



**EUROPEAN CAPITAL
OF CULTURE**

Valletta

European Capital of Culture 2018

Second Monitoring Meeting

Report by the Monitoring and Advisory Panel

Brussels

March 2017

Introduction

This report follows the second monitoring meeting in Brussels on 7 March 2017 between Valletta, one of the two European Capitals of Culture (ECOC) in 2018, and the monitoring and advisory panel (the “panel”)¹. Valletta was recommended for the 2018 title at the selection meeting in October 2012² and formally designated as the ECOC in May 2013; the recommendations in the selection report, the two post-designation reports³ and the first monitoring report⁴ are still valid.

The report is addressed to the Valletta 2018 Foundation ("Valletta 2018" or "the Foundation") and will be published on the European Commission's website (http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/capitals-culture_en.htm).

Attendance

The panel members:

Sylvia Amann and Cristina Farinha, appointed by the European Parliament 2015-17

Jiří Suchánek, appointed by the Council of the EU 2016-18

Ulrich Fuchs (Chair) and Dr Suzana Žilič Fišer (absent), appointed by the European Commission 2017-2019

Dr Elisabeth Vitouch, nominated by the Committee of the Regions 2016-2018

For Valletta 2018:

Jason Micallef	Chair of the Board of Directors Valletta 2018
Dr Karsten Xuereb	Executive Director Valletta 2018
Prof Alexiei Dingli	Mayor of Valletta
Margerita Pule	Programme Coordinator Valletta 2018
Graziella Vella	Research Coordinator Valletta 2018
Mario Philip Azzopardi	Artistic Director – Special Events Valletta 2018

¹ The European Capitals of Culture action is governed by Decision 1662/2006/EC of the European Parliament and the Council for the titles 2007 to 2019, which provides for two formal monitoring meetings between designated cities and the panel: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32006D1622>.

² Report at http://ec.europa.eu/culture/tools/actions/documents/ecoc/2018/panel-report-malta_en.pdf

³ Valletta had two post-designation meetings, in 2013 and 2014, as it was selected one year ahead of the normal schedule. Post-designation reports are not official and therefore are not made public.

⁴ The meeting took place in September 2015. Report at: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/files/ecoc-2018-malta-monitoring_en.pdf

Also in attendance were observers from the European Commission (DG EAC).

Report from Valletta 2018 and presentation

The Valletta 2018 Foundation submitted a detailed written report in advance of the meeting. The report outlined the activities of Valletta 2018 since the last monitoring meeting in September 2015.

At the meeting the team made a presentation which included these points:

- Jason Micallef presented the team and declared that currently there is a very good atmosphere in the city with regards to the ECoC project. Valletta 2018 is seen as a shared project for all communities and stakeholders in the country.
- As a general introduction, Mr Micallef gave an update on the four main infrastructure projects, the involvement of Gozo and overall of Malta into the project, the European dimension of the programme and the legacy plans beyond 2018.
- The project of renovation of Strait Street is showing very good results already, with year round cultural programmes. The renovation of the Indoor Market is expected to be finalised in September 2017. The Valletta Design Cluster, to be finalised in the last quarter of 2018, is expected to create new jobs, mostly in the cultural sector, and will constitute a strong legacy after the year. MUŻA, the new museum of arts, is also advancing. The Renzo Piano project, including the Valletta city gate and fountain, is expected to be ready by November 2017 for the opening of the ECoC on 20th January 2018.
- The programme has a very strong European Dimension, with more than 250 artists from abroad including Egypt, Israel and European countries. There is now a stronger focus in the programme on the Mediterranean and on all those countries which share its shores.
- The legacy is currently being discussed, with the idea to create a Valletta Cultural Agency that would recruit part of the staff currently working for the ECoC and take forward the cultural programme beyond 2018.
- The Mayor of Valletta explained that the Valletta 2018 ECoC project was focused on people, and reaching them will be the real measurement of success for Valletta 2018. The ECoC should bring the spaces of the city back to the people, from the entrance, being remodelled for citizen's use, moving to MUŻA, where an initiative of citizen's curatorship is being undertaken. Also in Strait Street a balance between visitors and inhabitants is being sought. The Indoor Market should become not only a commercial place but also a socialising venue, in particular for seniors. There are a lot of small projects happening for engagement and outreach.
- Karsten Xuereb spoke about the need to strike a balance between, on the one hand, flagship high quality events and, on the other hand, small projects focusing on the community and mixing social impact, education and culture. Following the recommendations of the panel in previous meetings, a rebalance of expenses has been carried out, reinforcing the programme and the capacity building and ensuring the

highest quality. Currently there are around 30 to 40 people working in the ECoC in Valletta, and twice as much in individual projects.

- Dr Xuereb also highlighted the important international dimension of the programme, with very good progress made following the previous recommendations. He also insisted on the importance of the legacy arrangements, where everything possible is being done to ensure that the momentum is kept and that the circumstances, either political or financial, do not roll these plans back.
- Mr Azzopardi, in charge of 5 major projects, gave further information about the opening ceremony. The ceremony is designed to allow people to touch and feel what it is meant by culture, further than academic knowledge. The opening ceremony will include 5 different scenes where the audience would become part of the performance. Each event will be repeated 5 times during the night, with people flowing from one to the next following a circuit, starting at the entrance of Valletta.
- Mrs Margerita Pule, Programming Coordinator, explained that most of the projects in the bid-book were still underway. Under the overall narrative of “An Island-Wide Festa”, the projects are now organised in three themes (Island Stories; Future Baroque and Voyages) which are in line with the spirit of the initial bid. The cooperation with Arts Council Malta and other national entities is very positive. Mrs Pule also emphasised that invited artists were not only asked to perform, but to come and work with people in Malta, spending time in the city and researching. Residencies are being organised in people's homes to develop their works. Artists have been chosen with regards to their capacity to work with local communities.
- On a more practical term, the contractual part is being finalised, setting the dates, the venues, and the budget.
- The Exile and Conflict strand has not been developed on its own, but included in the other strands and made stronger with a participatory element.

Discussion

During the subsequent discussion the panel sought clarification on a number of issues and offered experience and advice. Topics included:

- With regards to the opening ceremony, the panel emphasised that as a general rule, it is probably the most risky project of the year and that communication before, during and after the opening ceremony is crucial. Valletta 2018 explained that plans are made to allow for any problems to be solved. The communication will include a campaign in TV and newspapers, explaining how the ceremony will happen and where people have to go. While the design includes international figures, the opening is a celebration of the Maltese people that will take part in the performances, as much as the (small) venues in the city allows.
- The panel asked about the programme contracting status. Valletta 2018 explained that around half of the contracts are already closed. Small contracts are still pending but these are easier. The focus has been put on getting the biggest contracts signed first.

- The panel wanted to know more about the Valletta Design Cluster project and how it will be funded, now and in the future. Valletta 2018 reported that it was a project from the Foundation in this moment, with a budget of 0.5 million euros in 2017, and an increased budget in the years to come. In the future, the current funding sources would be replaced by ERDF funds, to which an application has to be made. However, there is a commitment that national funds would cover the costs if the ERDF application is not successful.
- The panel inquired about Valletta's Main exhibition "The Sea Our Neighbour" which will run for four months from the end of January until the end of May. Valletta pointed out that the exhibition will consist of an indoor exhibition as well as outdoor installations.
- The panel inquired about the project "European Eyes on Japan", and about the collaboration with Leeuwarden, in particular the Aida Opera and the films made by children. Valletta 2018 pointed out that the opera will be performed first in Leeuwarden and then in Valletta, and includes a collaboration between MCAST and the Frisian College as well as exchanges of artists. The film project opened last week a call for ideas for the films, and the children will then be helped with production during 2017 and 2018. The project is exactly the same in each of the cities (Valletta, Leeuwarden and Aarhus). The photography project with Japan includes working with the local artists, with a strong contribution from Japan. With Leeuwarden, the cooperation also includes student exchanges and travel of projects in the fields of design, engineering, new media, creative arts, applied sciences and business.
- The panel asked about the citizen-led projects and the status of calls and contracts. Valletta 2018 explained that no distinction was made contracting-wise between citizen-led projects and others. The Music Programme is still open, and should be resolved in May, so contracts can be finalised by July.
- The panel had problems understanding the connection between the narrative, the themes and the programme, and asked how the narrative would be communicated through the programme and how the programme was reflected in the themes. Valletta 2018 explained that an effort would be made in this respect as part of the final programme launch next October.
- On the budget side, the panel was reassured by the fact that the sponsorship officer was already in place and asked about the results achieved so far. Valletta 2018 mentioned that several agreements were undergoing discussions, with commercial companies in Malta. Enhanced visibility can be offered during the opening and the "Pageant of the Seas" flagship event in June.

- The panel raised a question about the results of the year, linked to the evaluation results already provided. Tangible targets for example for tourism are missing in the monitoring and evaluation plans currently in place. At the end of the day these figures will be helpful to illustrate in a simple way the results of the year. Valletta 2018 agreed that this issue was of key importance to communicate with the wider public and all involved stakeholders about the outcomes of 2018 and thanked the panel for this comment. At the same time, the Foundation confirmed that there was on-going collaboration with the Malta Tourism Authority. Cruising tourism provides with a natural pool of tourists, and agreements have been reached with cruising companies to pre-sell tickets for some of the events (for example, the flagship Aida Opera). There is of course a willingness to increase the quality of tourism.
- The panel drew the attention the Foundation and the Mayor about the need to organise legacy arrangements in a way that cannot be modified for political reasons during the coming election campaign. The way forward that will be pursued by Valletta 2018 is to ensure that both parties commit, before the campaign, to maintain the legacy of Valletta 2018 and include this as a manifesto in their electoral programmes.
- The panel finally raised a question about job creation with regards to the capital investments and their sustainability in the long term. The panel was pleased to hear about the 140 direct jobs created, for example, by the Indoor Market project, that would be made sustainable via the agreement with Arts Council Malta. Also, they welcomed the plans for improvement of the lower end of Valletta in the coming years, taking into account gentrification risks, as part of the strategy beyond 2020. A local capital of Culture, to be held every three years, will also be proposed as legacy of the year.

The Panel's assessment and recommendations

The panel praises the preparation work carried out by Valletta 2018 Foundation in the last four years and the effort made by the Foundation staff as well as the policy makers to bring the project forward, and considers that the project is on the right track. The panel also considers that the programme developed by Valletta 2018 has in particular a strong European Dimension and a high degree of involvement of citizens, in particular through the education and capacity building programmes.

However, the panel would like to make the following recommendations to Valletta 2018:

- Closely follow up on the contracting procedures for the various cultural and artistic projects included in the programme with the objective of having everything signed before the end of September 2018.
- Simplify the message of the overall narrative and clearly link it to the themes and the projects included in the programme.

- Continue the efforts to gather sponsors, for example by offering exclusive partnership on flagship exhibitions and events. Considering the importance of the opening flagship exhibition “The Sea Our Neighbour” (with a corresponding high budget), the panel recommends to make an effort to find an important and exclusive sponsor and to focus communication for international audience on this exhibition
- Bring forward the legacy discussions, using quantitative and qualitative facts and data where possible to strengthen the importance of making the effort of the ECoC sustainable. Develop business plans for the flagship venues that will constitute the legacy of Valletta 2018 as well as for the Valletta Cultural Agency.
- Clarify the target for international visibility and work closely with the Malta Tourism Authority for international promotion and communication.
- Closely follow up on the applications for EU funding and develop a plan B as these open calls are very competitive.

In view of the compliance with the criteria of strong European Dimension and City and the Citizens involvement, and the take up of most of the recommendations of the panel during the preparation phase, the panel recommends the Commission to award the Melina Mercouri prize to Valletta 2018.

The panel thanks the Valletta 2018 delegation for their report and the open discussion and wishes the city all success for 2018.