



Kaunas European Capital of Culture 2022

Second Monitoring Meeting

Report by the ECOC Expert Panel

Virtual Meeting, May 2020

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture
Directorate Culture and Creativity
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Introduction

This report follows the virtual meeting on 26 May 2020 between the Panel and Kaunas, one of the European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) in 2022¹. Kaunas was nominated as the European Capital of Culture 2022 in Lithuania by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania on 20 December 2017 on the basis of the Panel's selection report²; its bidbook is available on the Kaunas 2022 website³. There was previously a 1st monitoring meeting on 20 November 2018 in Brussels. The first monitoring report by the panel can be accessed on the European Commission website⁴.

This report is addressed to the Kaunas 2022 public non-profit institution and will be published on the European Commission's website⁵.

Attendance

The Panel members:

Sylvia Amann, Cristina Farinha and Agnieszka Wlazel, appointed by the European Parliament 2018–2020,

Paulina Florjanowicz, Dessislava Gavriloova and Pierre Sauvageot, appointed by the Council of the EU 2019–2021,

Beatriz Garcia (Chair), Jiří Suchánek (Rapporteur) and Jelle Burggraaff, appointed by the European Commission 2020–2022,

Alin Adrian Nica, appointed by the European Committee of the Regions 2019-2021.

For Kaunas 2022:

Advisor to Kaunas Mayor,

CEO of Kaunas 2022,

Head of Programme,

Mythical Beast Programme Curator,

Community Programme Curator.

Also in attendance were observers from the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture) as well as from the Lithuanian Ministry of Culture.

¹ The European Capitals of Culture action is governed by Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and the Council for the titles 2020 to 2033, which provides for three formal monitoring meetings between designated cities and the panel. See: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2014.132.01.0001.01.ENG

² See selection report at:

https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/ecoc-2022-lithuania-selection-report_en.pdf

³ https://kaunas2022.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/EN_keks_2022_2_final_web.pdf

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/ecoc2022-kaunas-monitoring_en.pdf

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/capitals-culture_en

Report from ECoC Kaunas 2022

Kaunas 2022 submitted in advance of the meeting a comprehensive progress report. It outlined in detail the activities of the organisation since the last monitoring meeting in November 2018. The report also referred in a humorous way to the current COVID-19 pandemic. One day before the virtual meeting, Kaunas 2022 delivered a 30-minute-long video that comprised a statement of the Mayor as well as a presentation of the state of affairs regarding the progress done in various areas, most notably the programme (including an outlook of the opening and closing events). The hints of the “Culture to the Courtyards” project were presented as one of the reactions to the current pandemic situation.

The main video message of the CEO referred to the stability within the team and project as a whole, as well as the ongoing political support from all authorities. The Head of Programme stressed the good cooperation and very solid development of all the projects indicated in the bidbook, noting in particular their emphasis on high quality artistic content, participatory arts and revived modernist architecture. The Mayor reflected on the very serious global situation caused by the pandemic but stressed the importance of the ECoC project for the city and whole Lithuania, as recently illustrated by the visit of various country leaders. He also stated that the pandemic would not have any negative impact on the city’s overall financial contribution to the ECoC project. All the changes in the project’s financing are of a temporary nature. According to the Mayor, the recently confirmed financial support from the Government to the city’s infra-structural investment projects creates a solid basis for the stability of the soft projects included in the ECoC and paves the way for future aspirations, such as securing the UNESCO World Heritage Site Award.

Discussion

During the subsequent discussion, the Panel sought clarification on certain issues and offered experience and advice. Topics discussed included the following:

Long-term cultural strategy

The Panel asked about the progress with monitoring and evaluation. In particular: how are they monitoring the impacts of their communication strategy this year – what is the learning out of the COVID situation, which has meant most activities are to be delivered virtually, and how are they capturing the impact of new ways of using digital media. The Panel also wanted to hear more about progress made in the development of the long-term database promoted by the Kaunas Artists House. Furthermore, the panel asked about the capacity to deliver in connection with some of their most creative proposals, such as the “Emotion Reflector” and the “Happiness Sensor”.

- The team stated that developments in evaluation and monitoring were in line with the initial plan, as described in the bidbook. The team is working on programming a special software allowing organizations to contribute to data collection. These data will be available also for external experts and other professionals. The expected investment for this platform amounts to around 50.000 EUR. The team underlined its readiness to react in a flexible manner to possible developments of the pandemic. However, they noted that it was extremely difficult to create variant plans at an uncertain time. Finally, the team noted that all the projects indicated in the bidbook were expected to be delivered.

The Panel asked about the overall legacy of Kaunas 2022 – what are the major achievements that can be expected across all activities with legacy potential.

- The Head of Programme explained that the strategy was to ensure legacy primarily at the level of partner organisations, in particular in terms of audience engagement and participation. She also stressed the importance of the Tempo Academy of Culture as well as of special financial supporting programmes that will continue after 2022 with funding from the municipal budget. Some cultural projects will also continue after the title-year, such as the “ConTempo Festival”, the “International Literature Festival” and the “Courtyard Festival”.

The Panel asked about the involvement and support from the surrounding district and the legacy they envisaged regarding the cooperation between the city and the district.

- The CEO noted the good cooperation with both the district and the city. She also described the specifics of the district, lacking a vibrant independent sector, and explained that the open call published in 2019 had been a useful tool to stimulate it. Kaunas-based organisations are motivated to act more actively in the district and with local partners and inhabitants. This approach shall ensure both high quality culture and better participation of local citizens and organisations.

The Panel inquired about modernist architecture and design as important landmarks of Kaunas and key elements of the bid, as well as the UNESCO World Heritage application for Kaunas modernist architecture, which has been on the Tentative List for a number of years now. Questions related to this topic involved two main areas: how the programme is linked with the timeline of the UNESCO application and assessment process and how it is contributing to a reinforced cooperation with the governmental services responsible for this. The Panel also asked whether any progress in the application process were foreseen by 2022.

- The Advisor to Kaunas Mayor stressed the importance of both the topic of modernist architecture and securing the UNESCO award as a strategic step for the city. He explained that the application was planned to be submitted to UNESCO by February 2021, so there was a high chance that Kaunas modernist architecture would be inscribed on the World Heritage List by 2022. The Head of Programme supported this answer, assuring the Panel about the close cooperation between the

relevant city authorities and the Lithuanian Government on this, especially in the area of consulting all stakeholders on site.

Programme

The Panel asked how the city envisaged to assess and to mitigate the new risks generated by the coronavirus crisis. What is the overall impact on the cultural programme and financing of the projects expected to be and are there any cuts to be expected?

- The Advisor to Kaunas Mayor explained that the city worked on several scenarios, where the strongest impact would come from financial cuts at national level. However, he assured the Panel that so far the city had been functioning on a solid footing and was in a very good economic situation. He also said the support from the national Government amounted to 25 million EUR and was therefore a very significant contribution to the municipal budget, which he presented as a positive point for all soft projects including Kaunas 2022.

The Panel was also interested in the risk of hosting fewer visitors during the ECoC year as a possible development due to the pandemic, and the financial effects this would imply.

- The Head of Programme highlighted how difficult planning was while pandemic-related restrictions imposed on cultural operators were still developing and changing. On a positive side, she mentioned that thinking out of the box was more needed than ever. The digital aspects of projects are now showing their full potential. However, the team does not expect any significant financial impact from a reduced number of visitors, as they do not rely on ticketing income (e.g. almost all planned events are free). Major limitations are linked to the capacity of attendees for large-scale events. No international project was stopped and Kaunas 2022 hopes for the best scenario to materialise in a near future, so that international cooperation can be maintained at a high level.

In the Panel's view, a crisis usually comes hand in hand with new perspectives and opportunities. Artists have the ability to invent and deliver new projects, in particular in public spaces, taking into account new constraints such as social distancing. Examples include urban routes, the use of drones, floor markings, murals, public choreography or the use of digital tools. The Panel asked whether Kaunas 2022 expected that the current Covid situation would impact their artistic projects and – if so – how.

- The Head of Programme said a new open call would be published later this year, taking this new reality into account. Also, the 64 partners that are currently working with Kaunas 2022 may be rethinking some of their artistic ideas in the light of the pandemic both through digital and offline means. The "Culture to the Courtyards" project is a good example of such a creative and timely response to the crisis, with a strong involvement of both artists and local people. The Community Programme Curator highlighted that this project would have a long legacy going well after 2022. Some cities in Lithuania and other European countries are developing similar projects. This is a great motivation for Kaunas 2022 to stay on track.

European dimension

The Panel asked the team about the message about Kaunas and about Europe they wanted to convey, especially in this time of a pandemic.

- The Mythical Beast Programme Curator explained that the pandemic had indeed an impact on Kaunas 2022, but also revealed its strengths through its very strong participatory programme. The team is now very confident that in the second part of the year, it will be able to test again how Kaunas 2022 can cooperate with the rest of Europe. The programme streams and the project as a whole stay in line with the bidbook, so that the messages to Europe and back to Kaunas remain unchanged, namely "come and see how culture is changing us" and "from temporary to contemporary".

Management

Tourism is one of the sectors hardly hit by the pandemic. The Panel asked how Kaunas 2022 was going to address the challenge of people presumably going to stay away from travelling, at least in the short to mid-term. Is there any strategy on how to reach more tourists – perhaps by adjusting the strategy in order to attract visitors from neighbouring countries?

- The Head of Programme admitted that some targets might not be reached, but on the other hand new doors were being opened via digital means. Maintenance of communication with other European countries and institutions remains top priority for the project. Kaunas 2022 is also working closely with national tourism authorities while cultural concepts using digital media are under development in order to be presented both in Lithuania and abroad. Increased effort will be put into activities, motivating tourists from the neighbouring countries to come by car and other alternatives to flights.

The Panel sought clarification on the financial situation of the project, especially the amount of funding frozen due to the pandemic. The Panel wanted to know whether the frozen funds were planned to be disbursed at a later stage and how these measures were communicated to partner organisations.

- The Advisor to the Mayor underlined that the support of the city remained unchanged and that the financial situation of Kaunas 2022 was stable. In addition, the CEO specified that the funding frozen on this year's budget amounted to 500.000 EUR, i.e. 200.000 initially planned for redistribution to programme partners and 300.000 for the Kaunas 2022 organisation. Kaunas 2022 has been actively communicating with its partners, explaining that this was only a temporary shift in budget planning and that the money would be disbursed when circumstances allow.

The Panel asked about the feasibility to reach the sponsoring target in current circumstances and probable upcoming economic crisis.

- The CEO explained that the ECoC project was based only on confirmed income and that a reduced level of sponsorship would therefore not harm its overall quality while the ambition was still to reach the 1 million EUR target. Moreover, in-kind sponsorship is very promising, in particular with broadcasters.

The Panel asked about the state of affairs in respect to the development of cultural infra-structural projects.

- Referring to Annex II of the progress report that gives a detailed status of all 16 infrastructural projects related to the ECoC project, the CEO said there was no chance for finalising the modernisation of M. Žilinskas Art Gallery in time. The team is therefore looking for various unconventional temporary venues to host the contemporary art programme, in particular the William Kentridge exhibition. The Advisor to the Mayor described the situation as complicated but not critical, and pointed to several positive developments in this regard.

The Panel asked how the team planned to include or strengthen the ecological dimension of their ECoC project.

- The Head of Programme gave the example of the International Day of Happiness, which was supposed to have ecology as its main focus this year. Kaunas 2022 received around 160 registrations for the event. As the programme had to be cancelled despite the high level of interest expressed, the topic will be kept for next year. The CEO also mentioned climate change as one of the very important aspects of the projects prepared by the young people. Guidelines and recommendations for event organizers are under preparation to help them be more sustainable.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Panel acknowledges the good progress made so far by Kaunas 2022 and wishes to draw attention to the following conclusions and recommendations:

- The Panel appreciates the stability of the delivery structure and the consistency of the programming since the establishment of the organisation. This helps to stay on track and in line with the plans and projects as indicated in the bidbook. The Panel acknowledges this as a strong asset of the ECoC project in Kaunas.
 - **Recommendation 1:** Good and long-term communication of all the efforts is essential for a comprehensive impact especially in relation to international audiences. The Panel recommends Kaunas 2022 to find as soon as possible a recruitment for the position of Head of Communication and Marketing. The pandemic shall not be taken as an excuse for slowing down – or postponing – the recruitment process.

- Not surprisingly, a significant part of the debate was dedicated to the current COVID19 situation and related challenges and opportunities. The Panel in general was pleased with the flexibility demonstrated by Kaunas 2022 and the popular success of new projects such as “Culture to the Courtyard”, where both offline and digital contents came together. The Panel appreciates the confidence of the team, which has been working hard to involve audience via digital means and in general to think out of the box. The European Capital of Culture Forum 2020 is a good example of such flexibility.
 - **Recommendation 2:** The Panel recommends that Kaunas 2022 keeps the same level of flexibility in any unpredictable situation that may arise in the future and prepare contingency plans with due alternatives in terms of narrative, programming, budget, management, evaluation and communication.
 - At the same time, the Panel encourages Kaunas 2022 to have a capacity building programme in the digital field targeting the cultural sector for example to help it be able to organize virtual meetings and activities with the adequate technical equipment.

- Having a good and stable financial and political support from key stakeholders is a must for any city willing to maximise the benefits of an ECoC project. The Panel was pleased to learn that the support of and cooperation with all relevant levels were extremely solid. The fact that the national Government is helping with the infra-structural projects is also a very positive element.
 - **Recommendation 3:** Continue to develop a collaborative environment and a sense of ownership amongst stakeholders in the city and the district. In this respect, the ECoC can act as a facilitator for actions and dynamics that are meant to ensure sustainability. The Panel reminds Kaunas 2022 that every single Euro invested in the development of the cultural community in a crisis time could have an even greater positive impact. On the other hand, the team needs to double check the rationality of all the expenditures.

- The Panel is fully aware that sponsoring is a sensitive matter in the current economic situation. Financial contribution from the business community is however important. A good practise from past ECoC (including Mons 2015) is the setting of a club of sponsors consisting of a few hundreds of smaller businesses supporting the ECoC project.
 - **Recommendation 4:** A strategy to attract and integrate smaller companies and businesses as sponsors should be developed so that the ECoC could benefit from more funding and communication-wise while at the same time strengthening local involvement and the sense of co-ownership.

- Kaunas 2022 presented a realistic plan for the evaluation and monitoring process that seems to be in line with the premise indicated in the bidbook. The Panel was pleased to hear about the positive

development in this regard. It appreciates the tools for collecting data in a participatory way, such as the app mentioned in the progress report.

- **Recommendation 5:** The Panel recommends Kaunas 2022 to make this app and whole evaluation and monitoring platform sustainable and ready for use after 2022.
- The Panel considers international cooperation as one of the strong and promising points of the Kaunas 2022 project. Cooperation with Esch 2022 seems to be on a good track.
 - **Recommendation 6:** The Panel recommends Kaunas 2022 to strengthen the cooperation with Esch 2022 through open calls and other means. Apart from creating long-term cultural connections, the importance of international marketing and communication shall not be missed in this regard.
- The Panel appreciates that some ecological aspects are present in the programme and implementation of the ECoC.
 - **Recommendation 7:** The Panel encourages Kaunas 2022 to work on ecological topics and environmentally friendly organisational solutions even more intensively and in cooperation with relevant partners in order to ensure the impact and legacy of these endeavours.
- The Panel was pleased to hear that the city was making a significant effort to get the UNESCO World Heritage label for Kaunas modernist architecture.
 - **Recommendation 8:** The Panel reminds both the city and the Kaunas 2022 team of the need to work closely with the UNESCO authorities and to coordinate all the steps and efforts with relevant stakeholders in order to finalize the inscription by 2022. In case of success, both the city authorities and the team shall be ready with a communication strategy targeting the professionals and wider public in Lithuania and abroad.
- The tourism sector was dramatically hit by the COVID “tsunami” and the whole economy was shut down in a matter of hours. Even though by 2022 tourism will possibly rise again, it will also most probably change. The Panel was pleased to hear that Kaunas 2022 started to prepare alternative strategies to bring international tourists – especially from neighbouring countries – to Lithuania.
 - **Recommendation 9:** The Panel encourages the team and tourism authorities to increase their efforts to attract tourists from the Baltic area and other neighbouring countries, while at the same time not leaving behind the ambition to target tourists from more distant countries. Flexibility in the approach will be beneficial in this respect. The Panel reminds Kaunas that not rarely the real impact in terms of tourism growth comes one or several years after the ECoC title-year.
- The communication part of the ECoC seems to be underdeveloped at this phase of the project.
 - **Recommendation 10:** A detailed communication strategy and plan for the whole project needs to be put in place and start being implemented. The original concept and key slogans should be translated into clear messages that have the potential to attract national and international visitors and to clearly communicate Kaunas 2022 aims.

- The Panel was pleased to hear about the legacy expectations in terms of knowledge, capacity building and partnerships and to learn about the improved cooperation with the district and the city.
 - **Recommendation 11:** The Panel considers important to also reflect on and clarify the legacy plans regarding other aspects of the ECoC project, for example governance, communication or sustainable support for capacity building and international cooperation. A special focus and attention should be given on the need to pursue the overall long-term cultural strategy of the city and district so that the ECoC legacy, beyond capacity building of the art sector, is smoothly planned and ensured. The work already done with other 2021 ECoCs could also be potentiated to develop into a common plan for legacy activities.

Next Steps

The Panel welcomes the relevant steps undertaken so far and remains available for questions and advice, through the Commission services.

The Commission will call for a third monitoring meeting in the autumn 2021.

At the end of this third monitoring meeting, the panel will make a recommendation to the Commission on whether to pay or not the Melina Mercouri Prize to Kaunas 2022.

The conditions for the payment of the Prize are specified in Article 14 of Decision 445/2014/EU:

“The prize money shall be paid by the end of March of the year of the title, provided that the designated city concerned continues to honour the commitments it made at the application stage, complies with the criteria and takes into account the recommendations contained in the selection and monitoring reports.

The commitments made at the application stage shall be deemed to have been honoured by the designated city where no substantial change has been made to the programme and the strategy between the application stage and the year of the title, in particular where:

- a) the budget has been maintained at a level capable of delivering a high-quality cultural programme in line with the application and the criteria;
- b) the independence of the artistic team has been appropriately respected;
- c) the European dimension has remained sufficiently strong in the final version of the cultural programme;
- d) the marketing and communication strategy and the communication material used by the designated city clearly reflects the fact that the action is a Union action;
- e) the plans for the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the title on the designated city are in place.”

The Panel would like to thank the Mayor of Kaunas, Kaunas 2022 team and other contributors to the monitoring report and ECoC project as such for a very informative and frank discussion via digital means and looks forward to the next developments of the European Capital of Culture project.

(Signed) all attending Panel's members

