementation of the cultural activities.

In addition, a large number of events were also organised, such as four large thematic exhibitions, 40 international meetings and summer schools and 62 original productions. The *Ars Excavandi* exhibition was part of the activities organised under the Utopias and Dystopias strand and combined a contemporary look at the history and culture of subterranean architecture from the Palaeolithic period to the present and towards the future. It took place at renovated Museo Ridola and was combined with a visit to the hypogeum of the Palazzo Lanfranchi museum, usually not accessible and especially set up for visits during the first period of the ECoC year. Under the theme Reflection and Connections, the *Re-reading Renaissance* exhibition brought visitors onto a journey through the artistic past of the two neighbouring regions of Apulia and Basilicata and proposed a renewed and less Tuscany-centred perspective on the Italian and European Renaissance. The *Anthropocene Observatory* exhibition combined film, photography, documentation, interviews, spatial analysis and fieldwork to explore spaces of continuity (from Helocene settlements to contemporary explorations of Earth-Observation science). Finally, the fourth exhibition, at the archaeological museum of the ancient city of Metaponto, was entitled *Poetry of primes* and was part of the Ancient Futures theme. It explored the centrality of mathematics in the work of artists throughout ages. Finally, Matera 2019 also had a dedicated collaboration programme with Plovdiv 2019. With Plovdiv, Matera collaborated on street-art projects and game-approach methods to transform the two cities' urban environments. In addition to this, the two cities produced cultural activities that travelled out along a Euro-Mediterranean route through the Balkans and linking Matera and Plovdiv with the future ECoC in Croatia (Rijeka) and Serbia (Novi Sad).

2.3.1 European dimension

The cultural activities that were part of the ECoC programme of Matera 2019 contributed to promote **cultural diversity, dialogue** and **mutual understanding**, as they involved a large number of international artists, project managers and partner associations. Out of the total number of artists and the local project leaders involved by the Foundation, 45% were international. In addition to this, over 1,000 international mobility programmes were realised with 55 different countries, as well as 15 debates involving international artists focusing on urban regeneration, cultural engagement and productions. This international dimension of the cultural offer enhanced the European dimension of the ECoC and contributed to bringing Matera and its citizens closer to Europe.

The Matera 2019 application set out the aspiration to design a cultural programme able to enhance the city's role in European culture, its belonging to Europe and its current participation in European artistic and cultural life. However, the application also acknowledged the challenge of achieving such a goal due to the uneven playing field Matera was starting from. In fact, the city and region suffered from a lack of international connections and capacity to attract international cultural operators and establishing international partnerships. This self-assessment done at application stage highlighted the need to prepare the ground for the ECoC year prior to 2019 by putting in place several activities already during the lead in period. **'Materadio'** provided the opportunity to host in Matera several concerts and events featuring international artists from previous ECoC cities (i.e. Turku, Guimaraes and Marseille). The project **'UnMonastery'** was aimed at creating links between skilled individuals from across Europe within communities that could benefit from their presence, thus preparing the

ground for the development of the Open Design School, one of the flagship projects included in the bid book. Finally, the event '**Matera Meets Berlin**' contributed to establish contacts between the local cultural operators and German artists and musicians through concerts, dialogues and meetings.

To help each project leader and local cultural operator to find (and maximise) a European dimension in their projects, the Foundation created the '**Go&See**' action. This initiative allowed 27 local cultural operators to visit another EU country to meet artists or other cultural organisations they wanted to collaborate with or learn from. The action had a relatively small cost (the operators received a voucher symbolically worth 2,019 EUR), but was strongly welcomed by the project leaders of Matera 2019 and was recognised to have contributed to setting up new networks and collaboration opportunities with European artists. For instance, the local organisation Onyx Jazz club had the opportunity through this initiative to travel to Vienna in December 2017 to meet Austrian artists, musicians and architects. In order to prepare their cultural activity, **Suoni del Futuro Remoto** (Sounds from a remote future),¹⁹ this local association aimed to understand the relationship between space and music through meetings and discussions with artists from the Experimentelle Gestaltung (Department of Experimental Arts of the Linz University) and from the Wien Music University among the others. The experience provided the opportunity for the Onyx Jazz Club to learn how to prepare large experimental concerts, as well as to establish relevant partnerships with Austrian artists and with the main Austrian radio broadcasting channel (i.e. ORF²⁰).

The '**Architecture of Shame**' project gathered representatives for a further international experience, Farm Cultural Park in Favara (Sicily) and New Art Exchange centre in Nottingham (UK), to work with inhabitants on the subject of the "shame" in architecture. Within the context of the 20th century neighbourhoods, local experiences and narratives were explored and then compared to other international case-studies. The collaboration with the '**EU Japan Fest**' provided Matera with the opportunity to host events and activities aimed at strengthening the links between the European and Japanese cultures through workshops, hosting of artists, exhibitions and the establishment of artistic residencies.

Another aspect that strongly contributed to the promotion of the European dimension of the ECoC title holding city were the efforts to host in Matera artists from all over the world and, in particular, from Europe.²¹ The initiative **Residenze Matera 2019** aimed to establish different artistic residences that could promote international and European cultural values, as well as European cultural diversity. A total of 41 artists from all the EU countries, also including artists from Switzerland, the UK and Turkey, were hosted in Matera, creating permanent or temporary cultural hubs offering opportunities to diversify the local cultural offer through their involvement and participation in cultural events and initiatives.²² Moreover, these cultural hubs, by both offering an international cultural perspective and promoting European diversity and cultural values, contributed

¹⁹ Foundation Matera 2019. Official website. Accessed from: <https://www.matera-basilicata2019.it/it/percorso/co-creazione/go-see.html>

²⁰ ORF Radiothek. Official website. Accessed from: <https://radiothek.orf.at/>

²¹ Foundation Matera 2019. Official website. Accessed from: <https://www.matera-basilicata2019.it/it/programma-2019/temi/riflessioni-e-connessioni/residenze-matera-2019.html>

²² Foundation Matera 2019. Final Monitoring Report: A Matera si produce cultura. Accessed from: <https://www.matera-basilicata2019.it/it/report-2019/a-matera-si-produce-cultura.html>

to strengthening the cultural vibrancy of the territory as well as the capacity of the local cultural operators. In addition to this initiative, 421 international artists were hosted in Matera or in other cities of Basilicata to collaborate with the Foundation and project leaders on the design and implementation of the original productions of Matera 2019, thus also contributing to promote a European and international dimension within the local community.

Further developing the European dimension of their programmes, the two 2019 ECoC cities, Matera and Plovdiv, established a strong cooperation in relation to:

- **Communication:** the two ECoC held a joint presentation of the two cultural programmes, established a dedicated info point in the two cities to promote the cultural activities of the other ECoC and launched a common communication campaign in Rome in 2018;
- **Volunteers:** a volunteer exchange programme was developed;
- **Events:** the two ECoC developed six joint events, such as the opening ceremonies, travelling exhibitions and ad-hoc projects (**Liquid Europe, Cosmic Jive: Valya Balkanska and Bread's Routes**).

Leveraging on the ECoC brand, the Foundation aimed to reinforce the links with former ECoC by organising capacity-building activities with Aarhus (sustainability policies and volunteers), Leeuwarden (work with communities) and Marseille (safety of public events, circus and legacy). Also, in cooperation with Leeuwarden, Aarhus and other European partners, Matera implemented the '**Night Light**' Interreg project aiming at bringing together key lessons and practices experienced in different European contexts related to reducing light pollution. This Interreg project was connected to two other events of the Matera 2019 cultural programme, **Social Lights** and **Onda**, also built around the preservation of the night sky and astronomy. Finally, Matera 2019 is also the coordinator of an Erasmus+ project, DeuS – European Open Design School for Sustainable Regional Development. In collaboration with other partners from 8 other countries, the project aims to co-create a European-wide learning and training approach in design, critical thinking and entrepreneurship to find participatory, creative and cost-effective solutions to local challenges, by unlocking the potential of the cultural and creative sector.²³

2.3.2 City and citizens dimension

The original Matera 2019 application stressed that the cultural programme would be centred around the citizens, who were seen as the real protagonists of the ECoC 2019. The ultimate original goal was indeed to make Matera a European co-creation capital through the direct involvement of citizens in the development and implementation of cultural projects, activities and laboratories.

The promotion of the "city and citizens" dimension was built around three main pillars:

- **Inclusion:** involving different sub-segments of citizens in the cultural activities organised;

²³ DeuS. Official website. Accessed from: <https://www.deuscci.eu/>

- **Participation:** creating opportunities for local residents and encouraging them to actively participate in the preparation of cultural activities and events through open public calls;
- **Community platform:** providing citizens and local cultural operators with opportunities and tools to facilitate their direct involvement in the cultural programme.

Matera 2019 aimed to involve groups of citizens that normally do not have the opportunity to engage in cultural activities. In this perspective, the project **Silent Academy**²⁴ is a good example of how migrants and refugees can not only participate in a cultural project, but also become protagonists whilst developing new skills. Spearheaded by a local organisation with the support of the Foundation, the project built up an academy where migrants living in Basilicata could practice traditional artistic forms (craftsmanship, tailoring, etc.), further developing technical or academic skills already acquired in their home country. Through this project, migrants and locals could exchange good practices and learn about different traditions and working methods.

Another example of Matera 2019 engaging with a new audience is the project **Humana Vergogna**²⁵. This project was developed in collaboration with the detainees of the local prison and was aimed at exploring the concepts of collective and individual shame through a theatrical and dance performance directly involving the audience. The play was based on a research process conducted through focus groups and workshops aimed at re-defining and re-conceptualising the concept of shame.

Finally, some ECoC activities were also directly targeted at people with disabilities, such as the '**Movimento libero**' dance labs²⁶ (further described in section 2.5.2) organised for people with mobility issues and the project **Silent City**²⁷, an opera event featuring sign languages for deaf people.

In collaboration with the Italian Ministry of Education and the Region of Basilicata, a number of projects involving students were launched to ensure that the 'students and young people are not only passively absorbing culture but become ambassadors of culture'.²⁸ Three main projects were developed at the national level:

- Dalle scuole per le scuole (From schools for schools),
- Patrimonio in gioco (Heritage in play),
- Giornata delle eccellenze (Excellence day).

More information on these projects are found below.

²⁴ Il Sicomoro. Official website. Accessed from: <http://ilsicomoro.net/progetti/silent-academy/>

²⁵ Matera Events. Official website: Accessed from: https://www.materaevents.it/events/view/teatro/2050/humana_verqogna

²⁶ Foundation Matera 2019. Official website. Accessed from: <https://www.matera-basilicata2019.it/it/area-stampa/comunicati-stampa/comunicati-stampa-istituzionali/2166-matera-2019-danza-inclusiva-con-attori-abili-e-disabili.html>

²⁷ Foundation Matera 2019. Official website. Accessed from: <https://www.matera-basilicata2019.it/it/area-stampa/comunicati-stampa/comunicati-stampa-di-progetto/2404-silent-city-la-citta-di-matera-si-racconta-con-un-opera-lirica.html>

²⁸ Interview with MIUR (Italian Ministry for Education)

Box 1 Involving the students in Matera 2019

Dalle scuole per le scuole (From schools for schools)

As one of the themes of the European Capital of Culture initiative was the promotion and discovery of local heritage, the Italian Ministry of Education launched a call for schools to develop student projects showcasing local traditions and cultural sites. Four projects were selected: one from Sicily, one from Emilia Romagna and two from Basilicata. The participating students were invited to Matera for a concluding event.

This national project also had a regional strand promoted by the Basilicata region that saw the involvement of all the schools of the region to develop a catalogue of 22 cultural itineraries across the region.

Patrimonio in gioco (Heritage in play)

The European Capital of Culture provided students with the opportunity to rediscover and re-imagine local history and traditions. This regional call aimed to bring together local heritage and new technologies. Primary schools were invited to select a local female historical figure and tell her story using digital means. Secondary schools, on the contrary, had to select an ancient product and re-develop it using modern technology and 3D printing. The students were supported by a team of IT experts. About 700 students from about 60 schools were involved and all of the participants were then invited to the city of Policoro for a concluding event.

Giornata delle eccellenze (Excellence day)

This event was linked to the National Academic Olympics. The winners (about 90 students) were invited to Matera for an urban treasure hunt that would lead them to discover the city and learn about its history and culture.

The focus on participation and the development of a community platform are evidently interconnected. A strong emphasis indeed was put on the direct engagement of citizens and their active involvement through co-creation practices and ad-hoc structures. In order to foster the participation of citizens in delivering cultural projects linked to the ECoC, the Foundation published several specific **open calls** through which citizens or local community organisations could submit their project ideas. As a result of these calls, 80 applications were received, of which 27 were finally selected. Once selected, local project leaders were supported by experienced project managers employed by the Foundation and were invited to workshops, trainings and brainstorming sessions on subjects linked to project management and implementation in the cultural field. The emphasis on **co-creation and capacity building** and the development of these participatory tools strongly contributed to the feeling of ownership of the process and the events. It also facilitated the upskilling of citizens and local cultural operators involved and provided citizens with the opportunity to participate in activities they had never experienced before.

Furthermore, the Foundation contributed to the creation of a platform aimed to listen and address citizens' cultural needs. The **Open Design School**, a flagship project of Matera 2019 presented above, provided a laboratory of interdisciplinary experimentation and innovation, which is planned to continue working after 2019. Through this project, citizens had the opportunity to come together with over 100 national and international artists. The Open Design School soon became a place of sharing and mutual learning, driven by the need for continuous creative exchange between art, science and technology. Thanks to the direct involvement of citizens, the School contributed to the realisation of 9 large exhibitions, 11 urban installations, 10 cultural events and to the mapping of 400 venues and locations for cultural activities scattered all over Matera. It also largely contributed to the opening ceremony, by fostering the participation of the peripheral areas of Matera. In particular, the Open Design School worked with the citizens from these parts of Matera to welcome international musicians and artists and contributed to the organisation of concerts and gastronomical events in these areas of the city.

These initiatives were a novelty in the region and without the ECoC, there would not have been such an opportunity to engage citizens in a similar fashion (i.e. in dance, theatre performances, storytelling, etc.). It is estimated that about 57,000 citizens were directly involved in cultural productions.²⁹ The co-creation process and the capacity building programme put in place by the Foundation, bringing together cultural operators, citizens and volunteers, gave citizens the opportunity to contribute to about 70% of the cultural programme of Matera 2019. The involvement of young people was also quite important, as approximately 30,000 students were involved in projects realised in collaboration with local and national schools, as a result of the collaboration described above between the Foundation and the Italian Ministry for Education.³⁰

In this regard, the project *Abitare l'Opera* (Living the Opera) represents a peculiar example of the co-creation approach adopted in Matera. This project was realised in collaboration with the San Carlo Theatre in Naples and was aimed to turn the whole city and the daily lives of its citizens into an open stage. Over 200 artists collaborated with 70 citizens who took an active part in the opera performance that represented the larger-scale original production of Matera 2019. The event was broadcasted live on national and international TV channels and on streaming platforms.

Despite the wide outreach achieved through the co-creation process, some stakeholders mentioned that the level of citizens' participation varied according to the degree of responsibility allocated by the project managers to them. While some projects involved the citizens in the development and implementation of the cultural activity - allowing them to learn new competences or gain new skills, a few project managers only engaged with citizens to overcome a lack of capacity in their projects, thus citizens were undertaking tasks that could have been done by volunteers instead.

Matera 2019 was also able to take advantage of the enthusiastic participation of almost 600 volunteers (out of the 1,500 registered). A survey conducted in spring 2020 among the volunteers and that collected 172 answers revealed that about 95% of respondents

²⁹ Foundation Matera 2019. Final Monitoring Report: A Matera si produce cultura. Accessed from: <https://www.matera-basilicata2019.it/it/report-2019/a-matera-si-produce-cultura.html>

³⁰ Ibid.

were satisfied with their participation in the ECoC 2019. Volunteers also reported to have benefited from their participation in the ECoC activities. According to the survey, some 165 respondents recognised personal growth in relation to:

- the interaction with citizens and the audience (64% saying it had helped them develop such skills),
- artistic and cultural knowledge (57%),
- teamwork (55%),
- self-confidence (42%),
- marketing and promotion of events (30%),
- coordination (30%).

Although it was lower than the Foundation had hoped for, around 10 **artistic residencies** were activated in 2019. These residencies allowed international artists to live in and experience Matera and the Basilicata region, translating this experience into artistic creations. This opportunity led to mutual transfers of vision, experiences and knowledge between the guest artists and the local community.

Ultimately, as further described in this report (see sections 2.2 and 2.5), the co-creation process, intended as the involvement of several groups of stakeholders (i.e. local and regional citizens, tourists, students, volunteers and cultural operators), capacity building and continuous cultural exchange, was a pervasive and stratified experiment that strongly characterised Matera 2019.

2.4 Governance and funding

2.4.1 Governance

The Matera-Basilicata Foundation 2019 was in charge of the governance of the Matera ECoC. The Foundation offices are located in the historical centre of Matera. The president of the Foundation was the previous mayor Salvatore Adduce, from the centre-left Democratic Party, who supported the bidding process and defined the path of the governance of the event from 2010 to 2015. The general management of the Foundation was entrusted to Paolo Verri, who was also in charge of the opening and closing ceremonies, the large-scale events and the design of the communication strategy. The Cultural Manager was Ariane Bieou, from IN SITU (the European platform for artistic creation in public space), based in Marseille at Lieux Publics, which had a key role in implementing the performing arts programme of Marseille-Provence 2013 ECoC. The Foundation team consisted of people from a variety of European countries including France, Germany, the UK and Italy. As Cultural Manager for Matera 2019, Ariane Bieou has been coordinating and supporting the work of the project leaders, thus contributing to the realisation of the different original productions of Matera 2019.

The goal of the Foundation was the implementation of the objectives described in the ECoC Bid Book: to deliver the programme of activities until the end of 2019, to consolidate the role of Matera as a hub for cultural and creative industries in Europe and to provide a platform for cultural businesses in the South of Italy. The Foundation

worked for supporting and encouraging the development of specific skills related to the cultural and creative sectors, for introducing cultural operators in European networks and for promoting new practices in artistic creation, production and tourism, which included a renewed care for social inclusion and technological innovation.

The overall ECoC programme was overseen by a Board of Directors and a Board of Trustees, including the dean and associate professors from the Basilicata University, the mayor of Matera and representatives from the Matera Province and the Basilicata regional authority. In addition, a dedicated and international Scientific Board provided relevant expertise and advice to the managing boards. Local authorities and officials were directly involved in the Foundation, not just within the Board of Directors but also because they were entrusted with managing roles. For example, an official of the Basilicata Region previously involved in European cooperation programmes had become manager of the Networking department of the Foundation and became General Manager after Paolo Verri completed his term of office in spring 2020.

While the General Manager was responsible for the general administration, marketing, communication and fundraising, three managers were in charge of the implementation of each specific department: Networking, Administration and Cultural programme. The Networking department included capacity building, public relations, contacts with local authorities, public fundraising and legacy. In addition to these areas of competence, this Department was also responsible for two flagship projects (I-DEA and Open Design School), but also for those projects that directly involved citizens in the design and implementation of the cultural activities. The Administration department managed all the aspects related to business plan and monitoring, accounting, human resources, agreements and subcontractors. The Cultural programme department produced the Matera 2019 projects that were directly under the responsibility of the Foundation, supervised the partners' projects and elaborated the full calendar of preparatory events and activities in 2019. It was involved in mentoring and training activities for the implementation of capacity-building activities, co-creation processes and internationalization, also ensuring an effective contact with the Plovdiv 2019 organisation and cultural operators.

The management composition of the Foundation indicates the effort made to gather the required competences to ensure an efficient and successful implementation of the action. According to some interviewees, the choice of bringing in competences from outside the local panorama was initially seen negatively by several local cultural operators, who felt excluded from the coordination of the process. In 2017, a call for 'Makers' and 'Linkers' seemed therefore instrumental in approaching local professionals and bringing them back into the process, ensuring a stronger sense of ownership of the development of Matera 2019 and reducing scepticism towards the Foundation. The creation, in autumn 2017, of a pool of 40 local "Makers" (project managers) and "Linkers" (audience developers and community builders) facilitated the implementation of the cultural programme. Within this pool, both the Foundation and its partners were meant to recruit their project staff members. The selected operators, who had to reside in the Basilicata Region, were asked to attend a Build-Up training (see Section 2.5.3 - Cultural capacity) in order to reinforce their skills.

After it was created in 2014, the Foundation went through an 'interrupted rhythm' of work, mainly due to the lack of continuity in local government resulting from the 2015

municipal elections. In particular, the political change at the municipal level had a significant impact on the design and development of the cultural programme, due to political frictions and different views on how to implement the programme proposed in the bid book. According to some interviewees, around a year and a half of the Foundation's work was substantially put on hold because of this political change. This impasse was unblocked around the time of the first monitoring meeting in October 2016 in Brussels. Against this backdrop, the Foundation acknowledged that the project needed to speed up, in particular in better defining the cultural programme of the ECoC year. As a result, first public calls for projects were prepared and published.

In late 2016, the process accelerated: recruitment of all vacant team positions took place throughout 2017, project leaders were selected and the local community was involved through some targeted actions (ex. Build-Up training, Open Design School, Social communication team...).

After 2019, the activity of the Foundation was oriented to reporting tasks and legacy building. Internal and subcontracted reports were drafted during the first semester 2020 and they were published by the end of July 2020. Legacy is focused on strengthening the key role played in 2019 by Matera and the whole Basilicata Region as a creative and cultural district for the South of Italy and at a European scale. In 2020, the work of the Foundation then follows four main guidelines:

- improving the role of small cities and inland areas for tourism and the development of the cultural sector;
- fostering co-creation as a trigger for citizens' engagement in cultural production;
- promoting urban regeneration and requalification, temporary re-use of the public space in a cultural and touristic perspective through the Open Design School project;
- developing a calendar of events for the whole Basilicata Region, which can enlarge the current range of activities for both permanent and temporary citizens (i.e. respectively inhabitants and visitors) by offering new "experiences".

The Foundation will work in 2020 with 13 employees and a budget of €6 million (including €1.2 million from the Melina Mercouri Prize) is allocated to fulfil these goals.

2.4.2 Funding

The **budget** for the delivery of the ECoC is estimated by Matera 2019 at €50 million. 94% of this overall budget (i.e. approximately €47 million) was covered by the public purse, while the remaining funds have been secured through private partnerships and sponsorships. €33.2 million of the public sector funding was provided by the national government and €12.2 million by the regional authority and the Matera municipality. The remaining funds were secured through EU and national funding applications, such as the Melina Mercouri prize (€1.6 million), and private funding.

Detailed figures on the proposed and actual financing and expenditure of Matera 2019 are included in the tables below.

Table 2.1 Actual operational budget of Matera 2019

Item	Bid book	Total expenditure (€)	% of total expenditure	Difference between planned and actual budget
Programme expenditure³¹	36.3 m	34.8m	63 %	- 6.3 m
Advertising and public relations	9.3 m	9 m	16 %	- 0.3 m
Salaries, administration overheads,	6.4 m	8.8 m	16 %	+ 2.4 m
Legacy	0 m	2.2 m ³²	4 %	+ 2.2 m
Total	52.3	54.8 m	100%	-2.5 m

Source: Matera 2019 Foundation and Matera 2019 Bid book

Table 2.2 Expenditure of Matera 2019 over time

Item	Total expenditure (€)	% of total expenditure
2015 – 2019	52.6 m	96 %
2020	2.2 m	4 %
Total	54.8 m	100%

Source: Matera 2019 Foundation

Table 2.3 Actual income of Matera 2019

Year	Total financing (€)	% of total financing
National government (MIBAC³³ and DIP COE³⁴)	38.2 m	68%
Other public (Basilicata Region and Matera Municipality)	12.2 m	24%
Private sector (incl. sponsors)	2.1 m	4%
EU	1.6 m	3%
Other	0.7 m	1%
Total	54.8 m	100%

Source: Matera 2019 Foundation

The final budget of Matera was generally in line with the proposed budget in the bid book of €52 million, while its repartition was changed during the implementation phase

³¹ The renovation costs of the main cultural venue "Cava del Sole" have been included in this budget line. The total cost was 4.8 m, which were provided by the National Government.

³² Allocated amount.

³³ Ministry for Cultural Activities and Tourism. Official website. Accessed from: <https://www.beniculturali.it/>

³⁴ Department for cohesion policies. Official website. Accessed from: <http://presidenza.governo.it/AmministrazioneTrasparente/Organizzazione/ArticolazioneUffici/Dipartimenti/DPC.html>

of the initiative. In particular, the overall expenditure for administration costs was largely higher than initially foreseen, while fewer resources were allocated to other areas, in particular the programme expenditure and the marketing and communication budget. The EU funding provided in the form of the Melina Mercouri Prize was added to the general budget for the legacy of Matera 2019, and thus was spent during 2020.

Although no specific budget for the legacy of the initiative was planned in the proposal, the Foundation managed to secure before 2020 about 6 million to work on the legacy of Matera 2019.³⁵ However, the COVID-19 outbreak put on hold the activities foreseen for 2020 and impacted the funds availability. The latest budget published by the Foundation indicated that 2.2 million had been currently reserved for the legacy.

Moreover, as also mentioned by some key stakeholders interviewed, the Foundation could have made a better use of EU funding by applying to relevant EU funding programmes. As outlined in section 2.3.1, the only successful EU project applications relate to an Interreg project developed in cooperation with Leeuwarden and Aarhus (respectively ECoC 2018 and 2017) and to an Erasmus+ project (DEUS36).

2.4.3 Marketing and communications

The marketing and communications for the ECoC were managed by the communication and digital team of the Matera 2019 Foundation. The emphasis on digital communication and the approach developed to reach local, national and international audiences positively contributed to raising awareness and informing all relevant audiences of the ECoC programme and its different initiatives. As outlined by key stakeholders, one of the main reasons behind the success of the communication campaign of Matera 2019 was the internal management of communication and marketing though some activities were outsourced.

Two communication managers, one in charge of traditional media and one of digital media, guided and supported the work undertaken by volunteers and contractors. While the website management was undertaken by contracted webmasters, the analysis and reporting on the social media performance was carried out by a specialised Italian company, Blogmeter.³⁷ In order to improve the digital communication of the ECoC, Blogmeter provided bi-monthly reports to the Foundation, identifying successes and challenges of the digital communication strategy.

Key stakeholders interviewed also emphasised the role of the digital volunteers, in particular their support to the social media communication activities of the Foundation. The digital volunteers were mainly involved in re-posting and sharing information on Matera 2019 and in brainstorming activities with the Foundation managers to define the digital communication strategy of Matera 2019. In this regard, the forward-looking approach of the Foundation has been crucial for the achievement of positive social media results (see international profile below). As pointed out by the digital communications manager, the development of the digital team had already started in 2013, before the

³⁵ Foundation Matera 2019. Official website. Accessed from: <https://www.matera-basilicata2019.it/it/area-stampa/comunicati-stampa/comunicati-stampa-istituzionali/2491-matera-2019-il-cda-ha-approvato-bilancio-di-previsione-e-legacy.html>

³⁶ DeuS. Official website. Accessed from <https://www.deuscci.eu/>

³⁷ Blogmeter. Official website. Accessed from: <https://www.blogmeter.it/it/home>

designation of Matera as ECoC 2019. In this context, a few days of training were offered to citizens willing to use social media to communicate the main milestones of the Matera 2019 candidacy process. As a result of these training opportunities, approximately 40 volunteers became involved in the digital team of Matera. This number increased further after the designation of Matera as ECoC 2019 and by 2019 there were over 100 volunteers working in the digital team of the Matera 2019 Foundation.

The social media strategy was based on a general campaign advertising the different activities of the ECoC programme during 2019. After 2019, the digital communication was originally intended to wrap-up the main results of the 2019 ECoC programme, while providing new content and information on the 2020 activities. The COVID-19 outbreak and the need to re-think the digital communication in accordance with the revised 2020 cultural programme shifted the attention to the work of project leaders and cultural operators in the context of COVID-19 and the digital events and workshops organised.

The communication via traditional media (TV, radio, press) was managed by a dedicated team within the Foundation in collaboration with a local media agency responsible for undertaking interviews and organising press releases. In general, the traditional media approach aimed at targeting three different geographical dimensions through ad-hoc partnerships and collaborations with selected media channels. A regional TV channel covered the ECoC communication in Basilicata, while the national coverage was secured through a long-standing relationship with the national radiobroadcaster, RAI Radio 3. In this context, the radio programme Materadio started broadcasting selected cultural events in Matera in 2011. Finally, a specific partnership with Euronews contributed to increasing the awareness of Matera 2019 and the ECoC brand worldwide. Euronews broadcasted 10 different episodes on Matera³⁸. The episodes were featured in a specific programme designed by Euronews for Matera 2019 called GoMatera, which included episodes focused on the co-creation aspect of the cultural programme, as well as videos and testimonies promoting the cultural and historical heritage of Matera. The partnership with Euronews also contributed to increasing the visibility of Matera on Euronews social media channels, particularly in relation to key events and programme milestones (i.e. the opening and closing ceremony, flagship events, etc.).

In addition to the communication on digital and traditional media, the Foundation and its partners undertook other marketing and communication initiatives. As an example, in collaboration with the Italian Consulate of San Francisco and the Chamber of Commerce of Matera, a series of events such as exhibitions, concerts and conferences were organised in San Francisco in June 2019 with members of the Matera Foundation 2019 and local Italian artists. The aim of this initiative was to strategically promote the ECoC initiative in Matera and establish cooperation opportunities with foreign stakeholders and cultural operators. Through the promotional activity in the United States, the Foundation started to collaborate with the Google Cultural Institute,³⁹ and as a result, Matera 2019 was included in the Google Arts & Culture platform.⁴⁰

Another marketing initiative was undertaken in Bahrain a few days after the events in San Francisco. In collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bahrain, UNIDO,

³⁸ The episodes on Matera 'Go Matera' can be accessed here: <https://it.euronews.com/special/go-matera>

³⁹ Google Arts and Culture. Accessed from: <https://about.artsandculture.google.com/>

⁴⁰ Google Arts and Culture. Matera European Capital of Culture 2019. Accessed from: <https://artsandculture.google.com/partner/matera-basilicata-foundation-2019>

ENI and the Italian Embassy, the Foundation organised a photo exhibition focusing on the cultural history of five municipalities (Aliano, Pietrapertosa, Tricarico, Matera and Tursi) in the region and their links with Arab culture. These cities own a peculiar cultural heritage, characterised by the influence of the Arab culture on food, music, architecture and craftsmanship as a result of the Arab settlements in the region since the IX century.

The main results of the communication strategy adopted for Matera 2019 are discussed in the international profile section.

2.4.4 Local research

Since the attribution of the UNESCO site label, several initiatives have been carried out in Matera for monitoring the development of new economic, cultural and participatory issues for the territory: this research has progressively been coordinated with the ECoC calendar in order to contribute to the monitoring and legacy planning of the event. Namely, the eventuality of hosting the ECoC in 2019 triggered the interests of many institutions, which initiated local research before and throughout the event. We list the most relevant ones below:

- Through its UNESCO Chair “Mediterranean Cultural Landscapes and Communities of Knowledge”, the University of Matera-Basilicata has engaged in a reflection on the management plan of the UNESCO site. The outcome of this reflection was a proposal for the development of an observatory⁴¹ for the implementation of the plan itself. The observatory would conduct research and documentation on the cultural landscape of the UNESCO site of Matera, as well as awareness raising actions to promote participation in the processes of recognising and enhancing cultural heritage. Through the observatory initiative, the chair collaborated on some objectives for the Matera European Capital of Culture 2019 (e.g. I-DEA Archive of Demo-Ethno-Anthropological Archives), and currently contributes to the legacy processes. This interest in the ECoC also resulted in the publishing of scientific articles and papers about the event.⁴²
- The University of Matera-Basilicata also collaborated on the HOMEE (Heritage Opportunities/Threats within Mega-Events in Europe) European project,⁴³ funded by JPICH call and Creative Europe and promoted by the Polytechnic University of Milan. On June 24–26 2019, workshops were organised in Matera. The four teams of the HOMEE project, in collaboration with the associate partners, University of Matera-Basilicata and the local siege for the Minister of Culture (MiBACT), interacted with local stakeholders and decision-makers of the Matera-Basilicata 2019 European Capital of

⁴¹ Colonna A., Fiore D. (2014). I Sassi e il Parco delle Chiese Rupestri di Matera Patrimonio dell’Umanità – Piano di Gestione 2014-2019. Accessed from: https://www.regione.basilicata.it/giunta/files/docs/DOCUMENT_FILE_2992928.pdf

⁴² Mininni M., Dicillo C. (2015). Politiche urbane e politiche culturali per Matera verso il 2019. in "TERRITORIO" 73, pp. 86-93, DOI:10.3280/TR2015-073013.

⁴³ Homee. Official website. Accessed from: <http://www.tau-lab.polimi.it/research/homee/>

Culture Programme.⁴⁴ However, the deliverables for this project mainly consisted of the meetings themselves, since the Matera-Basilicata2019 is not included in the volume edited by the HOME E project.

- In 2014, the Committee for Matera2019 commissioned a survey to DataContact Srl: 1,000 people were interviewed about their perception of the process and their perspective on the event in 2019.⁴⁵
- In 2015, SRM (Studi e ricerche sul Mezzogiorno) presented in Matera the results of its analysis of the economic impact the event could have on the city in terms of productivity and employment.⁴⁶
- A study on the potential impact of Matera 2019 was led in 2016 by Il Sole 24 Ore Business School.⁴⁷ The HubForMatera 2019 research analyses how the ECoC cultural programme of Matera could be replicated and become a model to be used in other geographical and cultural contexts. This study provides baseline information on the state of the art, cultural and infrastructure sectors of Matera before implementing their ECoC programme. The study considers the parameters of benchmarks, cultural production, audience development, tourism, sponsorship and infrastructures.
- The ENI Enrico Mattei Foundation was commissioned by the Matera-Basilicata 2019 Foundation for monitoring the implementation of the ECoC in Matera and Basilicata. When evaluating the impact of the event, the ENI Enrico Mattei Foundation also had three thematic surveys about the background of the territory. These included:
 1. a preparatory study, conducted in 2015 and 2018,⁴⁸ which investigated the sustainability of the event by analysing the relationship between inhabitants and tourists, with the goal of developing an integrated system of local touristic proposals. It also worked on the level of satisfaction among local citizens concerning the impact of the initiative on tourism in the region⁴⁹;

⁴⁴ Homee. Official programme. Accessed from: <http://www.tau-lab.polimi.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Calendar-HOME E-Matera-June-2019.pdf>

⁴⁵ Datacontact (2014). Report Sondaggio Comitato Matera2019. Accessed from: <http://dati.comune.matera.it/dataset/639b2c8d-1977-423f-b520-a5e2784bcedb/resource/6fa3fd72-40fc-4e93-a8cd-594d6f319da5/download/report-matera2019-datacontact.pdf>

⁴⁶ Deandreis, M. (2015). L'impatto economico potenziale di Matera 2019. Accessed from: <https://www.srm.it/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/slide-matera-30-6-15.pdf>

⁴⁷ Foundation Matera 2019. Official website. Accessed from: <https://www.matera-basilicata2019.it/it/news/742-hub-for-matera-2019.html>

⁴⁸ The surveys were tailored to the profile of the respondents (i.e. tourists or citizens) and collected over 1,000 respondents.

⁴⁹ Fondazione ENI Enrico Mattei. Official website. Accessed from: <https://www.feem.it/it/ricerca/programmi/climate-and-sustainable-innovation/past-projects/matera-2019-promozione-e-sviluppo-per-il-sistema-turistico-regionale/>

2. a second study, led in collaboration with the UNESCO Chair and Lucana Film Commission, started in 2018 and focused on the narrative of the city and the region, inhabitants' involvement and awareness of local heritage⁵⁰;
 3. the project Extra Matera 2019 | Extra-Ordinary Experience project, aimed at promoting the region through touristic itineraries.⁵¹ The same foundation was commissioned by 11 surrounding municipalities for this project.
- A survey about the impact of the event was conducted between December 2019 and January 2020 by the Foundation. It collected 4,609 interviews (2,866 with inhabitants out of which 1,700 were face-to-face and 1,166 online as well as 1,743 with tourists, out of which 845 were face-to-face and 989 online).⁵²
 - A quantitative report was edited by the Foundation in 2020: it mainly focused on producers, international network, access to culture, impact on tourism and regional dimension. It also contains some 'legacy pathways': Reflect on what happened, consolidating successes and learning from mistakes; relaunch the programme to start up a co-creation festival; continue the open design school with local and global activities; distribute the 2019 cultural products on a European and international level; combat over-tourism by strengthening temporary citizenship projects.

2.5 Results

The final findings of the results of Matera ECoC 2019 are as follows.

2.5.1 Cultural impacts

The Matera 2019 cultural programme featured a diverse range of cultural activities of high artistic quality. The large number of national and international artists enriched the programme further and provided the opportunity for citizens of Matera to experience a diverse cultural offer.

The cultural programme featured more than 1,300 events, 65% of which completely free and the remaining (about 450) accessible with the purchase of the Matera 2019 Passport (see section 2.5.2). Free events managed to gather about 350,000 people, while events accessible with the Passport were attended by over 140,000 participants. The citizens of Matera were not used to having such a wide cultural offer in their city (which is further reflected in the lack of theatres or venues that could host large exhibitions prior to the ECoC). The cultural programme offered cultural activities ranging from opera to circus shows, from workshops on digital tools to exhibitions focusing on traditions and cultural heritage elements of the local community. This diversity was stressed by the respondents of the Foundation's survey, where the majority reported

50 Fondazione ENI Enrico Matteri. Official website. Accessed from: <https://cdn.feem.gag.it/it/ricerca/programmi/climate-and-sustainable-innovation/past-projects/identita-paesaggio-culturale-e-comunita-di-saperi-matera-basilicata-2019/>

51 IntornoMatera2019. Official website. Accessed from: <http://www.intornomatera2019.com/homepage>

52 Foundation Matera 2019. (2020). The 2019 experience and the legacy of the European capital of culture. The opinion of tourists and citizens. Accessed from: <https://www.matera-basilicata2019.it/en/report-2019/the-survey-on-the-perception.html>

satisfaction with the content, quality, and originality of the cultural programme (64%) and with the diversity of the cultural offer (66%). The diversified cultural offer, together with the direct involvement of citizens through the co-creation process (described below), increased the number of people accessing culture and cultural initiatives (this aspect is explored further in the access and participation section). Moreover, a large majority of respondents believed that Matera is now more culturally vibrant (78%), more culturally diversified (65%) and more open to cultural differences and diversity more in general (82%).

Despite the positive feedback from survey respondents and interviewed stakeholders on the cultural impact of the ECoC, a few stakeholders did highlight that the cultural programme was more targeted at an older audience and that greater efforts should have been made to involve youth, thus enhancing the overall cultural impact of the initiative. It was mentioned that many exhibitions and concerts were mainly exploring topics and aspects connected with tradition that were less appealing for local young people. For example, the project '**Materarmoniae – Suoni di pietra**' was an event organised with international opera artists that was aimed at exploring the links of different musical traditions (local music from Italy, Hungary, Slovakia and Portugal) through discussions with artists and concerts. Similarly, the majority of the projects developed through the initiative '**Capitale per un giorno**' (see section 2.5.2) focused on exploring the cultural and artistic roots of the different municipalities of the region.

Although the large number and variety of events planned and implemented achieved the positive cultural impacts described above, it also posed organisational challenges to those implementing the cultural programme. It was reported there was a widespread impression that the programme was too ambitious and that fewer events would have improved the overall quality of the cultural offer. In this regard, it has been noted that governance problems (see the governance and funding section) might have also impacted the overall quality of the cultural offer. It is also likely that the delays in finalising the recruitment of the Foundation staff (completed only few months before 2019) hindered the timely preparation of some activities and events.

The ECoC initiative in Matera also had a considerable impact on the cultural spaces and venues made available for the different events of Matera 2019. As further explored in section 2.5.3, over 400 different venues were mapped by the Foundation, in some cases renovated, and made available for cultural operators to organise activities in Matera. Considering the lack of suitable places for artistic performances and events in Matera prior to 2019, the availability of these spaces strongly contributed to the diversity of the cultural offer for the local community and increased the citizens' participation in cultural activities.

Being included in the cultural programme of Matera 2019 was also beneficial for local cultural operators who were already active in performing arts in the region. As mentioned by several stakeholders, the ECoC provided the opportunity to increase the visibility of local initiatives and expand their geographical scope. For instance, the theatre play '**Humana Vergogna**' – organised in collaboration with the associations #reteteatro41⁵³ and Compagnia teatrale Petra⁵⁴ – was also performed in other Italian

⁵³ ReteTeatro41. Official website. Accessed from: <https://reteteatro41.it/>

⁵⁴ CompagniaTeatralePetra. Official Website. Accessed from: <https://www.compagniateatralepetra.com/>

and foreign cities, thanks to the connections established through the 'Go&See' initiative and to the partnerships established with international artists and cultural operators. The project '**Matera Città aperta**' was the continuation of a festival of performing arts (theatre and dance) called Nessuno Resti Fuori, that was organised for the first time in 2016 and featured theatrical workshops, performances and dance labs in different areas of Matera. The collaboration with the Foundation provided the organisers of this initiative with the opportunity to establish a partnership with the British Council (UK) to develop tools and teaching methods aimed at involving people with disabilities in dance performances and at developing long-term projects continuing after 2019.

Local cultural operators also had the opportunity to collaborate with other, more established, cultural institutions from the South of Italy (e.g. Teatro San Carlo in Naples, Campania) as well as from other regions of Italy (including the Scuola Holden in Turin, Piemonte). This cooperation helped them achieve a new level of quality of their artistic performance.

2.5.2 Access and participation

The strong engagement of citizens in Matera 2019 was one of the key achievements highlighted the most by those interviewed as part of the evaluation.

Reaching out to a wider audience and allowing citizens to experience culture in new ways were the goals that Matera 2019 tried to achieve through the introduction of the **Matera 2019 Passport** and the concept of 'temporary citizens' (see box below). The Passport gave unlimited free access to all of the events and performances of ECoC 2019, allowing citizens to experience new cultural activities without any additional cost. Some 74,000 passports were sold, and the Foundation estimated that almost 500,000 people attended at least one event (including the opening ceremony). A consultation among citizens and tourists shows that, among those who purchased the Passport, about 70% felt stimulated to attend more events than before and that on average they attended about ten events over the year. 80% of the respondents said that the Passport provided the opportunity to reach citizens who would have normally not attended these types of activities.

The table below provides an overview of to the overall attendance of Matera 2019 and of its flagship events.

Table 2.4 Attendance of Matera 2019 and flagship events / activities

Name of the event / activity	Attendance
Opening ceremony	60,094
Ars Excavandi	17,463
La Poetica dei Numeri Primi	13,321
Circus+	10,142
IDEA	6,188
Blind Sensorium	3,261
Total events and activities of Matera 2019	497,721

Matera 2019 aimed to be an inclusive and accessible experience. Passports at a reduced price were available for people with disabilities and the person accompanying them (about 400 passports were sold at reduced price, about 0.5% of the total number). In addition, specific projects were also developed to actively involve people with disabilities. A good example is the project '**Movimento libero**' ('Free movement'), which explored the relationship between art and disability through a series of activities.⁵⁵ A two-day workshop titled 'Dis/Ordinary Architecture Design Challenge' organised by the Open Design School aimed at reflecting on the physical accessibility of performance venues. A workshop organised in collaboration with the Stopgap Dance Company (UK) also engaged about 20 people with disabilities from all over Italy to bring to life a contemporary dance performance, which eventually performed in the city during 2019.

In the cultural programme of Matera 2019, there were clear attempts at bringing together different realities and social groups, creating bridges between communities that were otherwise distant. The event '**Humana vergogna**' saw the engagement of detainees of the local prison in a social theatre workshop exploring the concept of shame and connected stereotypes. The research ended up with a performance open to the public bridging prisoners and the community of Matera. In addition, through the '**Silent Academy**', four laboratories were developed to encourage the exchange of competences and skills between local citizens, migrants and refugees hosted in local communities within the region.

Box 2 Matera 2019 passport

One of the innovations of Matera 2019 was the introduction of the Matera 2019 passport. This was a unique ticket giving access to the whole panorama of cultural activities taking place in the context of Matera 2019.

The passport was available in two forms: permanent (covering the whole ECoC year and priced at 19 EUR and at the reduced price of 12 EUR for people from Basilicata region) and temporary (valid for one day and priced at 10 EUR).

The passport served several purposes.

First of all, the main idea behind it was to encourage local residents and citizens from the area to attend a diverse range of cultural events expanding their cultural horizon. By purchasing the permanent passport and acquiring unlimited free access to all the activities of the ECoC 2019, the citizens were free to experience new cultural activities without any additional cost.

Secondly, the passport was associated with the concept of temporary citizenship: tourists and non-locals purchasing the passport were encouraged to experience the city as citizens abiding to a 'decatalogue of the temporary citizen', ten ground rules that should inspire a responsible, mature and immersive forms of tourism:

1. I commit to being a responsible temporary citizen
2. I will take care of the spaces inhabited by nature and humans
3. I will read the stories and memories of this place, through the eyes of those who experienced them
4. I will listen to the sounds of what I see, through the words of those who live here
5. I will look and search for the soul of this place, its community
6. I will be nourished by the dialogues generated together
7. I will share the knowledge that this land teaches me
8. I will take part in its future, conscious of its past
9. I entrust, that which I have to offer, to this place
10. I will take with me the citizen I have become.

⁵⁵ Foundation Matera 2019. Official website. Accessed from: <https://www.matera-basilicata2019.it/en/programme-2019/themes/utopias-and-dystopias/1809-movimento-libero.html>

The passport system was implemented by all cultural operators involved in Matera 2019. So, museums that had previously only relied on paper tickets and manual accounting systems had the opportunity to switch to digital ticketing. Ultimately, although the platform and the hardware used (i.e. ticket scanners) have now been phased out (the platform was linked to the passport system and the hardware was only borrowed), the museums have acquired the necessary know-how to switch to a digital ticketing system in the near future. Indeed, following on the positive experience with the Passport, the museums are now considering implementing a digital ticketing system and introducing a unique ticket granting entrance to each museum for the first time.

Although overall the experience with the passport is considered positive, there were some lessons learnt. The system was implemented using an existing online platform. This solution had the benefit of saving some implementation time, but it did not allow the flexibility and customisation that would have been required. For example, the platform only recorded data of the buyer and not of the actual users, hence limiting the possibility of having a clear overview of the audience. Also, there were limitations for the booking of free events and in case of cancellation, creating additional workload for the Foundation.

Also, the use of the passport was not necessarily clear for all users. Indeed, it had to be clearly explained that though purchasing the passport gave free access to all events, most events still needed to be reserved given the limited seats (e.g. events in theatres).

Outside the local borders of Matera, the initiative '**Capitale per un giorno**' ('**Capital for one day**') aimed to improve access to and participation in cultural activities of the citizens from different municipalities in Basilicata⁵⁶, thus producing tangible cultural, social and touristic impacts. Some 86 applications were approved and over 100 municipalities⁵⁷ were provided with the opportunity to fund their own cultural activities and events. The awards ranged from 5,000 EUR to 63,000 EUR. Although this initiative is considered successful, it was highlighted that the regional dimension of the ECoC had not been sufficiently explored, as the share of events and activities organised in other cities and the direct involvement of their citizens was scarce.

2.5.3 Cultural capacity

This section on cultural capacity looks at three main aspects:

- cultural infrastructure;
- skills, capacity or governance of the cultural sector;
- partnership and co-operation with other sectors.

The lack of available **cultural infrastructure** was one of the key challenges that was faced in the development and implementation of Matera 2019. The city lacked spaces and structures that could host larger events (even today, the city lacks a theatre). In order to cope with this, the Foundation mapped available sites in the city and the region, listing about 400 venues and spaces that could be used for cultural events.

The Foundation also encouraged the restoration and repurposing of the scenic Cava del Sole, a historic location abandoned until recent years. In particular, the Foundation directly managed two public tenders awarded by the national government to renovate and reinstate the large venue. Several workshops held in the context of the Open Design

⁵⁶ The only exceptions were Matera and Potenza, as these municipalities already received funds from the Foundation, and based on the partnership programme defined in collaboration with the regional authorities.

⁵⁷ The number of municipalities receiving funds is higher than the number of applications received due to the fact that some of the applications included more than one municipality.

School project brought together multidisciplinary experts from the region and Europe to develop the concept for the conversion of Cava del Sole into a multifunctional area. Cava del Sole features an auditorium able to host up to 1,000 attendees, an open-air arena for 7,000 attendees and a number of other facilities for cultural and creative activities. Thanks to the allocation of an additional 5 million EUR by the government, the project was finally realised, and Cava del Sole was inaugurated in January 2019.

Matera 2019 also invested in cultural operators with the aim of developing new skills and strengthening their ability to seek partnerships and operate internationally. About 27 project leaders and 40 cultural operators (defined as 'makers' and 'linkers') participated in '**Build-up**' activities, among which was a 10-day workshop covering topics ranging from effective collaboration to overcoming State assistance dependency, entrepreneurship and setting up international networking. The '**Go&See**' action (described in section 2.3.1) was praised by many interviewed stakeholders for its positive effects, in particular in terms of acquiring a wider horizon and a more confident outlook on developing international partnerships.

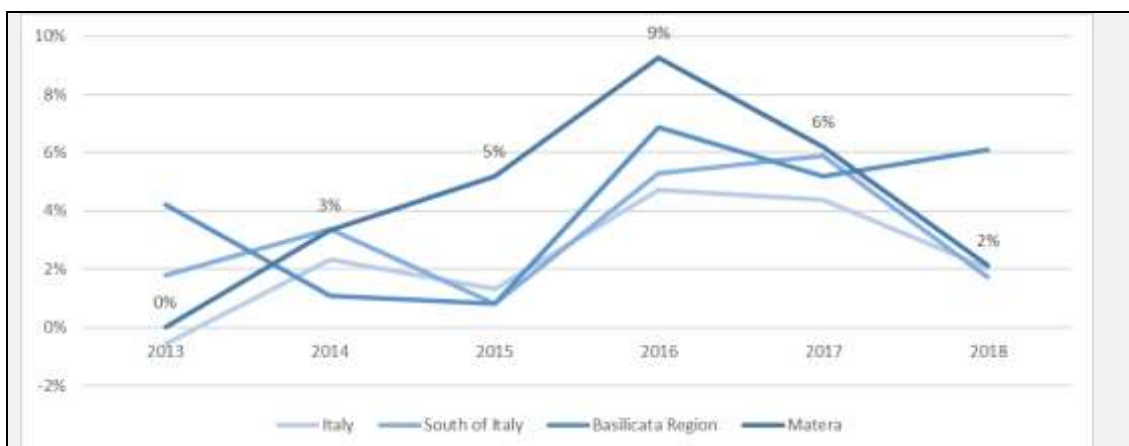
The cultural operators involved in the implementation of cultural activities for the Matera 2019 programme could also count on guidance and support from the Foundation. This support helped them to structure their work and creative process. A good example of how their working process was improved is the opportunity to perform a '**Crash test**' of their project concept while into the first six months of development. These tests happened in different ways; some organisations put in place a scaled-down project, others met a potential audience or tried to perform in a specific location. This step not only provided the cultural operators with useful insight for the fine-tuning of the concept, but also represented a wider learning opportunity in terms of creative process.

In conclusion, hosting the ECoC seems to have led to a strengthening of the local cultural sector. As further analysed in Box 3, over the period leading to the ECoC year, the cultural sector in Matera experienced an above-average growth both in terms of number of companies, number of people employed and, above all, average size of companies in the sector.

Box 3 Impact on the cultural sector

Figure 2.1 shows that over the period 2012–2018, the sector in Matera grew above the national and macro-regional levels, leading the sector growth in the region. This is particularly evident in 2015 for example, when all other geographical areas registered a decline. Overall, the number of enterprises in the sector grew in Matera from 149 to 192 (42% increase).

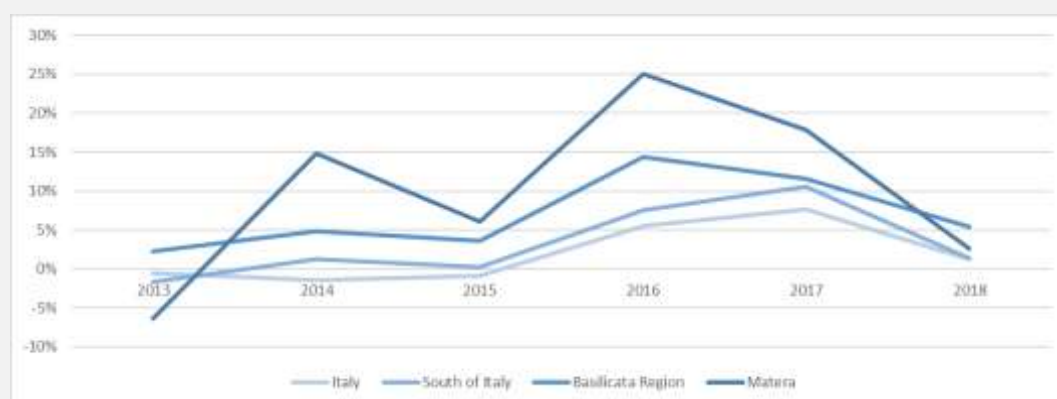
Figure 2.1 Number of enterprises operating in arts, entertainment and recreation (and other service activities) – yearly percentage change



Data source: I.stat, <http://dati.istat.it/>, Data extracted in June 2020

The growth in the number of enterprises in the sector is reflected in an increase in the number of people employed. As shown in Figure 2.2, this indicator also registered a higher than average increase, bringing the total number of people employed in arts, entertainment and recreation in Matera from about 277 in 2012 to 479 in 2018 (46% increase).

Figure 2.2 Number of people employed in arts, entertainment and recreation (and other service activities) – yearly percentage change



Data source: I.stat, <http://dati.istat.it/>, Data extracted in June 2020

Table 2.5 shows that the average number of employees in the different size classes of enterprise in the cultural sector has increased over time. The overall increase of the average number of employees over the years preceding Matera 2019 (an overall increase of 34% between 2012 and 2018) might be an indication of increased capacity of the overall sector.

Table 2.5 Average number of employees in enterprises in the arts, entertainment and recreation (and other service activities) by enterprise size

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Enterprises size – 0–9	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.7	1.8
Enterprises size – 10–49	13.0	11.2	16.1	16.8	16.3	18.0	17.5

Data source: I.stat, <http://dati.istat.it/>, Data extracted in June 2020

2.5.4 International profile

The section on cultural impact partly explored aspects of the activities and measures implemented to raise the international profile of Matera and the ECoC events. The

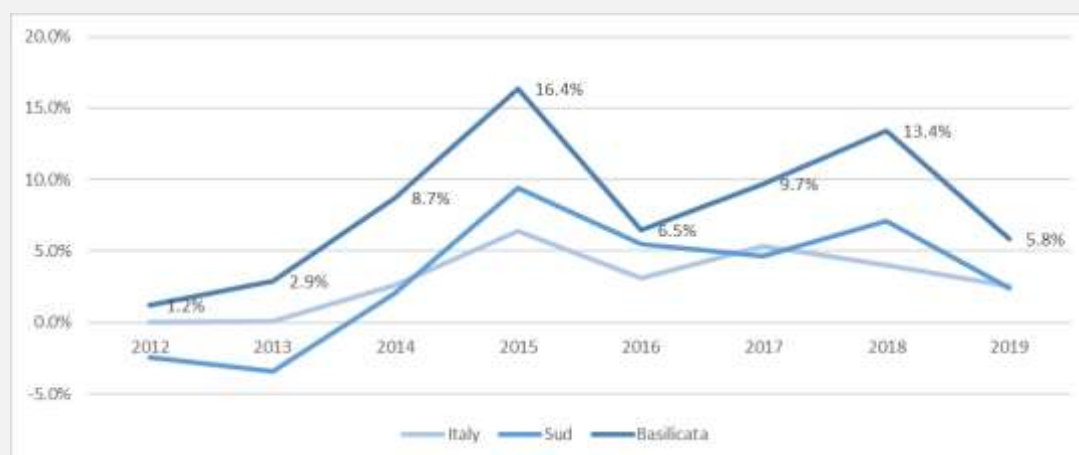
section on marketing and communication also illustrates how the Foundation planned to reach an international audience.

According to a survey conducted among some 2,866 respondents (residents and tourists), most of the respondents considered Matera far more international in 2019 compared to the period before it was designated as the ECoC 2019. However, data on the overall attendance of foreign people in the ECoC events has not been collected. As further elaborated in Box 4 below, in the period between 2012 and 2019, the Basilicata region experienced a higher increase in the number of tourists than the rest of Italy, from about 520,000 tourists in 2012 to almost 950,000 in 2019. A survey conducted among some 1,743 tourists in 2019 shows that for almost 70% of the respondents, Matera hosting the ECoC impacted on their decision to visit the city. The international exposure given to Matera by hosting the ECoC 2019 seems also to have led to a stronger increase of international tourism. While the increase in national tourists between 2012 and 2018 was 64%, foreign tourists increased by 135% over the same period (from about 60,000 to 142,000).⁵⁸

Box 4 Impact on international tourism

As shown in Figure 2.3, in the period 2012–2019, the Basilicata region experienced a higher increase in flow of tourism than the rest of Italy.

Figure 2.3 Total arrivals at tourist accommodation establishments – yearly percentage change

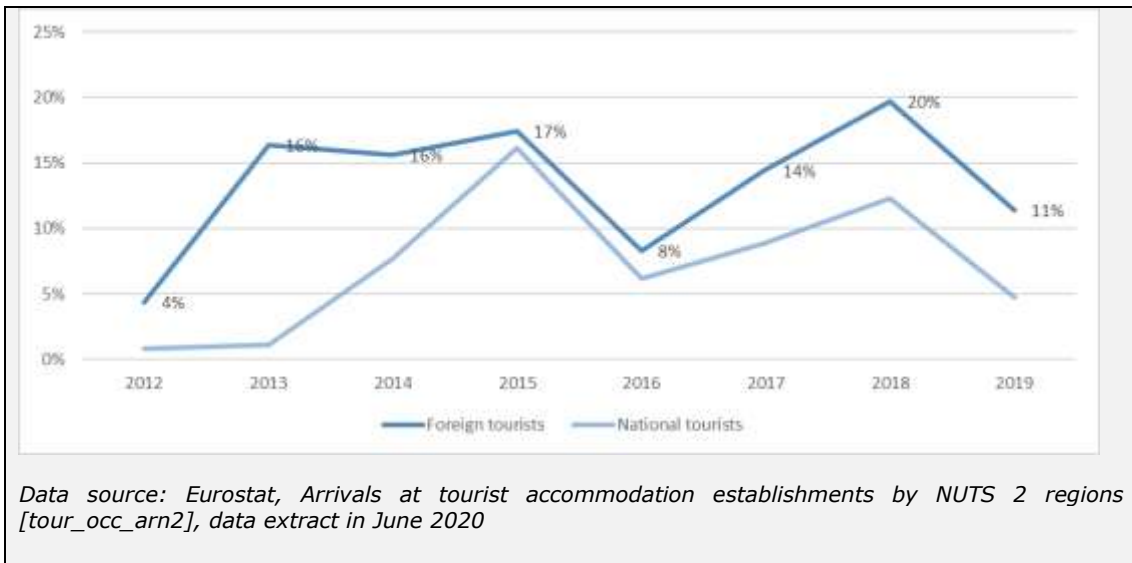


Data source: Eurostat, Arrivals at tourist accommodation establishments by NUTS 2 regions [tour_occ_arn2], data extract in June 2020

Figure 2.4 shows that the percentage increase of tourists coming from abroad has been larger than that of national tourists, potentially indicating a stronger impact on international tourism.

Figure 2.4 Arrivals at tourist accommodation establishments by national and foreign tourists in Basilicata region – percentage change

⁵⁸ Data on the share of foreigners attending Matera events was not available. However, about 41% of the passports sold (some 30,212) were temporary (or daily). While not all these were purchased by foreigners it is still an indication of the interest that Matera 2019 sorted toward non-resident population.



The high number of tourists also impacted on the market revenue. Historical market data on AirBnB listings for the period 2017–2019 shows a 25% increase on the average daily rate for one-night stay accommodation. Figure 2.5 indicates the positive trend of the market revenue from AirBnB listings in the period from May 2017 to December 2019. Taking in consideration the yearly peak value, typically August of each year, the market revenue doubled over the period.

Figure 2.5 Historical market revenue from AirBnB for Matera (May 2017 – May 2020)



Data source: AirDNA, Matera report, data extracted in June 2020

A wide and multichannel communication strategy ensured a national and international exposure of the city of Matera not previously experienced. The **digital strategy** proved to be effective in increasing the visibility of Matera 2019 and its cultural programme, achieving significant results through the use of social media platforms (see table below). Also, **traditional media** were fully exploited: Matera 2019 and its cultural programme was discussed in almost 58,000 articles in national and international newspapers and journals and in approximately 1,300 radio and TV reports. The partnership with Euronews also proved particularly successful in expanding the outreach of Matera 2019. Data and analytics provided by Euronews indicate that *GoMatera* specials reached approximately 10 million people mostly in Italy, France, Germany, the USA and Russia.

Finally, the *GoMatera* special collected over 1,5 million impressions on the Euronews social media platforms.

Table 2.6 Social media performance

Social media indicator	Performance
No. of Facebook followers	86,376
No. of Twitter followers	19,544
No. of hashtags with <i>Matera2019</i>	253,216
No. of hashtags with <i>OpenFuture</i>	22,536
No. of Instagram followers	29,656
No. of YouTube subscribers	1,230

Source: *Foundation Matera 2019*

Finally, as mentioned by a few key stakeholders consulted, the international profile of the initiative could have been further emphasised through a stronger collaboration with the city of Plovdiv. The objectives of developing more synergies on ad-hoc projects and ensuring common efforts for the promotion and communication of the initiatives in both cities represented a challenge. In this regard, it was argued that the lack of funds specifically allocated to this cooperation was a key obstacle hindering the implementation of some of joint activities. As outlined by a couple of key stakeholders, having budget lines dedicated to joint activities between the two cities and human resources at the European level to coordinate the efforts of the two cities might have contributed to develop more synergies and increased the international dimension of the initiatives.

2.6 Legacy

From the very start, Matera 2019 intended to start a process of renovation and cultural change of the city and the local community that would last well beyond 2019. 3 million EUR, including the Melina Mercouri Prize, had been allocated to the legacy and to ensure that the Foundation could carry on its activities for two years after the ECoC year. Though with a smaller team, the Foundation planned to become a **co-creation platform**, ensuring continuity of the processes and activities started by Matera 2019. However, the planned legacy effects of Matera 2019 were greatly impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak and the associated lockdown, meaning that most of the activities planned for 2020 will now take place in 2021.

Co-creation and citizen involvement were quite important features in the implementation of the ECoC 2019. In December 2019, with the guidance of the stage director Giorgio Barberio Corsetti, local citizens were invited to participate in a five-day workshop to look back at the implementation of Matera 2019 and, above all, to look forward and beyond in terms of sustainability and continuation. The outcome of this workshop was a **Cultural Manifesto of the citizens' of Matera** stating the clear intent to continue beyond the ECoC year the cultural renovation process started by Matera 2019.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Foundation Matera 2019. Official website. Accessed from: <https://www.matera-basilicata2019.it/en/get-involved/citizens-manifesto.html>

The development of Matera 2019 was accompanied by the effort to provide local cultural organisations with new skills and access to a wider cultural network. Project leaders developed new competences and acquired more confidence in engaging in cross-border collaborations. However, it was also mentioned that more could have been done to provide the cultural organisations with the means to ensure financial sustainability. While some organisations are reportedly planning to participate in European calls for cultural activities (e.g. Creative Europe), the majority may well revert to their pre-Matera 2019 business model.

Beyond personal and professional growth of various cultural operators, projects implemented through the ECoC programme have their own legacy. The development of a laboratory as the Open Design School in the heart of Matera where citizens can co-create project ideas represents a valuable example of the legacy of Matera 2019. Despite the COVID-19 outbreak, the **Open Design School** has already hosted several events and workshops in 2020. After a few months of lockdown, since mid-March 2020, five workshops have been organised at the school, focusing on co-creation, photography and linocut techniques. The **IDEA** project collected materials and documents from different archives of the Basilicata region to create a digital repository to explore the archives and collections of the region from an artistic perspective. The digital archive is now accessible online⁶⁰ and constitutes also an important aspect of the legacy of Matera 2019.

2.7 Conclusions

2.7.1 Successes

The main successes in the implementation of Matera 2019 were as follows.

Strong participation and citizen involvement: as outlined in the sections above, the events organised in Matera were largely attended by local citizens. As mentioned by stakeholders, the average attendance rate of the events⁶¹ was 95% and it was highlighted that the restricted capacity of some venues might have also prevented higher numbers of participation to some events. Another success factor strongly emphasised by different stakeholders relates to the co-creation and capacity-building activities for citizens and project leaders. As outlined in the sections above, the strong involvement of citizens in the cultural programme is a considerable success of Matera 2019. Finally, the passport and the concepts of permanent and temporary citizens strongly contributed to increased participation in cultural events and providing opportunities for citizens who would not have participated otherwise.

Volunteers: the recruitment and management of the volunteers' team could be considered a strong success factor of Matera 2019. As highlighted by a large majority of the consulted stakeholders, the volunteers have been instrumental in the realisation of the cultural programme due to their strong commitment and proactivity. The volunteers consulted were also quite satisfied with their experience as volunteers in Matera, as this provided an opportunity to grow professionally, to enlarge their networks and to increase their interest in cultural events and activities. As a result of this

⁶⁰ I-DEA. Official website. Accessed from: <https://idea.matera-basilicata2019.it/en>

⁶¹ Events that had a set maximum number of participants.

volunteering experience, after 2019 a group of 20 volunteers founded an organisation to support local cultural operators in future events. The organisation aims to involve between 70–100 volunteers of Matera 2019 in 2020, although this process has been partially halted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tourism and international profile: as explained in the international profile section, the communication campaign of Matera strongly contributed to increasing the visibility of the city and its cultural initiatives during 2019. The strategy to focus on digital tools as well as on traditional media at different levels (European, national and regional) contributed to raising the international profile of the city together with the organisation of cultural events and activities involving famous international artists. In this regard, the impact of the ECoC on the tourism sector of Matera could also be considered as an important success, as demonstrated by the fact that Matera ranked first in terms of tourism growth during the ECoC year among all of the European Capitals of Culture.⁶²

2.7.2 Lessons in delivery

Governance: structuring the Foundation as a public entity increased the administrative and bureaucratic burdens of its activities. It was pointed out by key stakeholders that in order to work with local and international cultural operators, it is necessary to have an agile structure able to act immediately and respond to changing circumstances. For instance, one of the consequences of the public nature of the Foundation was that tenders and sub-contracts were regulated by laws and rules established for public administrations and not for entities having to deal largely with the private sector. Another issue mentioned by one key stakeholder was the high dependency on financial resources allocated at local, regional and national levels. While the resources had been allocated, they were not necessarily made available at the right time, creating cash-flow issues, and causing the Foundation to make use of, otherwise avoidable, bank loans.

Team recruitment: the frequent political administration changes at national, regional and local levels contributed to delays in the preparation and implementation of the Matera 2019 cultural programme. As noted by the interviewees, one of the main challenges related to the governance of the ECoC 2019 was the political instability that emerged after the 2015 municipal elections in Matera. On this occasion, the candidate from the opposition party was elected as the new mayor of Matera. As reported by one interviewee, the previous mayor had been strongly involved in the preparation of the bid and committed to the delivering the proposed programme. This change in the city government affected the preparatory works and the readiness of the city to plan and deliver the programme, as some changes were proposed by the new city council. As a result of this political situation, the Foundation team lost some precious time and was only fully operational in the second half of 2018.

⁶² Fondazione Matera 2019 (2020). Report: Indirizzi di legacy. Accessed from: <https://www.matera-basilicata2019.it/it/report-2019/indirizzi-di-legacy.html>

3.0 Plovdiv

3.1 Background

3.1.1 City

Plovdiv is the second largest city in Bulgaria after the capital city Sofia, with a population of around 347,000 people. It is Southern Bulgaria's cultural and business centre. The city is unique by its 8,000-year long history and is one of the oldest, still-inhabited cities in the world. Originally a Thracian settlement, it was subsequently inhabited by Persians, Greeks, Celts, Romans, Goths, Bulgars, Slavs and Turks. As a result, it boasts a diverse cultural heritage and a multi-ethnic population. Plovdiv is located on the banks of the Maritsa River, the longest river in the Balkans, and at the foot of the Rhodope Mountains, which makes it an attractive tourist centre. Its favourable geographic location has also turned it into a major transport hub, as three of the ten Pan-European corridors run through or near the city.

The economy of Plovdiv has long traditions in manufacturing, commerce, transport, communications and tourism. The Trakia Economic Zone, which is one of the largest industrial zones in Eastern Europe, is located near Plovdiv, with about €2 billion of investments and over 30,000 new jobs created since the zone was established in 1996. It consists of six industrial parks that have attracted more than 180 international and domestic companies. Recently, Plovdiv ranked among the top three cities in the category "Foreign Direct Investment Strategy" in the ranking "European cities of the future 2018/2019" of the Financial Times.

The city has a vibrant atmosphere for young people with its six universities and over 70 schools, including elementary, high, foreign language, mathematics, technical and art schools. Despite its fast economic development, Plovdiv is known among Bulgarians as the city of Ayliak, a Turkish word used to express a relaxed, laissez-faire attitude to life.

3.1.2 Cultural sector

With its numerous remains from antiquity, Plovdiv has more than 200 archaeological sites. The most important of them is the Ancient Theatre, one of the world's best preserved ancient theatres, constructed in the 1st century AD, probably under the rule of Emperor Domitian. The theatre can host 5,000 spectators and is still in use for various performances, concerts and festivals such as Opera Open. Another important historical site in Plovdiv is the Roman Stadium, built in the 2nd century AD during the reign of the Roman Emperor Hadrian and situated beneath the main street of the city.

Plovdiv has a large variety of museums, galleries, theatres, an opera and the only Centre for Contemporary Art of its kind in Bulgaria, situated in the premises of an ancient bath from the period of the Turkish Empire. In addition, a large number of restoration and conservation projects are included in the Plovdiv Municipal Development Plan for the 2014-2020 period. Currently, one of the major cultural infrastructure projects is the restoration of the Great Bishop's Basilica of Philippopolis, with a rich decoration of mosaics from the late antique era, which will be turned into an innovative museum complex. Reflecting the presence of diverse religious communities in Plovdiv (Christian Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Jewish), there are a number of churches,

mosques and a synagogue, showcasing architecture and iconography typical for the region.

Notable existing and ongoing events in Plovdiv's cultural calendar include the summer Opera Open festival at the Ancient Theatre, the Night Festival taking place in September in various museums, galleries and night clubs, and One Dance Week, dedicated to contemporary dance. Another ongoing event, which attracts many tourists, is the Kapana Fest, taking place in an old neighbourhood, revived as a creative industries district.

3.2 Development of Plovdiv 2019

3.2.1 Application

According to Decision 1622/2006/EC establishing a Community action for the European Capital of Culture event for the years 2007-2019, Bulgaria was entitled to propose a European Capital of Culture for 2019, alongside Italy. In December 2012, the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture published a call for applications to launch the competition between Bulgarian cities. By the deadline of 18 October 2013, eight cities submitted an application: Burgas, Gabrovo, Plovdiv, Ruse, Shumen, Sofia, Varna and Veliko Tarnovo. In December 2013, the Ministry of Culture appointed the 13 members of the Selection Panel. As set out in Article 6 of Decision 1622/2006/EC, seven of these members were nominated by the European institutions and the remaining six were nominated by the Ministry in consultation with the European Commission.

3.2.2 Selection

The Ministry organised a **pre-selection meeting** in Sofia on 10-12 December 2013 and invited all candidate cities to present their respective programmes for the ECoC 2019. Burgas had built their programme around the concept of the "Cultural Collider", combining cultural industry, social innovation, and knowledge. Gabrovo presented the overall concept of "Balancing Europe", which seeks to balance the city's cultural heritage with contemporary arts. Plovdiv presented a programme under the theme "Together", which aimed to transform the city and integrate vulnerable groups of society through participation and inclusion. The programme of Ruse used the Bridges concept, as it aimed to capitalize on the city's location on the Danube River and its cross-border identity. Shumen presented a programme based on the theme of "The Sea of Shumen – A Sea of Culture". Sofia introduced the "Sharing Sofia" concept, emphasizing the role culture could have in social cohesion and inclusion. Varna presented a programme around the theme "Port of Inspiration", building upon the city festival culture and artistic production. Veliko Tarnovo presented the "We Create Happiness" concept, which would revitalize community centres as places for culture production.

The Panel recommended that four cities proceed to the final selection phase: Plovdiv, Sofia, Varna and Veliko Tarnovo. However, it identified potential for improvement and raised several points to all shortlisted cities:

- Putting a greater **focus on the European Dimension**, as the programmes were too inward-looking in their local context;

- Highlighting in more detail the **role of citizens** in the development of the programme;
- Working out the **artistic programme** more clearly, indicating involved and potential partners;
- Including **realistic budgets** for the programme, including full details of the proposed sources of funding;
- Indicating the objectives (both qualitative and quantitative), as well as an approach for **monitoring and evaluation** of the programme.

The Ministry of Culture asked the four pre-selected cities to submit revised applications. A delegation of four Panel members visited the cities from 29 August to 3 September 2014 to obtain more complete information on each programme.

At the **final selection meeting** on 4-5 September 2014 in Sofia, the four delegates reported back to the rest of the Panel on the findings of their visits. In October 2014, Plovdiv was put forward as the winning city. The Panel was particularly impressed by a number of aspects in the final bid of the city: the coherent and well-designed programme; the partnership plans with other cities in Europe (such as Thessaloniki, Bucharest and Istanbul); the bottom-up process of engaging citizens from various backgrounds; and the inclusive approach towards the Roma community in Plovdiv. However, several recommendations were made:

- To establish all the governance and management structures of the foundation, which would manage the ECoC project, with special attention to the Board and the senior posts of Chief Executive and Artistic Director;
- To put in place the internal administrative systems (including the finance, human resources, and legal systems);
- To start the monitoring and evaluation process, including the annual collection of qualitative and quantitative data;
- To undertake a re-assessment of the extent and impact of the projects in the bid book;
- To re-assess one of the flagship projects, as it was challenging and risky (the Adata Island project);
- To develop a stronger digital presence.

3.2.3 Development

In May 2015, based on the recommendation of the Selection Panel, the Council of the European Union officially designated the city as European Capital of Culture for the year 2019⁶³.

⁶³ [Council Decision \(EU\) 2015/809 of 19 May 2015 designating the European Capitals of Culture for the year 2019 in Bulgaria and Italy](#)

The **first monitoring meeting** took place in Brussels in October 2016 and was attended by members of the Plovdiv 2019 Foundation and members of the monitoring and advisory panel. The panel highlighted several aspects which needed further development/ monitoring:

- Identification of key priorities and elaboration of a detailed strategic document with milestone activities and a schedule for infrastructure projects;
- Clear definition of roles and responsibilities within the governance structure of the foundation;
- Simplification of the message to the general audience;
- Putting a greater focus on flagship projects, which seem to be lagging behind (e.g. Adata Island and Kosmos Cinema);
- Continued collaboration with partners with specific knowledge in certain areas of culture such as opera and theatre;
- Formulating specific evaluation criteria and selection of a new monitoring team;
- Publishing regular progress reports on the website of the foundation.

Finally, the panel made a specific recommendation to the government of Bulgaria to speed up the transfer of funds to the Plovdiv 2019 Foundation, as the transfer was delayed.

The **second monitoring meeting** was held in Brussels in April 2018. It appeared from the presentation by the Plovdiv 2019 Foundation that about 85% of the bid book projects were already under development. The cultural programme planned for the ECoC year featured around 350 events, with 30 highlights, and a major Opening weekend. The panel welcomed the improvements achieved, most notably regarding the governance process and the stabilisation of the budget. It also praised the fruitful collaboration and exchange of experience with Matera, covering projects such as Bread Route, Urban Games, and Cosmic Jives. However, the panel expressed concerns about the Opening weekend, mainly regarding the links between the event and the themes of the year, as well as the involvement of citizens. It recommended that a dedicated specific manager for the Opening weekend be appointed, and that responsibilities and coordination schemes among team members be further clarified. On the basis of the overall progress made, the panel recommended that the Commission should award the Melina Mercouri Prize to Plovdiv 2019.

Several aspects related to the development of the ECoC programme should be noted. Firstly, the approach used for generating content was based almost entirely on open calls for project proposals, with only 10% of the ECoC cultural content being produced by the Foundation itself. During the preparation phase, 20 open calls were announced, with over 1,700 applications received, which meant the development of the programme was very democratic. Compared to other ECoC cities, Plovdiv 2019 had a large number of calls to ensure as many stakeholders as possible were able to participate in the cultural programme. One of the positive aspects in this process was the use of targeted

calls (e.g. a call dedicated to community participation for projects within the Mahala cluster, the Cyrillisation programme and the Maritsa river cluster⁶⁴). In this way, the local community, including disadvantaged groups such as the Roma minority, had a strong and specific opportunity to curate and deliver cultural content in the ECoC year.

The downside of the open call approach was related to significant delays in bidding procedures, caused mainly by complaints from rejected applicants. However, these issues are linked to specifics of the public procurement system in Bulgaria and its complex legislative framework, with systematic appeals often slowing down the absorption of funding. Linked to this, cultural operators also experienced difficulties during the implementation of projects, mainly related to financial reporting. Although the staff members of the Foundation were fully committed to reducing the bureaucratic burden, they were often unable to “protect” the projects from heavy administrative work, recognising that these processes were set within Bulgarian procurement rules and laws. This time-consuming process particularly affected smaller NGO organisations and independent artists involved in the ECoC programme, who neither had the capacity nor the experience to undertake this administrative work, particularly when the amount of funding allocated to them was comparatively small.

Another aspect related to the development of the programme, which should be considered, was the lack of experience in Plovdiv and the whole country to develop and implement such a large-scale cultural project. The successful preparation and implementation of the ECoC needed much stronger coordination between authorities at local, regional and national levels. Many of those interviewed felt that national authorities were less engaged with the ECoC than expected. Last but not least, during the development and implementation process (spanning from 2013 to 2019), the Foundation staff had to deal with three different Governments and three Ministers of Culture. This led to a series of delays and a range of re-negotiations in relation to budgets, priorities and infrastructure projects.

3.3 Cultural programme

The motto of Plovdiv 2019 was “Together”, as the co-existence of different cultures and communities has always been the biggest challenge locally but also the strongest drive for the city’s development. The Opening Weekend took place on 11-13 January 2019 with a wide range of events and the “We Are All Colours” light show as a highlight, combining music and dance performances of more than 1,500 participants from Bulgaria and abroad, in line with the “Together” motto. An impressive crowd of 50 000 people attended the ceremony, which was also web-streamed live on the Bulgarian national TV-broadcaster. Commissioner Gabriel and Plovdiv Mayor Ivan Totev delivered short speeches to explain the importance of Plovdiv 2019 and the ECoC action for the city, the country and the European Union as a whole.

The final monitoring report produced by the Foundation shows that in 2019, a total of 513 public events with cultural content took place in Plovdiv. In addition, there were 54 ECoC related events held in other cities and abroad, as well as 34 events related to organisation and coordination activities of the Foundation. The cultural programme of

⁶⁴ <https://plovdiv2019.eu/en/opencall/239-open-call-small-projects>

Plovdiv 2019 was structured around four thematic platforms, which were selected in line with the typical features of the city, its communities, cultural heritage, pace of life, and specific challenges. The four thematic platforms are presented below:

Fuse

The Fuse platform was aimed at the integration of ethnic and minority groups in Plovdiv, as well as bringing together different generations and social groups, in order to overcome exclusion in isolated territories. The platform comprised the following three clusters:

- **Mahala:** this cluster was related to the integration of Roma and Turkish communities. The aim of the projects in the cluster was to achieve maximum involvement and participation of these minorities groups, as well as to help overcome barriers and social stereotypes.
- **RegionalE:** this cluster embraced local festivals and cultural projects from the entire Plovdiv region. It celebrated the diversity of traditions, crafts and arts and everyday life in the small villages and towns around Plovdiv.
- **Beauty and the (b)East:** the distinct culture and traditions on the Balkans and Eastern Europe were presented in the fields of music, design, architecture and contemporary art. This cluster also included partner projects with other European Capitals of Culture in the region.

Transform

The Transform platform was focused on revitalization of forgotten and abandoned urban spaces and aimed at changing the perceptions of such spaces. It included the following clusters:

- **Urban Dreams:** within this cluster, dysfunctional public spaces had to be revitalized. The objective was that abandoned buildings from the recent past, among which prominent architectural landmarks (e.g. the Tobacco warehouses, Kosmos Cinema, Kapana Creative District), became spaces for cultural activity and social interaction.
- **River of Imagination:** this cluster was aimed at restoring the connection between Plovdiv and the Maritsa River, which runs through the city. The focus was on stimulating sustainable design, alternative tourism and green innovation.
- **edYOUcate:** the cluster was focused primarily on children and youth audiences. Its aim was to develop their creative potential and foster their interest in arts.

Revive

The Revive platform was aimed at preserving cultural heritage in the contemporary context by improving the access to it and stimulating the use of new technology and digital media. It comprised the following clusters:

- Culture Meets People: the projects in this cluster aimed at breaking down the boundaries between audience and performers. Inhabitants of more distant areas and suburbs were key participants in various cultural activities.
- Art for a Forgotten Future: the focus was on contemporary art, hybrid formats, and the use of innovative practices for overcoming local challenges in Plovdiv.
- Time Machine: this cluster was concentrated on reviving the city's cultural heritage. Unpopular and outdated historical sites, museums and other cultural institutions were reactivated by art performances in public spaces, educational activities and dialogue.

Relax

The Relax platform promoted sustainable living, slow life, slow food and de-growth. It also aimed to popularize the "green" and eco-life through these clusters:

- Ayliak City: Ayliak (from Turkish) means either "a state of relaxation and comfort" or "a person who is not occupied with anything, who is free". The state of Ayliak has been recognised as characteristic of Plovdiv's pace and everyday life. Projects were focused on increasing happiness and prosperity through non-consumerist methods.
- EURhythmica: the ambition of this cluster was to introduce Plovdiv's rich musical culture to a European audience. Some of the city's biggest and traditional music festivals were included in the cluster with an enriched international programme.
- Animate the City: the emphasis was on the connection between sports and art. The projects included a swing dance festival, an aikido dance workshop, an anime and gaming festival and various other events.

Several important aspects related to the cultural programme should be outlined. First, with regard to content, for the very first time in Bulgaria, the Foundation attempted to add a social dimension to the cultural offer in the city. Although previous cultural activity in Plovdiv had addressed issues such as injustice, inequality and environmental matters, this had been rather ad-hoc and done at an individual project level rather than being part of a wider programme or initiative. The social dimension to the cultural offer in Plovdiv also intended to deal with 'deeper' issues in society such as the integration of the Roma minority in Stolipinovo district and raising awareness on LGBT issues.

However, this approach sometimes turned Plovdiv 2019 into an 'easy target' for local opposition politicians, who claimed there was an overemphasis on disadvantaged groups in the ECoC programme. One of the major attacks from a local nationalist party was an attempt to halt the photography exhibition "Balkan Pride" featuring LGBT themes, which turned into a homophobia scandal covered by international media⁶⁵. Although the

⁶⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/07/homophobia-scandal-hits-plovdiv-bulgaria-european-capital-of-culture>

Foundation did not let such provocations interfere into the cultural programme, the political rhetoric brought challenges to implementation and, in the view of some stakeholders, watered down some of the positive aspects of the ECoC.

It should also be noted that some of the flagship projects about the Tobacco City, the Adata island and the Kosmos Cinema did not happen as foreseen in the bid book, which was also a topic of concern for the Monitoring and Advisory Panel⁶⁶. To a great extent, this was caused by various external factors, which were beyond the control of the Foundation. In 2016, the Tobacco City project was undermined by a demolition and a fire, which burned down three of the iconic tobacco warehouses. In 2018, the Foundation moved its headquarters to SKLAD, a renovated warehouse, which also hosted site-specific exhibitions, workshops, conferences, theatre and film productions and performances during the title year. Still, the large-scale revitalisation of the district was not possible due to a difficult cooperation between the city administration and private property owners. Similarly, Plovdiv 2019 could not invest in a temporary artistic settlement on the Adata island because of legal difficulties related to the private ownership of the land. Instead, an artistic residence programme was implemented there, along with other activities focused on the Maritsa river.

3.3.1 European dimension

The ECoC programme featured much more extensive involvement of European artists and organisations compared to the cultural offering in Plovdiv in previous years. The final monitoring report shows that a total of 80 events with a cross-border dimension took place in 2019, which is four times higher than the number of events during the baseline year 2017⁶⁷. International collaborations included festivals with guest artists, international workshops and seminars with visiting lecturers, presentations abroad and joint co-productions. Over 130 partnerships with creative organisations and artists from Europe were established over the ECoC year according to the monitoring data.

The European dimension, coming from collaboration between local and international artists, was particularly well integrated in the following projects:

- **The Prince of the Sea and the Prince of the Earth:** a puppet theatre performance, part of the *FOCUS: Japanese Culture Programme*, which was implemented in partnership with the EU-Japan Fest Foundation⁶⁸. The performance was inspired by the traditional Japanese Bunraku theatre and created by the State Puppet Theatre Plovdiv in collaboration with two Japanese artists, a puppet maker-master and a choreographer. The project was among the winners of the prestigious Plovdiv Award in the field of art and culture for 2019 in the category “Creative Project for Children”.

⁶⁶ https://plovdiv2019.eu/data/fms/Documents%20General%20Plovdiv%202019/Monitoring%20EU%20Reports/Plovdiv_2nd_monitoring_report_EN.pdf

⁶⁷ Plovdiv ECoC 2019 - Final Monitoring report, p. 12 - Indicator 10 “Number of European cross-border co-productions, guest international artists, exported and imported productions”

⁶⁸ <https://plovdiv2019.eu/en/platform/revive/187-time-machine/780-the-spirit-of-the-japanese-puppet-the-prince-of-the-sea-and-the-prince-of-the-earth>

- **Plovdiv Karavana:** open-air artistic camps set up for a period of 10 days in June 2019 in three neighbourhoods of Plovdiv (Trakiya district, Stolipinovo district and the Rowing Canal)⁶⁹. About 200 travelling artists from Belgium, France, Italy and Switzerland came to the camps with various theatre, dance, music, circus and street art performances.
- **LIEU d'ÊTRE:** a French dance company implemented a project aimed at transforming the traditional urban environment through the involvement of local citizens in unusual art activities. The project brought together French choreographers and non-professional participants in an aerial ballet performance on the façade of the student dorms of the Medical University in Plovdiv.

Cross-border collaborations were also supported through various **artistic residencies** such as ADATA AiR residence programme implemented in 2018 with nearly 50 artists from around the world⁷⁰. The programme had two main themes related to the Maritsa river passing through Plovdiv and the Adata wild island, and the city-specific architecture. In 2019, 14 creative concepts proposed by artists who participated in the residency programme were implemented as part of the ECoC programme.

To stimulate cooperation between the cultural operators in the city and other Member States, Plovdiv reached out to various cultural experts from other EU countries as early as the bid application stage and resorted to the expertise of a wide range of advisers and consultants with a solid knowledge on how to manage and implement ECoC. In the lead in period until the title year, Plovdiv continued to draw on the experience of previous ECoCs and had a particularly fruitful collaboration with Wroclaw 2016, which included several exchanges with and study visits to the Polish city.

Overall, Plovdiv implemented all activities described in the bid book as means to promote the European dimension:

- As mentioned above, the title year brought about various collaborations between local and foreign artists, among which the Odysseus theatre project, part of the larger three-year project "European Odyssey 2019. The Travelling Man";
- A new perspective on art and culture from the Balkans and Eastern Europe was introduced through events such as the Balkan Dance Project, which brought together choreographers and dancers from Serbia, North Macedonia, Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina⁷¹;
- The Cyrillic script was brought to the fore both as a unique feature of the city (Plovdiv is the first ECoC using a Cyrillic alphabet) and a shared aspect of European culture. This was implemented mainly through the Cyrillization flagship project, using the tools of literature, translation, graphic design, conceptual text and visual media⁷²;

⁶⁹ <https://plovdiv2019.eu/en/platform/fuse/123-beauty-and-the-beast/434-plovdiv-karavana>

⁷⁰ <https://plovdiv2019.eu/en/platform/transforms/185-river-of-imagination/212-adata-air>

⁷¹ <https://plovdiv2019.eu/en/platform/fuse/123-beauty-and-the-beast/876-balkan-dance-project-in-plovdiv>

⁷² <https://plovdiv2019.eu/en/platform/fuse/123-beauty-and-the-beast/546-cyrillization>

- Plovdiv's ECoC contributed to the general discourse on ethnic diversity at European level through a series of projects with the Roma, Turkish, Armenian and Jewish communities in Plovdiv implemented within the Fuse platform (see "Access and participation" below).

In terms of strengths, it should be noted that Plovdiv 2019 embedded the European dimension in the **assessment criteria** of the open calls for project proposals. If a project stimulated local, national or international partnerships with cultural operators and organisations in the Balkans and Europe, their application would receive a higher score. In addition, the Foundation implemented specific capacity building activities to encourage and help cultural operators to find European partners. Despite this, there was recognition that smaller projects would not be able to secure a 'European' dimension and that in some cases a European partner was neither realistic nor necessary.

Secondly, the Foundation identified suitable **topics** in the cultural programme that would help stimulate the European dimension. For example, as 2019 was the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, a collection of original fragments of the wall came to Plovdiv for the Opening Weekend⁷³. Besides being a symbolic event in world history, the fall of the Berlin wall has important connotations for countries in Southeast Europe, as it is related to the fall of communist regimes. Such thematic events helped create a stronger European dimension, especially because they were accompanied by educational activities like screening of films, political debates and lectures that further stimulated social dialogue.

Another strong aspect of Plovdiv's ECoC approach to the European dimension was the active involvement of the **European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC)** network. Both during the preparation and the implementation of the ECoC, Plovdiv had a particularly fruitful collaboration with the British Council in Bulgaria, Goethe-Institut Bulgaria, the Polish Institute in Sofia, the Institut Français and the Austrian Embassy. The role of the cultural institutes was multidimensional. Prior to the ECoC year, they helped the Foundation identify skill gaps and provided support through trainings and other capacity building activities. For instance, in 2018, the British Council organised a practical workshop on audience development, which was delivered by a UK marketing agency. In addition, cultural institutes initiated a dialogue with stakeholders abroad and helped promote and spread the word on Plovdiv 2019 across the EU. Last but not least, EUNIC members contributed significantly to the content of the cultural programme. Goethe-Institut Bulgaria participated in several programme highlights, among which the Deutsche Telekom's exhibition of contemporary art, Building Together - Learning from Stolipinovo, 100% Plovdiv and Children City. Similarly, the Polish Institute in Sofia participated in the ADATA Programme and co-organised the ABC of Polish design.

3.3.2 City and citizens dimension

Consultations with citizens started early in the preparation of Plovdiv's application, with the team having numerous meetings and discussions with local organisations, institutions, cultural communities and individual citizens from 2013 onwards. Several focus groups were conducted to shape the conceptual framework of the application. Two

⁷³ <https://plovdiv2019.eu/en/events/922-art-liberty-from-the-berlin-wall-to-street-art-opening-12-january-2019>

major open questions were discussed at these focus groups, related to what aspects of Plovdiv culture citizens were pleased with and what aspects they would rather change.

The Plovdiv 2019 application highlighted several ways in which the ECoC was intended to promote the city and citizens dimension:

- Cultural activities related to topics that would be of interest for citizens across the EU such as heritage of ethnic minorities and urban regeneration issues;
- Targeted events for special interest groups covering various cultural sectors such as Plovdiv Jazz Fest or Opera Open, respectively for jazz and classical music lovers, One Architecture Week for those interested in architecture, or One Dance Week for contemporary dance fans;
- Activities for different groups of society, including children and youth, people with disabilities, elderly people, and minority groups;
- Projects of high artistic excellence with internationally acknowledged artists that would attract a wider audience.

In the actual cultural programme of Plovdiv 2019, efforts were put to engage various social groups. Citizen involvement was a key aspect of the Fuse platform and more specifically, two of its clusters: Mahala, focused on the integration of Roma and Turkish communities, and RegionalE, targeted at people living in the small villages and towns of the entire Plovdiv region. A good example of engaging ethnic minorities is the “**GetToStolipinovo**” project, which got its name from a wordplay hinting for a change in perceptions: instead of a “ghetto”, Stolipinovo was presented as a place to go to⁷⁴. The project was directed at the Roma youth in the neighbourhood and had three stages of implementation: #GetToExplore – participants collected stories, myths and traditions of the people in Stolipinovo; #GetToAction – workshops and seminars were held with discussions on youth field work and ways to solve community problems; and #GetToShare, which was about sharing collected stories and achieved results.

In line with the bid book, there were also projects aimed at youth and children, as well as activities targeted at the elderly people. For instance, the “**Listen to Us – Artistic Intelligence**” project included an educational programme for children in schools and kindergartens⁷⁵. The aims of the programme were to get the children acquainted with contemporary art and to stimulate their creative thinking, following a model from the Folkwang Museum in Essen. The children attended exhibitions and then participated in workshops, where they tried to interpret the works they had seen. The educational programme also included specialized tours for members of the Social Club for Adults with Disabilities and retirement clubs in the city.

⁷⁴ <https://plovdiv2019.eu/en/platform/fuse/121-mahala/564-gettostolipinovo>

⁷⁵ <https://plovdiv2019.eu/en/events/1506-listen-to-us-artistic-intelligence-educational-programme-for-children>

With regard to accessibility of the programme for citizens, it is interesting to note that 61% of the ECoC events in 2019, or 313 out of 513 public events in total, had free entrance. In comparison, the share of free entrance events in the baseline year 2017 was only 10%. In this way, the cultural programme was made accessible even for those citizens with lower than the average income⁷⁶.

As way of examples, the involvement and active participation of citizens in the delivery of the ECoC programme was particularly well embedded in the following projects:

- **Plovdiv's Typeface:** part of the wider Cyrillisation programme devoted to promotion and popularisation of the Cyrillic alphabet, the project was implemented by two design studios, which created a font, inspired by the handwriting of Plovdiv residents⁷⁷. Citizens and city guests were invited to write a sentence in Bulgarian that included all the letters in the alphabet or to upload handwritten texts on social media. Participation exceeded expectations, as about 4,000 samples of handwriting were submitted and people of various age, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, including foreign citizens, joined.
- **100% Plovdiv:** this project was co-organised by the Foundation and a German theatre collective, which "entered" into the local community and selected 100 citizens for a documentary theatre performance⁷⁸. The selection process could be described as a chain reaction: only the first participant was chosen by the event organisers. He then had 24 hours to recommend another person, and so on until the last participant was selected. They all had to meet certain statistical criteria like gender, age, neighbourhood and civil status. In this way, the sample of citizens portrayed current political and social processes taking place in Plovdiv. The performance was both an interesting artistic experiment, as the 100 citizens appeared as a choir on the stage, and an authentic snapshot of society.

Plovdiv 2019 also ensured the citizen dimension in the cultural programme by the active involvement of **volunteers**, with 400 people volunteering over the ECoC year. The final monitoring report shows that over 2,000 people were engaged in volunteering activities for the entire period of the initiative. The interest was higher among young people – over 60% of the volunteers were 14-24 years old, and some of them signed up after a presentation of the volunteer programme at their school, university or volunteer networking meetings. Based on their skills and preferences, the volunteers were hired in one of the following five departments: Backstage; Photo & Video; Marketing & Merchandise; Blog & Translation; and Meet & Greet. The most preferred department among volunteers was Backstage (chosen by 33% of them)⁷⁹, where they could support the organisation of events and meet the artists in person. Most of the interviewed

⁷⁶ Plovdiv ECoC 2019 - Final Monitoring report, p. 11 - Indicator 8 "Percentage of cultural events with free entrance, allowing disadvantaged groups access"

⁷⁷ <https://www.plovdivtypeface.com/en>

⁷⁸ <http://plovdiv2019.eu/en/events/2000-100-plovdiv>

⁷⁹

https://plovdiv2019.eu/data/fms/Documents%20General%20Plovdiv%202019/Plovdiv2019_volunteerreport.pdf

cultural operators confirmed they had used the volunteer network of Plovdiv 2019 for their projects and were very satisfied with the support received.

3.4 Governance and funding

3.4.1 Governance

The ECoC was implemented by the Plovdiv 2019 Foundation, which was created to develop the application of the city. Plovdiv 2019 was initially set up in September 2011 as a municipal foundation but since then there have been several changes in the team and the governance structure. Currently, the Board of the Directors of Plovdiv 2019 is the main governing body of the Foundation. It consists of 9 members, designated by the City Council of Plovdiv and elected for a period of 5 years. The Chairman of the Board is Plamen Panov, Deputy Mayor of Plovdiv for “Culture, archaeology and tourism”. Until September 2020, he was supported by the Deputy Chairman of the Board, Ilia Kirchev, who is Deputy Mayor of Plovdiv in charge of “Finances, healthcare, business activities and ecology”⁸⁰. The Board of the Directors examines and approves all the main documents related to the Foundation's activities such as the annual programmes, reports, budgets and expenditures.

The day-to-day implementation of the ECoC was led by the Executive Director (Kiril Velchev) and the Artistic Director (Svetlana Kuyumdzhieva), who shared the same level of responsibility in the management structure of the delivery entity. They were assisted by three Deputy Directors, respectively in the areas of Marketing, Advertising and Commercial Activity; International Relations; and the Programme itself. The Foundation was organised into several departments according to the team members' field of activity and expertise. Four project managers and the experts in the artistic team were responsible for the above-mentioned four thematic platforms in the programme of Plovdiv 2019: Fuse, Transform, Revive, and Relax. In addition, each project in the programme had a coordinator from the team of the Foundation.

While there was a consensus among the stakeholders interviewed that the Foundation was very effective in implementing the cultural programme, the political oversight of the Foundation generated a more mixed set of views. Most stakeholders believe that some of the challenges in the preparation and implementation of Plovdiv 2019 were not particularly caused by the ECoC but that they arose from the wider political context. In 2014, there were snap parliamentary elections in Bulgaria, which were later followed by several rounds of cabinet reshuffle, including three changes of Ministers of Culture. In addition, two rounds of local elections took place in Plovdiv in 2015 and in 2019. The impact of the political context on the ECoC manifested itself in changes in key personnel in the Board of Directors during the preparation phase and the title year and in what some saw as attempts at politicising the ECoC.

After the title was awarded in 2014, the then mayor of Plovdiv (Ivan Totev) took over as Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Foundation, while the then deputy mayor (Stefan Stoyanov) stepped in as Deputy Chairman of the Board. At about the same time, many members of the core artistic team, who prepared the application of Plovdiv,

⁸⁰ As of 30 September 2020, Ilia Kirchev stepped down as Deputy Mayor of Plovdiv and the Foundation expects a new appointment in the Board of Directors.

left the Foundation. Throughout the preparation and implementation phases, the Board of Directors insisted on closely monitoring the activities of the Foundation through weekly meetings and regular reporting. As noted above, the Board examined and approved all main documents related to the Foundation's activities, in line with its mandate. However, the City Council of Plovdiv subsequently examined and approved all these documents as well. In this way, the local authorities played an active role in the supervisory process, which generated criticism among one third of consulted stakeholders, including some journalists and cultural operators.

In 2017, one of the members of the Board of Directors was dismissed from the Board due to an alleged conflict of interest related to the intended publishing of the anthropological study on the Stolipinovo neighbourhood. Disagreeing with his dismissal, four other members of the Board resigned.

However, the core team of the Foundation believes that these staff changes did not influence the implementation of the ECoC too negatively. Despite the occasional political pressure, as was also too often the case in the implementation of past ECoCs, the Foundation managed to maintain control over the cultural content of the ECoC. From 2017 onwards, all efforts were directed at finalising the programme and ensuring a smooth organisation of events during the title year.

In January 2020, there was a recognised transition phase for the organisation. Very positively, after the local elections in November 2019, the new mayor announced that the Foundation, its key staff and investment levels in cultural content would remain post 2019. The newly elected Board of Directors voted on reducing the staff of the Foundation from 47 to 24 people, which was reasonable and reflected the reduced workload. Current tasks of the Foundation include finalisation of the ECoC reporting, support for the recently approved projects under the "Legacy" open call⁸¹, maintaining the partnerships with the EUNIC network and the EU-Japan Fest, as well as attracting private sponsorship for the development of cultural content and participation in EU funded programmes such as Creative Europe.

3.4.2 Funding

The original budget planned at the bid book stage by Plovdiv 2019 for the delivery of the ECoC was estimated at €38.2 million, with the national government, the city of Plovdiv and private sponsors contributing respectively €10 million, €23.2 million, and €3.5 million. As specified in the bid book, operating expenditure constituted about 58% of the total budget, while capital expenditure was about 42%.

However, funding from the national government was delayed significantly, leading to a high degree of uncertainty for the ECoC implementation. In October 2016, the Monitoring and Advisory Panel made a specific recommendation to the government of Bulgaria to speed up the transfer of funds to the Foundation. When the national subsidy of €10 million finally came through, it was allocated entirely to capital expenditure for infrastructure projects, i.e. building of new facilities, upgrades of existing ones, as well as urban revitalisation (e.g. reconstruction of the main square and other public spaces

⁸¹ <https://plovdiv2019.eu/en/opencall/2544-results-of-the-open-call-legacy>

in Plovdiv). Hence, the budget of the Foundation for operating expenditure relied entirely on the contribution from the city of Plovdiv, European funding and private sponsors.

In practice, the total budget (covering both operation and infrastructure) decreased from €38.2 million to €29.4 million, as both the contributions from the public and the private sectors were lower than expected. The initially foreseen income from private sponsors was quite ambitious (€3.5 million), as in reality it turned out to amount to €0.5 million. The contribution from the city of Plovdiv was also €5.7 million lower than expected at the application stage. The Foundation clarified that the actual contribution of the city of Plovdiv does not include funding for infrastructure investments made from the start of the bidding process until the actual designation in 2015, as well as investments made in the title year, which would be finalised in 2020 and 2021. Nevertheless, operating expenditure was cut by more than a half, dropping from €22.3 million, as planned in the bid book, to €10 million.

The table below provides the total expenditure and income at the bid book stage, compared to the actual figures at the end of 2019.

Table 3.1 Expenditure and income: actual and planned figures

	Bid book	Actual	Difference	Percentage difference
Total expenditure in the budget	38.2m	29.4m	-8.8m	-23%
Total income in the budget	38.2m	29.4m	-8.8m	-23%
From the public sector	34.7m	29m	-5.7m	-16%
From the private sector	3.5m	0.5m	-3m	-86%
Total	38.2m	29.4m	-8.8m	-23%

Source: Plovdiv 2019 Foundation

At a meeting in April 2018, the Monitoring and Advisory Panel asked the Foundation how they would deal with the decreased contributions from both the public and the private sectors⁸². The approach of the team included re-evaluation of the costs for each project and use of co-branding models to secure additional funding from business partners (e.g. a Bulgarian beer company and a wine company as explained later in this section). However, efforts from the Foundation towards trying to attract sponsors proved to be insufficient, which was also confirmed by most of the interviewed stakeholders.

In the open calls for project proposals, Plovdiv 2019 transferred the responsibility for attracting sponsors to applicants through the requirement for self-financing. For example, in the Last Minute Open Call announced in 2018, it was required that each candidate contributes at least 30% of the value of the project in the form of either a financial or an in-kind contribution⁸³. Still, many of the interviewed cultural operators, who implemented projects in 2019, found it very difficult to attract sponsors and

⁸² [Second Monitoring Meeting – Report by the Monitoring and Advisory Panel, April 2018](#)

⁸³ <https://plovdiv2019.eu/en/opencall/625-last-minute-open-call>

eventually had to rely on their own financial contributions. It should be noted, however, that using private sponsors' funding for cultural content is not a widespread practice in Bulgaria, as compared to other EU countries.

The table below provides the income from the public sector, comparing actual and planned figures.

Table 3.2 Income from the public sector: actual and planned figures

Income from the public sector	Bid book	Actual	Difference	Percentage difference
National Government	10m	10m	0	0%
City	23.2m	17.5m	-5.7m	-25%
EU	1.5m	1.5m	0	0%
Total	34.7m	29m	-5.7m	-16%

Source: Plovdiv 2019 Foundation

The table below provides the operating expenditure, comparing actual and planned figures.

Table 3.3 Operating expenditure: actual and planned figures

Operating Expenditure	Bid book	Actual	Difference	Percentage difference
Programme expenditure	14.7m	6.8m	-7.9m	-54%
Promotion and marketing	5.4m	1.4m	-4m	-74%
Wages, overhead, administration	1.8m	1.9m	0.1m	6%
Other reserve	0.5m	***	***	***
Total	22.3m	10m	-12.3m	-55%

Source: Plovdiv 2019 Foundation

A positive aspect linked to the funding of Plovdiv 2019 was the decision of the Foundation to allocate the entire amount of the Melina Mercouri Prize to legacy related projects in the years following the title (see "Legacy" below). Unlike other ECoC cities, Plovdiv did not use the award funding for operating expenditure, even though the actual budget for the ECoC had decreased significantly from the foreseen amount in the bid book. At the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education meeting in December 2019, Plovdiv was pointed as a positive example of ensuring legacy, due to

its decision to reserve funding from the Melina Mercouri Prize for cultural content after 2019⁸⁴.

It should also be noted that Plovdiv 2019 ensured a high degree of transparency with regard to funding, as the annual reports of the Foundation with details on implemented activities, revenue and expenditure per year, were published on their official website. For the years 2018 and 2019, reporting was done on a quarterly basis and the reports are available online (in Bulgarian language).

3.4.3 Marketing and Communication

The communication activities for the ECoC were undertaken by the Marketing, Advertising and Commercial Activity department of the Plovdiv 2019 Foundation. Similarly, to others ECoCs, the development of the communication strategy faced some challenges in the period prior the title year.

In October 2016, the Monitoring and Advisory Panel expressed concerns that the content of the cultural programme was “too intellectual” and difficult to communicate to a wide audience, which could lead to a serious risk of the ECoC concept not being clearly understood by the general public. The panel advised the Foundation to produce clear and simpler messages towards different target groups, which would also make the project more attractive to private sponsors, the media and tourists. In the end of 2017, the new visual identity of Plovdiv 2019 was developed by the PUNKT design studio and comprised a new logo, related pictograms and the overall look and feel of the brand, accompanied by three videos for advertising and promotion purposes. The visual identity was highly praised by all interviewed stakeholders, and some specifically mentioned the logo, which successfully embodied various elements that are characteristic of Plovdiv: its hills, ancient arcs, the Antique Theatre and Roman Stadium, the river, old houses, cobblestone streets and the Bulgarian Cyrillic alphabet.

However, most interviewees noted that more effort could have been put into marketing and advertising. The Foundation staff confirmed they faced difficulties in promoting the project, as they started to approach private sponsors in 2017 but most were hesitant because there was no clear understanding of what the ECoC actually was. In the view of the Foundation, there were two main reasons for this. Firstly, the delay in the funding from the national government was not a positive signal for the business sector. Secondly, journalists appeared to be not sufficiently engaged and interested in covering the preparation of the ECoC, except for the state-owned media such as the Bulgarian National Television and the Bulgarian National Radio. In addition, speculations arising from the local political rhetoric resulted in a predominantly negative media tone during the title year.

The Foundation applied co-branding models in partnership with several Bulgarian companies, among which the Kamenitza beer company, a winery and a cosmetic company, which created co-branded rose oil products. Additional advertising activities included distribution of various printed materials (e.g. posters, copies of the monthly ECoC programme), outdoor advertising on billboards, LED-screens, bus stops and central pedestrian zones in Plovdiv and seven other cities in Bulgaria. An innovative

⁸⁴ https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/committee-on-culture-and-education-ordinary-meeting_20191204-0900-COMMITTEE-CULT_vd

element of the communications strategy was the romantic comedy “Reunion”, which was filmed in Plovdiv and told the story of several childhood friends, who reunited in Plovdiv after many years. After its premiere in October 2019, it became one of the most watched films in 2019, with over 90,000 viewers.

Plovdiv 2019 also had a bilingual social media communication strategy on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn. The Facebook page of Plovdiv 2019 has over 55,000 followers, with 80% being from Bulgaria and 20% from abroad. Data provided in the Marketing report of the Foundation shows that 515 Facebook events were created, which reached over one million users⁸⁵. In addition, the website of Plovdiv 2019 has been visited over 1.5 million times by nearly 400,000 users since the beginning of 2019. Overall, in terms of awareness raised nationwide, the Foundation achieved very good results, as the final monitoring report shows that the share of those who knew Plovdiv was selected as ECoC 2019 increased from 57% in 2017 to 85% in 2019.

Activities directed at the audience abroad included six international advertising campaigns and four journalistic tours with over 250 media representatives. These efforts resulted in unprecedented international media coverage with 500 publications in 2019 alone (see “International profile” below). Regarding international advertising, the Foundation received significant support from the EUNIC members in Bulgaria, various embassies and the Ministry of Tourism of Bulgaria, which actively promoted Plovdiv 2019 at tourism and travel fairs and exhibitions. In the period from 2017 to 2018, a promotional campaign was set on the TV and digital networks of CNN, Euronews and BBC, which reached users in over 50 countries in the EMEA region (see “International profile” below). Another interesting aspect related to communication was the joint campaign of Plovdiv and Matera, which included advertising of both ECoC cities on public transport buses in Rome and 3D mapping on the façade of the Municipality of Rome.

3.4.4 Local research

The Plovdiv 2019 application set an ambitious monitoring and evaluation framework based on 39 indicators spread across four key assessment areas:

- Cultural sector transformation;
- Image and identity;
- Social impacts;
- Economic growth.

The Foundation commissioned the First Monitoring report for the 2015-2016 period to a team of researchers from the Sociology department of the Plovdiv University. Although the report provided some useful insights on the baseline socio-economic situation in the city, it was too academic and lacked a focus on targets and a clear methodology for collecting information on indicators. After the Monitoring and Advising Panel advised

⁸⁵ Draft report on Marketing and Communication, provided by the Foundation. The official version of the report is yet to be published.

Plovdiv on a more targeted approach to evaluation, the Foundation commissioned the monitoring activities for the 2017-2020 period to a private consultancy company.

In 2018, the external provider assessed the relevance of the monitoring framework, and three indicators dropped out as they were beyond the influence of the ECoC⁸⁶, i.e. "Percentage of young professionals who would consider coming back to Plovdiv after they have studied/ worked elsewhere", "Increased number of flights to and from Plovdiv airport", and "Overall decrease in unemployment rates in the city to under 10%". Besides the assessment of indicator relevance, the report also reviewed the target values and frequency of reporting for each indicator.

In the beginning of 2019, the consultancy company produced a report on the progress of indicators around the time of the ECoC programme launch⁸⁷. One of the conclusions of the report was that appropriate survey samples among event participants/visitors in 2019 was crucial for the measurement of the ECoC impacts.

In May 2020, the Final Monitoring report was published in both English and Bulgarian on the website of Plovdiv 2019, thus feeding into the current evaluation⁸⁸. The Final Monitoring report was based on the following sources of information:

- A national representative survey among the adult population of Bulgaria (a sample of 1004 people);
- A representative survey among the adult population of Plovdiv (a sample of 450 people);
- A poll among 3632 participants and visitors of cultural events in 2019;
- A quantitative survey among 300 Roma households in the Stolipinovo neighbourhood;
- Interviews with 50 representatives of "chitalishta" and cultural institutions in Plovdiv.

In addition to these sources of information, the external agency collected data from the National Statistical Institute on the visitor flows in the city and the region. However, it should be noted there are some limitations of statistical data related to growth in tourism. For the number of domestic and international visitors, as well as for the number of overnight stays, the National Statistical Institute tracks only tourist accommodation establishments with 10 and more bed places. As these establishments account for only about 30% of the visitor flow in Plovdiv, reported data for these indicators in the Final Monitoring report is only a rough estimation. To address this limitation, the current report uses data extracted from the AirDNA MarketMinder tool, which also covers tourists using online booking platforms (see "International profile" below).

3.5 Results

⁸⁶ [Plovdiv ECoC 2019 - Second Baseline Monitoring report 2015-2017](#)

⁸⁷ [Plovdiv ECoC 2019 - Interim report on the progress around the time of programme launch](#)

⁸⁸ [Plovdiv ECoC 2019 - Final Monitoring Report](#)

3.5.1 Cultural impacts

The main cultural impacts of the ECoC in Plovdiv are related to diversifying the cultural offer in the city, attracting a stronger presence of international artists and solidifying Plovdiv's reputation as a cultural tourism destination.

The cultural programme contained a large number of projects (about 513 events delivered in Plovdiv over 12 months), which attracted high attendance levels, as 60% of Plovdiv's residents have attended at least one event during the title year. The cultural impacts of the ECoC have also spread across the wider South-Central region, which hosted 24 events, and other cities in the country (Sofia, Varna, Blagoevgrad and Kyustendil), where another 24 events took place. Compared to previous years, the content of the cultural programme was very diverse and ranged from standard art forms like gallery and museum exhibitions, music festivals and street art to more innovative content such as educational activities, ecological interventions and co-creation initiatives with disadvantaged groups. The social dimension of certain projects, although challenging at times due to the local political rhetoric, made culture accessible for social groups, which previously were not active participants in the cultural life. These groups include the Roma minority, young people from deprived neighbourhoods and elderly people from smaller towns and villages in the wider Plovdiv region (see "Access and participation" below).

Despite the diversity of genres throughout the title year, Plovdiv 2019 was particularly beneficial to performing and visual arts, which was also confirmed by the majority of interviewed stakeholders. Positive impacts are especially visible with regard to the larger, well-established cultural operators such as the State Opera, the Drama Theatre and the State Puppet Theatre in Plovdiv, which all managed to boost their repertoire and produced ambitious and high-quality productions. The **Opera Open** festival⁸⁹, which had a long tradition prior the title year, expanded its programme in 2019 by collaborating with world-famous performers and directors, staging a co-production with Teatro Regio di Parma and a ballet performance with stars of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow. The project is also a good example of a long-term impact, as the concept of niche "opera tourism" in Plovdiv has started to emerge.

Another acclaimed highlight of the ECoC programme, based on a collaboration with the Greek National Theatre, was the **Odysseus**⁹⁰ theatre performance. Besides being visually compelling due to the highly technological scenic design, the project also had a research dimension through a preparatory conference, where the original text of Homer and its modern connotations were analysed. Both the Opera Open festival and the Odysseus project were among the winners of the Plovdiv Awards in the field of art and culture for 2019, respectively in the "Contemporary multi-genre arts" category and the "Theatre" and "Fiction and Humanities" categories.

⁸⁹ <https://plovdiv2019.eu/en/platform/relax/190-eurhythmica/492-opera-open>

⁹⁰ <https://plovdiv2019.eu/en/platform/revive/187-time-machine/580-european-odyssey-2019-the-travelling-man>

Nevertheless, Plovdiv 2019 also had a positive impact on the smaller cultural operators and independent artists. One of the interviewed stakeholders mentioned that ECoC 2019 has shed light on a great number of emerging young artists, while the diversity and European dimension of the cultural offer were enhanced by some specialized, niche projects (e.g. the Deutsche Telekom's collection of contemporary art⁹¹ and the exhibition of artworks from the Institute for International Relations of Germany collection⁹²).

Another important cultural impact was related to affirming Plovdiv's image as a cultural tourism destination. Besides the ECoC programme itself, citizens and tourists were also attracted by some examples of improved cultural infrastructure, most notably the **Kapana Creative District**⁹³. Being a flagship project of Plovdiv 2019, Kapana has turned into one of the most recognisable city landmarks. In the period from 2014 to 2019, the Foundation announced annual thematic open calls aimed at developing and supporting creative spaces in the district. As a result of these open calls, more than 60 projects were implemented and over 300 events took place in Kapana. The district also serves as a good example of converting architectural heritage into multifunctional spaces that combine art and commercial purposes. For example, Coffee and Gallery Cu29 turned an old craft shop for brassware into a place hosting exhibitions and thematic film screenings, on one hand, and a café, on the other hand.

3.5.2 Access and participation

Stimulating access and participation in cultural events was in line with the "Together" motto of Plovdiv 2019, inspired by the co-existence of different communities. The final monitoring report shows that overall, the ECoC achieved very good results with regard to participation, as the share of those who visit relatively often cultural events in Plovdiv has increased from 27% in 2017 to 44% in 2019. Attendance of events in Plovdiv has exceeded the target of 50% of Plovdiv's residents attending ECoC events in 2019, as survey results revealed that 60% of the city residents have attended at least one cultural event in the title year. Overall, 1,528,432 people attended ECoC events in Plovdiv and the wider South Central region in 2019, out of which 80% were national visitors, 11% were residents of Plovdiv, and about 9% were international visitors (see the table below).

Table 3.4 Overall attendance of Plovdiv 2019

Visitors of Plovdiv 2019	Number	Share of overall attendance
Plovdiv residents	170,642	11.2%
National visitors	1,223,905	80%
International visitors	133,885	8.8%
Total	1,528,432	

⁹¹ <https://plovdiv2019.eu/en/platform/revive/188-art-for-a-forgotten-future/751-listen-to-us-artistic-intelligence-works-from-art-collection-telekom>

⁹² <https://plovdiv2019.eu/en/platform/revive/188-art-for-a-forgotten-future/2203-travelling-the-world-art-from-germany-artworks-from-the-ifa-collection-1949-to-the-present>

⁹³ <https://plovdiv2019.eu/en/platform/transforms/130-urban-dreams/418-kapana-creative-district>

Source: Plovdiv 2019 Foundation, National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria and AirDNA MarketMinder tool

Ensuring access to the cultural offer in the city was the underlying principle of the Fuse platform, aimed at the integration of ethnic and minority groups in Plovdiv, as well as bringing together different generations and social groups. Regarding access and participation of the Roma minority, the Foundation carried out extensive preparatory work prior the title year with a focus on Stolipinovo, the largest Roma district in the Balkans with a population of about 80,000 people. Representatives of the local community were invited at focus groups and discussions, while a team of researchers carried out field work as part of a study, commissioned by the Foundation. The most important output of the research project was the Ethnographic study of communities in Stolipinovo⁹⁴, which gave initial understanding of the context and core issues, while also providing guidance to artists and activists planning to interact with the local people.

A total of 61 events took place in Stolipinovo throughout the ECoC year. Compared to 10 events in the baseline year 2017, the number of cultural events in the Roma neighbourhood has increased six times, which is a significant achievement. According to data provided by the Plovdiv 2019 Foundation, about 2,600 Roma people took part in ECoC cultural events, out of which 600 were participants in workshops, educational events and hands-on initiatives, while the audience reached was 2,000 people, which can be seen as a modest result but also a positive achievement given the context⁹⁵. Project partners included non-profit organisations, architectural studios, cultural institutes and Roma NGOs. They implemented a wide variety of events and activities, targeting different age groups of the Roma community (e.g. architecture workshops within the **Building Together** project⁹⁶, co-creating of handmade books and prints within **The Beauty We Share** project⁹⁷, various events for children, dance classes and others). Interviewed representatives of the Roma community in Stolipinovo confirmed that local residents were stimulated to take part in the ECoC not only as audience but as active participants. For example, in the Building Together: Learning from Stolipinovo project, local Roma craftsmen took part in a series of open workshops, in which various structures, urban furniture and facilities for children were built. Similarly, over 500 Roma youths aged between 16 and 25 participated in activities within the GetToStolipinovo project, aimed at sharing the myths and traditions of local people in Stolipinovo.

A good example of enhanced participation, widely regarded as one the most successful projects within Plovdiv 2019, was **Medea**⁹⁸, a theatre performance in which children from the Roma, Turkish, Jewish and Armenian ethnicities in Plovdiv participated as actors. The three-year long rehearsal process included a series of training sessions and art workshops for 75 children in Plovdiv and culminated in a large-scale, open-air

⁹⁴ <https://plovdiv2019.eu/data/fms/Documents%20General%20Plovdiv%202019/stolipinovo%20ENG.pdf>

⁹⁵ Collection of data on the overall attendance and participation of the Roma community in ECoC events was not envisaged in the monitoring activities of Plovdiv 2019 but roughly estimated data from individual events in Stolipinovo was later aggregated.

⁹⁶ <https://plovdiv2019.eu/en/platform/transforms/186-edyoucate/649-building-together-childrens-city>

⁹⁷ <https://plovdiv2019.eu/en/platform/fuse/121-mahala/2142-the-beauty-we-share>

⁹⁸ <https://plovdiv2019.eu/en/platform/fuse/121-mahala/482-medea>

performance at the Ancient Theatre in June 2019 with an audience of 1,753 people. In addition, *Medea* is one of the projects with higher chances of sustainability, as the performance still takes place on a monthly basis in the Azaryan theatre in Sofia with a capacity of 400 seats, and there are plans of replicating activities with children from ethnic minorities in other cities in Bulgaria.

Another positive aspect is that Plovdiv 2019 combined the entertainment and educational dimension in some projects. For instance, the **Mahala School of Magical Words**⁹⁹ project was targeted at school students from various ethnicities in Plovdiv and included a fanfiction competition, creative writing workshops, meetings with writers and mentors. Interviewed stakeholders stated that such activities would be likely to have a long-term impact through newly developed educational models in schools and a change in perception among students and teachers.

The final monitoring report shows that the share of survey respondents from Roma households who know about Plovdiv being ECoC 2019 increased from 45% in 2017 to 65% in 2019, as against 90% for the overall Plovdiv population. However, only 4% attended an ECoC event in Stolipinovo, and another 8% somewhere else in Plovdiv. The low attendance level is partly due to the Roma community's lower interest in the ECoC, as 28% of respondents stated they did not care about the selection of Plovdiv as ECoC, as against 5.8% for the overall Plovdiv population. In addition, Roma households usually have lower incomes, and the share of those who spend money on culture on a monthly basis remains unchanged from previous years (only 13%), with an average amount of EUR 7. Although there are some positive examples of individual ECoC projects that stimulated attendance and participation, a significant part of the Roma community remained distant and disengaged. This could be interpreted as a signal that continued efforts are necessary to stimulate the participation of the Roma community in the cultural life of the city.

The cultural programme of Plovdiv 2019 was also focused on enhancing access to and participation in culture in marginalised districts, as well as in smaller towns and villages in the wider Plovdiv region through the Regionale cluster. Monitoring data shows that 32% of the wider region's residents (excluding the population of Plovdiv) have attended at least one cultural event in 2019, thus meeting the set target of 30%. A good example of reaching out to local communities far from the cultural epicentre is the **Murmures of Rhodope Fairytales**¹⁰⁰ project, taking place in the village of Dobralak, in the Rhodope Mountains. Activities included telling of folktales, folk singing and improvisation, with participants being invited to take part in the performances.

Another initiative, which had a significant impact on enhancing the access to culture in the wider Plovdiv region was the **Chitalishta** project¹⁰¹. Chitalishta are socio-cultural centres specific for Bulgaria, which have a key role in the preservation of Bulgarian cultural traditions, especially in smaller towns. Plovdiv 2019 sought to revive and set in motion the activities of these communal centres in the direction of innovation and experimenting with new forms of art. In November 2017, the Foundation published a specific open call targeted at Chitalishta in the South-Central Region, which resulted in

⁹⁹ <https://plovdiv2019.eu/en/platform/transforms/186-edyoucate/959-mahala-school-of-magical-words>

¹⁰⁰ <http://plovdiv2019.eu/en/platform/fuse/122-regionale/501-murmures-of-rhodope-fairytales>

¹⁰¹ <https://plovdiv2019.eu/en/platform/revive/189-culture-meets-people/417-chitalishta>

247 projects submitted, out of which 93 were approved. Supported activities ranged from folk performances, bread making and singing competitions to light installations and graffiti art. The final monitoring report shows that a total of 109 events were held outside the Plovdiv city centre, including in the Chitalishta. Considering there were only 10 such events in 2017, the title year marked a considerable progress in this respect.

3.5.3 Cultural capacity

Plovdiv 2019 achieved significant results related to strengthening the capacity of cultural operators to prepare and implement high-quality projects. This was done mainly through **FORUM 2019**¹⁰² (originally CABADEPLO in the bid book), a flagship project of the ECoC and an educational platform aimed at creating partnership networks, capacity building and audience development, in order to ensure the smooth realisation of the ECoC. FORUM 2019 started in 2015 and gradually developed as the fifth platform, providing the necessary horizontal links between the other four thematic platforms of the cultural programme. Throughout the 5-year period of implementation, 60 workshops and training events took place, covering a variety of themes and topics, with a total of 4,900 participants.

In 2015, the FORUM featured a public discussion on the 30th anniversary of the ECoC initiative, presenting successful project examples, lessons learnt and long-term sustainability goals. In 2016, a series of information meetings were conducted with cultural operators from Plovdiv, some of which in collaboration with the Creative Europe Desk and Europe for Citizens Desk in Bulgaria, with an emphasis on available opportunities to apply for funding. In 2017, the thematic focus was on competence building with some helpful exchanges of experience with Wroclaw 2016, and events directed at volunteers with trainers from Japan, Romania and Poland. In 2018, the educational activities focused on digital media and art, audience development and interactive training, while at the end of the title year, a two-day event was dedicated to a recap of results and legacy plans¹⁰³.

The 60 workshops and training events organised within FORUM 2019 included face-to-face events for cultural operators, webinars and Q&A sessions, with team members acting as facilitators or guest lecturers taking over. It should also be noted that the EUNIC members provided significant support to the Foundation in identification of skill gaps and capacity building needs. For instance, a practical workshop on audience development was conducted with the help of the British Council and a marketing agency from the UK. Other ECoC cities from the Balkans also contributed to the capacity building process with joint events such as a networking forum on funding opportunities for funding the Europe for Citizens programme in partnership with Novi Sad European Capital of Culture 2021.

The majority of interviewed stakeholders stated that increased capacity has been felt more strongly among the larger cultural organisations in Plovdiv (e.g. the State Opera, the Drama Theatre and the State Puppet Theatre in Plovdiv). However, others noted that previously the creative sector in the city tended to be relatively conservative and

¹⁰² <https://plovdiv2019.eu/en/forum2019>

¹⁰³ <https://plovdiv2019.eu/en/news/2422-top-cultural-experts-from-the-international-jury-arrive-in-plovdiv>

self-enclosed but the ECoC has helped artists become more open to cross-border collaborations.

3.5.4 International profile

Plovdiv 2019 achieved significant results related to raising the international profile of the city in two main directions, namely stimulating the tourism sector and attracting unprecedented international media attention. As most ECoCs, one of the widely felt results was the positive impact on tourism, which was also confirmed by all interviewed stakeholders. Monitoring data shows that the share of Bulgarians visiting Plovdiv per year has increased from 28% in 2015 to over 39% in the title year. Moreover, a number of tourists said that their motivation to go to Plovdiv was connected with the city's reinforced status as a cultural tourism destination, as the share of visitors indicating cultural events as the main reason for their visit increased more than three times, from 11% in 2015 to nearly 39% in 2019.

In terms of international tourists, the final monitoring report identified a 27% increase in numbers compared to 2015, or a total of 121,478 visitors in the title year. However, as mentioned above in the "Data gaps and limitations" section, for the number of domestic and international visitors, as well as for the number of overnight stays, the National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria tracks only tourist accommodation establishments with 10 and more bed places. As these establishments account for only about 30% of the visitor flow in Plovdiv, reported monitoring data is only a rough estimation. To address this, the current report uses data extracted from the AirDNA MarketMinder tool, which covers tourists using online booking platforms, and reports 12,407 international visitors in Plovdiv in 2019. Summing up data reported by NSI and the AirDNA tool, a total of 133,885 foreign citizens visited Plovdiv during the title year, which is about 9% of the overall ECoC attendance.

The table below presents statistics on the number of rental properties, nights booked and total number of domestic and international guests in Plovdiv who have used the Airbnb and Vrbo booking platforms from 2017 to 2019. The AirDNA data shows that the supply of rental housing in the city has increased significantly, as the number of active listings from 2017 have doubled in 2019. The demand also has increased, as the number of nights booked in 2019 is four times higher than those in 2017. The ECoC has influenced the number of domestic guests to a greater extent but international ones also appear to have found Plovdiv more attractive during the title year.

Table 3.5 Data on Airbnb and Vrbo rental properties, occupancy and number of guests

	2017 ¹⁰⁴	2018	2019
Active listings	459	752	968
Nights booked	22,949	52,017	90,990
Domestic guests	2,135	5,785	8,209

¹⁰⁴ For nights booked in 2017, data accessible through the AirDNA tool covers only the period from May 2017 to December 2017.

International guests	5,040	10,339	12,407
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Source: AirDNA MarketMinder tool

As well as attracting tourists, the ECoC succeeded in creating unprecedented international media coverage. In the period from 2017 to 2019, over 800 publications appeared in international media, among which CNN Travel, Lonely Planet, The New York Times, Euronews, La Repubblica, Daily Telegraph, Deutsche Welle, RAI TV, France-Presse, Reuters, TASS, the Chinese agency Xinhua, Associated Press, and many more. The large number of travel related articles helped raise the visibility and attractiveness of the city for international tourists. For example, Plovdiv was named one of CNN Travel's best places to visit in 2019¹⁰⁵. In celebration of the ECoC 2019, National Geographic featured a six-series documentary film, dedicated to Plovdiv¹⁰⁶. The city was presented in the form of an urban expedition along landmark locations, showing the city's cultural traditions and less familiar facts about its history.

However, alongside the positive coverage, the international reputation of Plovdiv 2019 was partly damaged by a homophobic episode following the attempt of a local nationalist party to halt the photography exhibition "Balkan Pride" featuring LGBT themes. The controversy was covered by The Guardian, Le Figaro and Le Monde, among other international press. However, the Foundation's decision to endorse the project and continue with its implementation, was a positive signal to the audience abroad.

As mentioned in the "Marketing and Communication" section, the efforts of the Foundation towards higher international visibility included a promotional campaign during 2017-2018, set on the TV and digital networks of CNN, Euronews and the BBC, in partnership with the Ministry of Tourism of Bulgaria. The promotional videos for the TV network of Euronews were adapted to English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Greek, Portuguese, Hungarian and Russian languages, while the digital campaign content was also disseminated in Turkish, Arabic and Persian. The TV campaign reached out to 25 million people, while the digital campaign attained nearly 14 million impressions in more than 50 countries in the EMEA region.

Another activity aimed at raising the international profile of the city, was a promotional campaign with Ryanair on social media and on the company's mobile application. The campaign aimed at potential visitors to the city from Italy and Belgium and reached out to 2,012,307 people. During the campaign, Ryanair ticket reservations from Milan to Plovdiv increased by 24.5% and those from Brussels to Plovdiv by 17%.

3.6 Legacy

A positive aspect related to ensuring the legacy of the initiative, which sets Plovdiv apart from most other ECoC cities, was the decision of the Foundation to reserve funding from the Melina Mercouri Prize for projects in the years following the title. In October 2019, the "Legacy" open call was announced¹⁰⁷, which was aimed at sustainable development of cultural initiatives and events in the city and intended to provide a continuation of

¹⁰⁵ <https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/places-to-visit-2019/index.html>

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4Caj7Mvrno>

¹⁰⁷ <https://plovdiv2019.eu/en/opencall/2353-open-call-legacy>

the positive changes brought by the ECoC. Eligible applicants included cultural organisations, independent curators and artists from Bulgaria and abroad, both those who implemented projects in the programme of Plovdiv 2019 and new partners, who had not been involved in the ECoC.

To ensure legacy, the Foundation added a specific requirement for project proposals to build on the following aspects:

- Topics and concepts of the Plovdiv 2019 programme, and where possible, to enrich festivals and events, which were implemented in the title year;
- The culture, perceptions and attitudes of the communities and groups involved as participants and audiences;
- The requirement to develop and strive for long-term partnership and sustainability of the project.

At first, the intention of the Foundation was to allocate the entire €1.5 million funding from the Melina Mercouri Prize to this goal. However, in February 2020, the new Board of Directors made a decision to divide the sum into two equal parts¹⁰⁸. The first part of €750,000 is to be distributed to projects approved for funding under the “Legacy” open call. To this end, the jury reassessed the already submitted projects and came up with a new ranking list which would fit into the decreased budget. The remaining sum of the Melina Mercouri Prize is to be distributed in a second call by the end of 2020 under new terms and conditions for application, and project proposals will be evaluated by a new jury.

A total of 85 project proposals were submitted under the “Legacy” open call, out of which 23 were approved for funding by the jury. Of the approved projects, 11 are from organisations based in Plovdiv, 11 are from other parts of the country, and one is from an organisation based abroad. A positive aspect linked to legacy is that some of the highlights of the Plovdiv 2019 programme will have their continuation within the call, among which Open Art Files, ONE Dance Week, the Opera Open and Hills of Rock festivals and the Travelling Man project of the Drama Theatre in Plovdiv.

However, there is a considerable degree of uncertainty surrounding the implementation of approved projects due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the interviewed stakeholders, who had their projects approved within the “Legacy” call, expressed their concerns about having to adapt the content, activities and schedules for implementation. With regard to the remaining sum from the Melina Mercouri Prize, consulted organisations stressed the importance of allocating the funding to culture related projects that would indeed ensure legacy of the ECoC initiative. All of them agreed that a strategic vision is highly necessary in the long-term management of the culture sector in Plovdiv, with as little political influence as possible.

3.7 Conclusions

3.7.1 Successes

¹⁰⁸ <http://plovdiv2019.eu/en/news/2523-1-500-000-bgn-is-the-amount-for-open-call-legacy>

Some of the main successes in the implementation of Plovdiv 2019 are outlined below:

High-quality events in performing and visual arts: some of the highlights in the cultural programme were large-scale, ambitious productions, which were praised by audiences, stakeholders and critics, and received several artistic awards. Most notably, these include the projects of the State Opera, the Drama Theatre and the State Puppet Theatre in Plovdiv, which created visually compelling productions and involved renowned European artists and cross-border collaborations. The visual arts genre also stood apart, as several prestigious exhibitions were held for the first time in Bulgaria (e.g. the Deutsche Telekom's and the Institute for International Relations of Germany collections of contemporary art).

Introducing a social element to the cultural offer in the city: the social dimension of certain projects made culture accessible for social groups, which previously were not active participants in the cultural life. These groups include the Roma minority, young people from deprived neighbourhoods and elderly people from smaller towns and villages in the wider Plovdiv region. A good example of enhanced participation was *Medea*, a theatre performance in which children from the Roma, Turkish, Jewish and Armenian ethnicities in Plovdiv participated as actors. Although the integration of disadvantaged groups is beyond the control of ECoC, Plovdiv 2019 took some initial steps in overcoming prejudice and widening the access to culture for the whole local community.

Stimulating tourism and economic growth: monitoring data shows that both the number of domestic and international tourists was significantly higher during the title year. The motivation of visitors was connected with Plovdiv's reinforced status as a cultural tourism destination, as the share of those indicating cultural events as the main reason for their visit has increased more than three times since 2015. The ECoC has also brought economic growth to the city, with Kapana Creative District being the most notable example. Besides being a place hosting cultural events, Kapana is also home to many bars, restaurants and multifunctional spaces that combine art and commercial purposes and bring substantial revenue to the city.

3.7.2 Lessons in Delivery

The importance of governmental support: due to the lack of experience in Plovdiv and the whole country for such a large-scale cultural project, a strong coordination was necessary between stakeholders and authorities at local, regional and national levels. However, both the Foundation and the majority of cultural operators felt that national authorities were less engaged with the ECoC than expected. There was a significant delay in the funding from the national government, which led to a high degree of uncertainty for the ECoC implementation. When the national subsidy finally came through, it was allocated entirely to infrastructure projects, thus significantly decreasing the budget of Plovdiv 2019 for operating expenditure.

The importance of clearly communicating the ECoC concept with the view to attracting private sponsors: the contribution of the private sector to the budget of Plovdiv 2019 was much lower than expected at the bid book stage and the majority of interviewed cultural operators confirmed they found it very difficult to attract sponsors. Most private sponsors were hesitant because there was no clear understanding of what ECoC actually is. In addition, two other factors seem to have influenced the business

sector. Firstly, the delay in funding from the national government was not a positive signal, and secondly, the occasional negative media tone and speculations during the title year also discouraged the business circles.

Importance of balancing political oversight with artistic independence: since ECoCs are largely overseen, supported and financed by public bodies, to a certain degree, they require political oversight. At the same time, the need for a clear artistic vision and direction suggests the need for a degree of independence in the leadership of the ECoC. A careful balance thus needs to be struck between political ownership and artistic independence. The impact of the political context in Plovdiv on the ECoC manifested itself in changes in key personnel in the Board of Directors during the preparation phase and the title year and in some attempts at politicising the ECoC. Although the artistic team Foundation managed to maintain control over the cultural content of the programme, the strict political oversight generated criticism among some journalists and cultural stakeholders.

4.0 Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

This section of the report finalises the 2019 ECoC ex-post evaluation with a set of key conclusions and recommendations to consider in light of the collective findings of both city chapters. It is structured in terms of the main criteria attached to European Commission evaluations - relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and EU added-value.

4.1.1 Relevance

4.1.1.1 EQ1: To what extent were the objectives of each title city relevant to the objectives of the Action?

The objectives of both 2019 cities were relevant to the general and specific objectives of the ECoC Action, as set out in Decision 445/2014/EU.

The main driver for Matera bidding to become a European Capital of Culture was the opportunity for a cultural renovation, opening up the city to Europe and strengthening a diversified cultural offer. Seen almost as a necessity, this goal encompassed cultural participation, cultural capacity and infrastructure, and internationalisation of the city and of its cultural offer. These areas were not only in line with those of the overall ECoC Action, but were the product of a bottom-up approach that saw local organisations and citizens continuously engaged to ensure Matera 2019 remained relevant to the needs of the local community post the ECoC year. In line with the second objective of the ECoC Action, the bid book emphasised the need to widen access to and participation in culture for the citizens of Matera. In particular, one of the objectives of Matera 2019 was to directly and indirectly involve citizens in the design and implementation of 80% of the cultural programme. Despite the large participation of citizens in the design and implementation of the activities (i.e. approximately 18,000 people), only around 80% of the cultural programme was developed in collaboration with citizens, which is however a positive achievement. The European dimension was also integrated in the cultural offer of the title holding city, through creating links between Matera and previous and future ECoCs and involving international artists and cultural operators. Finally, another relevant objective set out in the bid book related to the need to empower the local cultural sector and offer them training and mobility opportunities aimed at improving their cultural production and audience engagement skills, thus also contributing to strengthening the capacity of the local cultural and creative sector.

The main motivation for Plovdiv bidding for the ECoC was to use culture as a driver of change for challenges related to its multi-ethnic background, cultural heritage and belonging to the wider European context. A total of seven objectives were outlined in the bid book, which were relevant to the general and specific objectives of the ECoC action. The objectives "To enjoy the city together" and "To blast the ghettos" were aimed at the integration of excluded social groups, with a particular focus on ethnic minorities such as the Roma and Turkish communities, and were thus highly relevant to the ECoC objective to widen access to and participation in culture. Similarly, the objective "To plug into Europe", which was focused on collaboration with European partners and

neighbouring countries in the Balkans, was in line with the ECoC objective to enhance the range, diversity and European dimension of the cultural offer in cities. Plovdiv also sought to foster cultural entrepreneurship through a targeted capacity building and audience development platform directed at cultural operators. The objective “To wipe off the dust” was focused on revitalisation of abandoned urban spaces, while the objective “To mobilise resources” was aimed at stimulating cultural sponsorships. One of Plovdiv’s objectives, aimed at stopping the brain drain and creating education opportunities for young people, stands out as particularly ambitious, as it is related to a wider demographic problem beyond the influence of the ECoC.

4.1.1.2 EQ2: To what extent were the title cities’ cultural programmes and associated activities relevant to their own objectives?

Overall, the cultural programme and associated activities of Matera 2019 were relevant to its own objectives and broadly consistent with the bid book. Matera set out an ambitious objective of widening the participation in culture of its citizens and engaging local people through a bottom-up approach in the design and implementation of the cultural programme. As also demonstrated by the large involvement of citizens and local cultural operators in the co-production of the different cultural activities, Matera 2019 maintained this promised bottom-up approach, which remained a central aspect of its cultural offer. The themes of the cultural programme were also consistent with those proposed in the bid book and generally responding to the need to renovate the local cultural sector and open up the city to Europe. However, the ambitious goals of implementing half of the cultural programme through European partnerships and to involve a large number of international artists and cultural operators represented a challenge for the city. In this regard, the promotion of the European dimension in the cultural offer of Matera seemed to be less relevant than other objectives relating to widening access to and participation in culture for its citizens.

To a significant extent, the cultural programme of Plovdiv 2019 was relevant to its own objectives, as it was structured along the four thematic platforms proposed in the application: Fuse, Transform, Revive and Relax. The Fuse and Revive platforms were consistent with the objectives towards improved access and participation of marginalised groups in the cultural life of the city. In particular, social groups covered by interventions included the Roma and Turkish minorities (through the Mahala cluster of projects), communities in smaller towns and villages around Plovdiv (through the Regionale cluster), and residents of neighbourhoods outside the city centre (Culture Meets People cluster). The European dimension was stimulated through cross-border collaborations on topics of European importance (such as the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall) and the active involvement of the EUNIC members and the EU-Japan Fest Foundation. Plovdiv’s own objective of revitalising abandoned urban spaces was only partially addressed, as some of the flagship projects linked to the Adata island and the Kosmos Cinema did not happen as foreseen in the bid book. A number of external factors such as the burning down of two tobacco warehouses and legal difficulties related to the private ownership of the Adata island undermined these projects, meaning the eventual contribution of the cultural programme towards this objective was less prominent. Similarly, although Plovdiv made some efforts to address the objective of mobilising resources for the ECoC, there were not sufficient activities

aimed at creating public-private partnerships and getting the business sector acquainted with cultural sponsorship, as initially planned in the bid book.

4.1.2 Effectiveness

4.1.2.1 EQ3: To what extent were the EU-level objectives achieved?

SO1: Enhance the range, diversity and European dimension of the cultural offer in cities, including through transnational co-operation

Hosting the ECoC represented the opportunity to radically change Matera's approach to culture and its role in the national and European cultural scene. Matera and the whole Basilicata region experienced through the ECoC project a rich and diversified cultural offer never seen before in its history. More than 1,300 events and projects were implemented in 2019, 80% of which consisting in original creations. The wide involvement of almost 200 international artists, the implementation of over 1,000 international mobility programmes, the artistic residencies, the integration of international shows and events, the partnerships created with other ECoC and international festivals contributed to the enrichment of the cultural offer and fostered the European dimension of Matera. Ultimately, there is a general consensus that thanks to the European Capital of Culture, Matera became more culturally vibrant, diversified and open to cultural differences.

The cultural offer in Plovdiv diversified significantly through the ECoC project, as the latter attracted a stronger presence of international artists than in previous years and brought about high-quality events, especially in performing and visual arts. Some of the highlights in the ECoC programme were large-scale, ambitious productions, which were praised by audiences and critics, and received several artistic awards. A total of 80 events with a cross-border dimension took place in 2019, which is four times higher than the number of events during the baseline year 2017. International collaborations included festivals with guest artists, workshops and seminars with visiting lecturers, as well as joint co-productions. Over 130 partnerships with creative organisations and artists from Europe were established over the ECoC year according to monitoring data. It is of key importance that Plovdiv actively went out of its way to encourage a European dimension and did not just 'hope' that a European element would emerge organically. Key assessment criteria of open calls, suitable topics linked to European issues in its bid book and active support by European cultural networks all led to a fuller European offer than in previous years.

SO2: Widen access to and participation in culture

While the diversified programmes of Matera 2019 allowed the engagement of a wider audience meeting different interests, the introduction of the Matera 2019 Passport was one of the innovative elements that contributed the most to the success of the overall experience, allowing more than 70,000 people to attend ECoC events. It was generally recognised that the passport allowed local citizens to explore new genres and types of cultural activities.

The objective of Matera ECoC was not only to host a larger number of events, but to ensure that a large share of these were original events co-created and realised with Matera's citizens. This goal was achieved, as more than 1,000 projects were designed and implemented specifically for the ECoC year and about 35% of the original productions were managed and implemented by local cultural operators (the remaining projects were implemented by either the Foundation, national or international operators). Citizens played a central role in Matera 2019 with more than 80% of the projects actively engaging citizens' participation for a total of almost 60,000 local citizens involved. On top of this wide participation, about 600 volunteers supported the implementation of the Matera 2019 and more than 30,000 students were involved through various ad hoc projects.

Inclusiveness and accessibility had been two keywords of Matera 2019. Some activities were not only designed for a specific audience but were implemented in a way to be accessible to specific communities. A number of projects were realised in hospitals, mental health institutes and prisons in order to ensure that also those who would normally not have access to cultural activities could benefit from and be part of Matera 2019. A specific focus was placed on the participation of older citizens and, also thanks to the use of specific calls, about 15,000 citizens participating in the implementation of the Cultural programme were above 55 years old.

In Plovdiv, stimulating access and participation in culture was a key original objective linked to the "Together" motto of Plovdiv 2019, inspired by the co-existence of different communities in the city. Ensuring access to the cultural offer in the city was the underlying principle of the Fuse platform, aimed at the integration of ethnic and minority groups in Plovdiv, as well as bringing together different generations and social groups. Monitoring data shows that overall, the ECoC achieved strong results in terms of participation, as the share of those who 'often' visited cultural events increased from 27% in 2017 to 44% in 2019. Attendance of events in Plovdiv showed that 60% (above target) of the city residents have attended at least one cultural event in the title year.

Through ECoC, Plovdiv introduced a social dimension of the cultural offer, as 'new' social players and groups (including those from Roma communities) were given an opportunity to develop content and actively participate in cultural activities across marginalised areas. Although the complete integration of disadvantaged groups is beyond the control of ECoC and the local political rhetoric was challenging at times, Plovdiv took some initial steps in overcoming prejudice and widening the access to culture for the whole local community.

SO3: Strengthen the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors and their links with other sectors

In Matera, the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors was impacted in two main ways. Firstly, cultural infrastructures were made available. About 400 venues and spaces that could be used for cultural events were identified, mapped and made available for use. Also, the historic location of Cava del Sole was finally restored and converted into a multifunctional area. Secondly, Matera 2019 invested in capacity building of cultural operators to help them develop new skills and strengthen their ability to seek partnerships and operate internationally. The Go&See action, for example, gave the possibility to many project managers to travel abroad to reach out directly to other

cultural organisations in Europe. Figures show that hosting the European Capital of Culture was beneficial for the sector in Matera and in the Basilicata region that experienced a stronger growth than the rest of the country (42% increase of cultural enterprises between 2013 and 2018).

Plovdiv 2019 achieved strong results in terms of strengthening the capacity of cultural operators to prepare and implement high-quality projects. The FORUM 2019 initiative was key to this (originally CABADEPLO in the bid book) as it stimulated partnership networks and audience development, in order to build capacity of cultural operators. FORUM 2019 started in 2015 and throughout the 5-year period of implementation a total of 60 workshops and training events took place, covering a variety of themes and topics. The Foundation also organised a wide range of face-to-face events for cultural operators including workshops, webinars, Q&A sessions, with team members or guest lecturers who advised cultural players on a range of themes. The EUNIC members provided significant support to the Foundation in the identification of skill gaps and capacity building needs, for example a practical workshop on audience development conducted with the help of the British Council.

SO4: Raise the international profile of cities through culture

Evidence suggests that Matera international profile was positively impacted by the ECoC initiative. Thanks also to the wide and diversified communication strategy adopted by Matera 2019, it was estimated that Matera received media coverage in around 40 countries. This exposure allowed by the opportunity to host the ECoC resulted in an increased flow of foreign tourists over the period preceding the ECoC year, with more than 50,000 additional foreign tourists seen in 2019.

Plovdiv achieved significant results related to raising the international profile of the city including stimulating the tourism sector and attracting significant international media attention. One of the most common results was the positive impact on tourism, with statistical data showing a steady increase in the flow of foreign visitors to Plovdiv in the years prior the ECoC and a total of 133,885 international tourists in 2019. In addition, the share of domestic tourists indicating cultural events as the main reason for their visit to Plovdiv increased more than threefold, from 11% in 2015 to nearly 39% in 2019. This shows that the motivation of visits to the city was very much driven by its cultural offerings linked to its ECoC status. The ECoC also succeeded in creating unprecedented media coverage, with over 800 publications in leading international media and Plovdiv being named one of CNN Travel's best places to visit in 2019.

4.1.2.2 EQ4: To what extent were the title cities' own objectives achieved?

Matera's application to become ECoC was built on the idea of using the opportunity to drive a cultural renovation process, not only for Matera, but for the entire South of Italy. The programme aimed to constantly involve local cultural operators and citizens, with the underlying objective of transforming Matera in a co-creation laboratory for the South of Italy. Evidence suggests that these objectives have been partially achieved. Matera 2019 clearly drove a cultural transformation in the local area of Matera and to a lesser extent the wider region. The city was also successful in its objective of involving citizens and widening access to culture: about 80% of the projects were implemented using co-

creation method, 60,000 citizens were directly involved and thousands attended events who would not have done otherwise. Matera 2019 was also a catalyst for tourism, driving an exponential growth previously not seen in the area and it also became the title city registering the highest increase in tourism numbers in the history of the Action. However, despite the 'Capitale per un giorno' initiative that saw other towns and cities hosting events during 2019, the involvement of the rest of the Region was less extensive than anticipated in the bid book, marking this one aspect where better coordination and planning could have delivered stronger results.

Plovdiv's own objectives set out in the bid book were generally achieved during the build-up and delivery of the 2019 ECoC. Stakeholders taking part in the evaluation rarely stated poor or disappointing performance against the main objectives of the programme. Cultural capacity was strengthened, the profile of the city was raised, and the cultural offer was developed much more than it would have been outside of the ECoC year. Although there were some positive examples of ECoC projects that stimulated attendance and participation, one third of the Roma population in Plovdiv remained distant and disengaged from the ECoC, as shown by the monitoring data. The inclusion of the Roma community in the cultural life of the city is one of the key areas in which continued efforts are necessary to reach initial objectives. In addition, Plovdiv's objective aimed at revitalisation of abandoned urban spaces was only partially achieved, as some of the flagship projects linked to the Adata island and Kosmos Cinema did not happen as foreseen in the bid book. There were also difficulties related to the objective of mobilising resources for the ECoC, but it should be noted that cultural sponsorship is still not a widespread practice in Bulgaria.

4.1.2.3 EQ5: To what extent has the Action resulted in unintended effects?

Matera 2019 saw a strong involvement of citizens in the implementation of its cultural programme. Citizens had the opportunity to meet artists, participate in the creative process and play an active role in the implementation of projects. This level of cultural engagement had never been experienced before by local citizens and many of them demonstrated, at the end of the title year, in order to carry on being involved in the cultural activity of the city. As a consequence, citizens drafted a **Cultural Manifesto of the citizens' of Matera** stating the need and clear intent to continue beyond the title year the cultural renovation process started by Matera 2019. Hosting the ECoC and the adoption of the Passport as a 'golden ticket' for all events and activities also represented the opportunity for some local cultural operators to update their practices and experiment new business models. Museums that had previously only relied on paper tickets and manual accounting systems are now considering implementing a digital ticketing system and introducing a unique ticket granting entrance to most museum as a consequence of the work done in the ECoC year.

One of the main obstacles to Matera 2019 reaching its full potential was the political instability at local, regional and national levels that characterised the implementation period. The frequent changes in political leadership happening over the period 2013 – 2019 led to delays and a more complex coordination between the different levels, partly hindering the development of a unified vision and shared goals.

The ECoC in Plovdiv had less in terms of unexpected consequences than Matera. One of the unintended effects was raising the awareness on LGBT issues, which were not among the central themes of the ECoC initially. As the attacks of a local nationalist party on a LGBT-themed photo exhibition were widely covered by international media, the ECoC helped raise the visibility of the LGBT community and flagged issues related to tolerance and acceptance of marginalised groups in Bulgarian society, which is a positive development in line with EU values. Similarly to Matera, Plovdiv experienced difficulties related to its political context, as during the development and implementation process (spanning from 2013 to 2019), there were two rounds of local elections and the Foundation had to deal with three different Governments and three Ministers of Culture. In the view of the majority of stakeholders, the political rhetoric often watered down some of the positive aspects of the ECoC.

4.1.2.4 EQ6: To what extent can the positive effects of the ECoC Action be considered to be sustainable?

Sustainability and legacy of the ECoC 2019 has been strongly impacted and partly undermined by the COVID-19 outbreak in a way that is not yet possible to assess. Events and activities that had been planned for 2020 have had to be cancelled or postponed creating a hiatus in the natural evolution of the ECoC action.

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the Foundation Matera 2019 has still a budget of about 6 million EUR, including the Melina Mercouri Prize, to work on the legacy of Matera 2019 and to become the **co-creation platform** needed to ensure continuity of the processes and activities started by Matera. As previously mentioned, citizens also kick-started a local grassroots cultural movement to build on the experience of Matera 2019. Local cultural organisations have acquired new skills and access to a wider cultural network, although more could have been done to provide cultural organisations with the means to ensure financial sustainability. Finally, hosting the ECoC 2019 placed Matera on the international map impacting, potentially permanently, the touristic flow toward the city and the region.

In Plovdiv, a positive aspect related to ensuring the legacy of the initiative, which sets Plovdiv apart from most other ECoC cities, was the decision of the Foundation to reserve funding from the Melina Mercouri Prize for projects in the years following the title. The “Legacy” open call, which was announced in November 2019, was aimed at sustainable development of cultural initiatives and events in the city and intended to provide a continuation of the positive changes brought by the ECoC. A total of 85 project proposals were submitted under the “Legacy” call, out of which 23 were approved for funding by the jury. At the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education meeting in December 2019, Plovdiv was pointed as a positive example of ensuring legacy, due to its decision to reserve funding from the Melina Mercouri Prize for cultural content after the title year.

4.1.3 Efficiency

4.1.3.1 EQ7: How did the management arrangements of each title city contribute to the achievement of outputs, results and impacts?

During the application phase, the ambition for the ECoC in Matera was to implement the project through a partnership between the Municipality, the regional authorities and the national government. The political change at municipal level in 2015 impacted on the efficiency of the implementing team in designing and developing the cultural programme for which the city had been selected, due to political frictions and different views on how to implement the programme proposed in the bid book. This political instability and the lack of a productive dialogue with the regional and municipal governments after 2015 represented a challenge for the implementing structure, thus resulting in delays with the appointment of the staff and with the preparation of the cultural programme. On the other hand, the general management of the Foundation appointed a cultural manager with relevant international experience, which provided the necessary skills, network and strategy for the development and implementation of the initiative. Local cultural operators were later actively involved in the implementation of the cultural programme and the Foundation aimed to strengthen their cultural capacity through several capacity building initiatives (co-creation workshops, Go&See). The Foundation also developed a solid communication strategy, focused on partnerships with media agencies and companies at local, regional, national and international levels. The decision to channel the communication through social media, with the appointment of a dedicated staff, including a large number of 'digital volunteers', strongly contributed to raise the profile of the initiative and increase awareness on the cultural programme.

The main set-up of the governance structure within Plovdiv 2019 remained largely unchanged since the award of the title, with a clear distinction of roles and responsibilities within the team. The Board of Directors had controlling functions, as it examined and approved the annual programmes, budgets and expenditures of the Foundation, while the Artistic Director dealt with the cultural content of the ECoC and shared the same level of responsibility as the Executive Director. However, changes in the political context (two rounds of local elections in Plovdiv and three changes of Ministers of Culture) affected the ECoC and led to a series of delays and a range of re-negotiations in relation to budgets and infrastructure projects. Local authorities maintained political oversight of the ECoC, as in 2014 the then mayor of Plovdiv was appointed Chairman of the Board, and in 2019, the newly elected Deputy Mayor took over. About one third of consulted stakeholders expressed criticism towards changes in key personnel and saw them as attempts at politicising the ECoC. A positive aspect of Plovdiv's ECoC was the democratic design of the programme, which was based almost entirely on open calls for project proposals and gave the local community an opportunity to curate and deliver cultural content. However, this approach was also challenging due to the Bulgarian public procurement system and its complex legislative framework, which led to lengthy complaint procedures from rejected applicants and significant administrative burden in financial reporting at implementation stage. The communication strategy of Plovdiv 2019 achieved good results in awareness raising at local, national and international levels but faced challenges in promoting the ECoC among the business sector and potential sponsors. Although the visual identity of Plovdiv 2019 was highly praised, most stakeholders noted that more effort could have been put into marketing and advertising. Nationwide, the share of those who knew Plovdiv was selected as ECoC 2019 increased from 57% in 2017 to 85% in 2019. Target groups at international level were also reached, as Plovdiv received unprecedented media coverage and its promotional campaign across Euronews, CNN and BBC reached users in over 50 countries.

4.1.3.2 EQ8: To what extent were the selection, monitoring and EU co-financing procedures, introduced by Decision 2006/1622/2006 (EC) efficient?

In Italy, the selection procedure implemented at national level but submitted to EU rules shortlisted 6 candidate cities out of 21 that originally applied in 2013. At final selection, the Panel outlined the high quality of each short-listed candidate city and particularly appreciated Matera's effort to present its cultural programme as an output of the local community, but also involving international partners and institutions. The monitoring process foreseen in Decision 1622/2006/EC was instrumental in accelerating the definition of the ECoC governance after a first period of difficulties and political frictions. In September 2015, the monitoring and advisory Panel pointed out the need to rapidly put in place a complete organisation chart and a solid team with long term contracts and clear mission statements. As a result, the Foundation management board addressed this issue and boosted its recruitment process, compensating the significant delay in developing and implementing the initiative. From a financial point of view, the Melina Mercouri Prize was already included in the budget of the initiative as part of the co-financing and to be exclusively used in 2020 for the legacy of the initiative.

The ECoC selection procedure in Bulgaria ensured fair competition among eight cities, out of which four (Plovdiv, Sofia, Varna and Veliko Tarnovo) were shortlisted. The Panel provided useful guidance to pre-selected cities, mainly related to the need for a stronger focus on the European dimension, the role of citizens and the importance of realistic budgets. After being awarded the title, Plovdiv received constructive feedback during monitoring meetings. The Panel managed to pinpoint some weaker aspects of the ECoC preparation, which later proved to be indeed challenging such as the simplification of the message to the general audience and the progress of flagship projects that lagged behind (e.g. the Adata island and Kosmos cinema). For most of the identified issues, Plovdiv took the Panel's recommendations on board and examples include the formulation of specific evaluation criteria, the selection of a new monitoring team, the regular publishing of progress reports on the website of the Foundation and the appointment of a dedicated manager for the Opening weekend. Some of the flagship projects connected with the Adata island and the Kosmos Cinema did not happen as foreseen in the bid book, but this was mainly due to external factors, which were beyond the control of the Foundation. The Panel also played an important role as a mediator, as it recommended to the government of Bulgaria to speed up the transfer of funds to the Plovdiv 2019 Foundation after a significant delay. The ECoC co-financing is expected to have a positive effect on the sustainability of results, as the entire funding from the Melina Mercouri prize was allocated to legacy related projects in the years following the title. Out of 85 project proposals submitted under the "Legacy" open call in the end of 2019, 23 were approved for funding, among which new editions of highlight events and festivals from the ECoC calendar.

4.1.3.3 EQ9: To what extent did the title holding cities manage to raise the necessary resources?

For Matera, the final budget of €54.8 million is generally consistent with the proposed budget of €52.3 million. However, the overall expenditure for administration costs was higher than initially foreseen (€8.8 million instead of €6.4 million). As a result, fewer resources were allocated to other areas, in particular: €34.8 million instead of €36.3

million for the implementation of the cultural programme and €9 million instead of €9.3 million for marketing and public relations. The expenditure for the legacy was not initially included in the budget proposed during the bidding process. However, €6 million were later allocated to the legacy of the initiative also thanks to the funds secured through the Melina Mercouri Prize. Approximately 70% of the total budget was secured already in 2014 through agreements with the national and regional governments and regardless of the outcome of the ECoC competition, as also outlined in the Selection Panel's Final Report. Out of €38 million provided by the national government, approximately €5 million were allocated to the implementation of infrastructures. Complementary sponsorship was also ensured by the private sector, which accounted for 4% of the total budget (€2 million). Compared to the expected budget from private sources (€7.3 million, this budget item has been considerably lower). As also outlined in the bid book, the Foundation's intention was to make an intensive use of ERDF and ESF funding, but this occurred with a certain delay. €11.7 million from ERDF were allocated by the Basilicata Region in October 2018 to 27 Municipalities for preserving their cultural and environmental heritage, in line with the objective of cultural renovation of Matera 2019. Despite the recommendations of the selection Panel in 2014, the Foundation did not make an extensive use of other EU funds, as just a few projects were actually supported through these funds.

The original budget for the delivery of the ECoC in Plovdiv planned at the bid book stage was estimated at €38.2 million, with the national government, the city of Plovdiv and private sponsors contributing respectively €10 million, €23.2 million, and €3.5 million. In practice, the total budget decreased to €29.4 million due to two major challenges Plovdiv faced when raising the necessary financial resources. First, there was a significant delay in funding from the national government, which led to a high degree of uncertainty for the ECoC implementation. When the national subsidy of €10 million finally came through, it was allocated entirely to capital expenditure for infrastructure projects, i.e. building of new facilities, upgrades of existing ones, as well as urban revitalisation (e.g. reconstruction of the main square and other public spaces in Plovdiv). Secondly, both the contributions from the city and the private sector were lower than expected, and efforts to attract complementary sponsorship proved insufficient. Most private sponsors were hesitant about getting involved because of the unclear ECoC concept, the discouraging signals from the national government, and the occasional negative media tone during the title year. All these factors led to the budget for operating expenditure being cut by more than a half, dropping from €22.3 million, as planned in the bid book, to merely €10 million.

4.1.3.4 EQ10: To what extent were the financial and human resources secured by each title city appropriate and proportionate?

The financial resources for Matera were generally appropriate for the implementation of the programme and its promotion. Administration and overhead costs required more resources than expected, as a consequence of the need to accelerate the planning process and staff recruitment after 2016. However, it has emerged that a larger number of human resources could have been deployed to implement the ambitious cultural programme (i.e. almost 2,500 events organised) and to ensure a better coordination and communication between the different departments of the Foundation. During the bidding stage, the Selection Panel was also impressed by the Foundation's aim to offer

training opportunities to public officials, in order to better prepare them to work on international projects and in a more transparent way (Open Data policy and Matera Public Service build-up programme). However, this aim was not achieved due to political frictions between the Foundation and the local and regional administrations. On the other hand, the renovation and re-opening of Cava del Sole represents a good example of long-term investment, which provides the city with a new cultural infrastructure and with adequate equipment for the development of cultural productions. However, a more accurate budget for the legacy programme should have been defined since the initial phase of initiative, in order to ensure an effective and longer-term impact on the territory.

Although Plovdiv 2019 struggled with a significantly decreased total budget of €29.4 million, over 500 cultural events took place in 2019 and the ECoC managed to achieve positive impacts related to tourism and economic growth in the city, with Kapana Creative District being the most notable example hosting many international visitors and new businesses. It also strengthened capacity of cultural operators (especially in performing and visual arts) and introduced a new social dimension into the cultural offer. It would have been extremely difficult to achieve the same results with less funding. It is very likely that if Plovdiv had received the initially foreseen budget of €38.2 million and operating expenditure had represented about 60% of the total budget, as specified in the bid book, the achieved impacts would have been even more significant. Overall, the actual budget of Plovdiv was not appropriate and proportional to what Plovdiv set out to achieve in the bid book. On the positive side, funding from the Melina Mercouri prize, which was allocated entirely to legacy related projects in the years following the title, could be considered appropriate for ensuring sustainability of results. Human resources deployed for preparation and implementation of the ECoC were proportional to intended outputs, as the Foundation staff included 47 people. In addition, over 2,000 people were engaged in volunteering activities for the entire period of the initiative. Plovdiv had a particularly fruitful collaboration with EUNIC members, which also provided additional human resources for the preparation and implementation of the cultural programme.

4.1.4 Coherence

4.1.4.1 EQ11: To what extent was the ECoC Action coherent and complementary to other EU initiatives?

The ECoC Action confirms to be coherent and complementary to other EU initiatives, in particular to the Creative Europe Programme. Although preserving its distinctive nature, the action builds on the objectives of the programme, namely international mobility of artists, capacity building of sector organisations and promotion of European cultural diversity as well as of the common features we share as Europeans. Plovdiv used Creative Europe funding both during the preparation and the implementation of the ECoC, co-financing three projects targeted at creative practitioners: School of Spectacles, which took place in the period from 2016 until 2017, and its follow-up in 2019, School of Participation, which focused on practical skills for outdoor events, as well as the transnational artistic project Borderline Offensive, which featured artistic residencies, workshops and research activities. In addition, evidence collected suggest that several organisations will seek EU funding for upcoming projects, also as a result

of the several capacity building activities organised by the two title cities and aimed at raising the international competences of the local public authorities and cultural operators.

The Action allowed to develop synergies with other EU financial instruments. The European Regional Development Fund was for example used by the Basilicata Region to finance projects related to heritage, environment and cultural equipment and this pot of funding also supported physical improvements across the city of Plovdiv.

4.1.5 EU Added value

4.1.5.1 EQ12: What is the EU added value and the visibility of the ECoC Action?

The experience of the two title cities highlighted how deeply the European dimension of the Action influenced not only the bidding strategy of the cities and the development of the cultural programmes, but also the implementation of the overall project. The internationalisation of the activities and the wide horizon of the programmes in both cities would have been of much lower scale if it had been a national action. A crude counterfactual evidence comes from the experience of Palermo Capitale Italiana della Cultura 2018. The evaluation of this national action showed that the cultural programme and the partnerships developed had a strong national and local focus.¹⁰⁹

Evidence collected shows that political instabilities hindered the smooth implementation of the ECoC in both countries and cities. However, the European nature and the exposure that comes with it grant the ECoC with a privileged status in the implementing countries, allowing to overcome more easily a situation that, in a pure national context, could be more subject to political influences.

The European nature of the action represented also the stimulus for the title cities to look for partnerships abroad and, most importantly, it acted as a link with other EU initiatives and cities. Matera collaborated with the '**EU Japan Fest**' strengthening the links between the European and Japanese cultures and, leveraging on the ECoC brand, organised activities with previous title cities, namely Aarhus, Leeuwarden and Marseille. Plovdiv engaged with the European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) network and involved a number of high-profile international stakeholders, namely the British Council, the Goethe-Institut and the Polish Institute in Sofia. For Plovdiv, the ECoC was also the opportunity to reconnect with their European common history hosting during the Opening Weekend a collection of original fragments of the Berlin Wall.

¹⁰⁹ Human Foundation. Valutazione di Palermo Capitale Italiana della Cultura 2018. Accessed from: <https://magazine.leviedeitiesori.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2019/12/Report-Palermo-Capitale-della-Cultura-2018.pdf>

4.2 Recommendations

Based on the evidence collected throughout the ex-post evaluation and the findings presented in this report, the following recommendations for the EU institutions in respect of the ECoC Action are put forward:

1. To ensure a smooth preparation and implementation of the ECoC, relevant national authorities could consider actions to facilitate coordination with stakeholders and authorities at local and regional and levels, especially in countries with less experience in large-scale cultural projects. Possible actions could include joint planning sessions for infrastructure projects, monthly progress meetings, discussions about challenges encountered and possible solutions, etc. This is especially relevant for those ECoCs with a larger public sector contribution to the budget, where stronger collaboration between local and national institutions is necessary.
2. Relevant national authorities could consider facilitating opportunities for current or potential applicant cities to exchange experience in mobilising financial resources and attracting private sponsorship for their ECoC. This has been an issue for both 2019 cities. Possible actions could take the form of dedicated sessions focused on private sector involvement and cultural sponsorship, which is still not a widespread practice in all EU Member States.
3. The Commission could consider inviting the title cities to collaborate in the development of a common international communication campaign between the two title cities. This could ensure a more efficient and effective use of available resources and a stronger impact on the European dimension of the Action.
4. The Commission could consider placing stronger emphasis on the sustainability aspect of the action and, in particular, on the capacity building of cultural operators in this respect. The ability of cultural operators to find financing opportunities beyond the ECoC year is fundamental to ensure that the progress made are not dispersed once the action is finished.
5. In order to ensure comparability of results between title cities and over time, the Commission could consider establishing a clear and harmonised set of minimum Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that the title cities will be responsible to monitor and report on. It would be recommended to limit the number of KPIs to be collected for each specific objective and to select local level KPIs that reflect the themes and implementation methods of the ECoC, so to avoid unnecessary administrative burden on the title cities.

5.0 Annexes

5.1 List of references

5.1.1 Plovdiv

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National / ECoC level

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5.1.2 Matera

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5.2 Interview lists

5.2.1 Interviews undertaken in Matera

Interviewee
Matera 2019 Foundation
Director
Ticketing area
Cultural Manager
Finance
President
Digital communication manager
International relations manager
Open Design School manager
Executive producer
Communication manager
Exhibition Producer I-DEA e BLIND SENSORIUM
Project Manager Lumen/social light
Volunteers manager
Other stakeholders
Formafantasma (Partner – IDEA project)
Gommalacca Teatro (Nave degli incanti project leader)
Rete teatro 41(Humana Vergogna project leader)
Teatro Sassi (Atlante delle emozioni project leader)
Member of ECoC Selection Committee
MIUR – Ministry for Education
Manifesto Matera 2019 (Civil society organisation)
MOICA (Civil society organisation)
Euronews
Associazione Matera2019 (Civil society organisation)
La Scaletta (Civil society organisation)
University of Basilicata
Volunteer
EVS volunteer

5.2.2 Interviews undertaken in Plovdiv

Interviewee	Position / Organisation
Plovdiv 2019 Foundation	
Kiril Velchev	CEO
Svetlana Kuyumdzhieva	Artistic Director
Victor Yankov	Deputy Director International Relations
Gina Kafedzhian	Deputy Director Programme
Radost Ivanova	Deputy Director Commercial Activity, Marketing, and Advertising
Other stakeholders	
Stefka Tsaneva	Stakeholder/ Cultural manager, Goethe-Institut Bulgarien, EUNIC
Stefan Stoyanov	Ex Board member, Ex Deputy Mayor of Plovdiv
Krassimir Stavrev	Visual and digital artist, PUNKT design studio
Victor Boytchev	Stakeholder/ Project partner/ Director of State Puppet Theatre Plovdiv
Snezhina Petrova	Stakeholder/ Project partner/ Actress
Snezhana Kostadinova	Head of the Monitoring team/ Consultant
Vesselina Sarieva	Stakeholder/ Project partner/ Co-founder of Open Arts Foundation and Sariev Gallery
Plamen Panov	Chairman of the Board of Directors/ Deputy Mayor of Plovdiv "Culture, archaeology and tourism"
Yohanes Artinian	Visual and digital artist, I-creativ studio
Boyana Giaurova	Stakeholder/ Project partner
Nina Naidenova	Stakeholder/ Project partner/ Director of State Opera Plovdiv
Mariana Cholakova	Ex Board member, Honorary German Consulate, Plovdiv
Velizar Dimchev	Creative Industries Stakeholder
Lyubov Kostova	Country Director British Council, EUNIC
Yaroslav Godun	Director of Polish Institute in Sofia, EUNIC
Assen Karagyozov	Stakeholder/ Project partner (representative of a Roma NGO)
Krastyo Krastev	Stakeholder/ Project partner/ Director of Drama Theatre Plovdiv
Ivaylo Dernev	Media representative
Irina Nedeva	Media representative
Simeon Vasilev	Stakeholder/ Project partner, GLAS Foundation (LGBT NGO)
Rumen Krivitzki	Sponsor/ Outdoor advertising company
Ana Divarova	Sponsor
Hristo Gyulev	Stakeholder/ Hotel owner/ Ex Board member
Chris Baldwin	International partner

5.3 Interview Guide

Background

1. Explore background of interviewee and his/her organisation
2. Explore role of interviewee and his/her organisation in the ECoC
3. Explore views of interviewee on the background context of the city (e.g. state of cultural sector, socio-economic context, etc.)
4. Explore views of interviewee on the impact of the ECoC on the city.

Objectives

5. What was the overall motivation for the city bidding for the ECoC?
6. What were the main objectives of the overall ECoC programme (themes, goals of the programme)?
7. How relevant were the objectives chosen to the needs/potential of the city and the interests of the partner organisations?
8. Did the objectives of the ECoC event include reaching out to all groups of society, including the excluded, disadvantaged, disabled people and minorities? And if so, how was this objective reached?

Application and planning/development phases

9. Please describe the process of designing the programme, in particular please highlight any consultation activity done.
10. What difficulties were encountered during the application and planning/development phases and how were these overcome?
11. If there was a new delivery agency / mechanism put in place to develop and deliver the ECoC, what were the key success factors and failure elements related to it?

Management

12. Could you please describe the organisational models (Board and operational structures) adopted for the implementation and management of ECoC2019 (what, when, roles)? How did it improve management of culture in the city during the event?
13. Who chaired the Board and what was his/her experience? What were the key success and failure elements related to the work of the Board and operational structure used and personnel involved?
14. Has an artistic director been included into the operational structure and how was he/she appointed? What were the key success and failure elements related to the work of the artistic director and personnel involved?
15. To what extent has the informal meeting following the designation as well as other advice offered by the panel and by the Commission influenced the results of the ECoC event?

Inputs

16. What were the key success factors and failure elements related to the process of raising the necessary financial resources (EU, public, private, sponsorship etc)?
17. How helpful (or not) was the ECoC brand in attracting funding and sponsorship? Without the participation to the ECoC, would similar resources have been raised?
18. To what extent were the financial inputs sufficient to achieve the desired outputs, results and impacts? Could similar results have been achieved with less resources?
19. To what extent have the human resources deployed for preparation and implementation of the ECoC event been commensurate with its intended outputs and outcomes?
20. How were volunteers engaged and involved in the implementation of the ECoC?
21. To what extent were EU Structural Funds used in combination to the development of the ECoC?
22. How was the Melina Mercouri Prize used?

European dimension

23. How/how far was the European dimension taken into account in relation to
 - a. The objectives of the ECoC
 - b. The content of the cultural programme
 - c. Specific individual projects and activities
24. To what extent was the European dimension a bolt-on or integral to the ECoC?
25. Was the fact that this is a European Union action sufficiently communicated by the cities?
26. Do you think that the general public and the cultural operators in the cities are aware of the fact that the title is an EU action?

Activities and outputs

27. What were the key success factors and failure elements related to the process of
 - a. Selecting activities, events and projects
 - b. implementing activities, events and projects and
 - c. monitoring activities, events and projects?
28. What projects went best and worse and why was this the case?
29. What were the key success factors, failure elements and unintended effects related to the communication and publicity of the cultural programme? To what extent has the communication and promotion strategy, including the use of social media, successfully reached the communication's target groups at local, regional, national, European and international levels?

Results and impacts

30. What have been the ECoC's short, medium- and long-term results and impacts in relation to the general objectives of enhancing diversity and European dimension of cultural offer in the city?
31. What have been the ECoC's short, medium- and long-term results and impacts in relation to the general objectives of widening access to and participation in culture?
32. What have been the ECoC's short, medium- and long-term results and impacts in relation to the general objectives of strengthening the capacity of the culture and creative sector?
33. What have been the ECoC's short, medium- and long-term results and impacts in relation to the general objectives of raising the international profile of the city?
34. To what extent did the ECoC achieve the results and impacts hoped? Were initial expectations met or exceeded?
35. Would the above results and impacts have been achieved without the ECoC? What is the added value of the European Capital of Culture being an EU initiative, compared to what could be achieved if the Action was a purely national or local action?
36. In what ways did the delivery mechanism and approach improve management of the culture sector in the city during the title year? In what ways has the ECoC improved the management of cultural development in the city? (in the long-term)
 - a. Will there be a follow up to the ECoC cultural programme?
 - b. What will be the role of the foundation/ operational structure?
37. Which of the activities or elements of the ECOC event are likely to continue and in which form now that the ECOC-year is over?
38. What are the impacts of the ECOC event likely to be on the long term
 - c. cultural development of the city?
 - d. social development of the city?
 - e. urban and broader economic development of the city?
39. What data is available that could be shared with us?

5.4 Technical Specifications

Ref. Ares(2019)4075684 - 27/06/2019



Annex I to the Invitation to tender

Technical specifications

EAC/15/2019/Lot1

Reopening of competition under the Framework contract PO/2016-06/01—

LOT 1 of DG COMM



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of the European Union