

European Capital of Culture

Valletta 2018

Report of visit by members of the Monitoring Panel

January 2016

Introduction

This is a report following the visit by two members of the Monitoring and Advisory Panel (Ulrich Fuchs and Sylvia Amann), accompanied by Gloria Lorenzo Leronés of DG EAC of the European Commission, to Valletta on 25-27 January 2016.

This visit was in the context of the Panel's role:

“to monitor the implementation of the objectives and criteria of the (ECOC) action and to provide ECOCs with support and guidance from the time of their designation to the start of the ECOC event”¹

The Panel members wish to thank the Chair of the Board of Valletta 2018, Jason Micallef, the CEO of Valletta 2018, Karsten Xuereb and the team of Valletta 2018 for the organisation of the visit and their open and informative contributions.

The Panel members had the opportunity to meet with the implementation team and discuss at length the status of the project, give advice from experience and learn more about the programme. The Panel members visited several infrastructure projects and had the occasion to exchange with the local and national decision makers.

Progress of implementation

The Panel members welcome the progress made since the first monitoring meeting in terms of programme and flagships. The Foundation is following the recommendations made by the Panel and advancing with the preparations, though there is a need to keep momentum to be ready for 2018.

¹ Decision No 1622/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, 24 October 2006, Article 10.1

The artistic vision and narrative are crucial to generate a common framework for internal and external communication. Malta should exploit its unique position (the sea, its international projection, its links to Africa and the Middle East) and its connections with the international themes already in the agenda of the upcoming Maltese Presidency of the Council.

The Panel members are satisfied to find a good dialogue between Arts Council Malta and V18 and encourage both institutions to intensify their cooperation.

The Panel members were impressed by the regeneration projects and the infrastructure projects visited. While timing is tight, it remains feasible at this stage. The projects address the different priority axis of the ERDF and show a wise use of these. Attention should be paid though to the long-term impact of these projects on the Malta cultural budget to ensure their sustainability.

The projects on creative industries (film and fashion salon, design cluster) are promising and can further position the city and the country in these fields and in a European perspective. The crafts sector is a further opportunity which is not yet sufficiently visible in the current programme. Starting activities during the ECOC ramp-up years would be of added value.

Governance

The Governance structure is clear and there is a political backing reflected in the meeting with the Parliamentary Committee following the project and with the Minister of Culture. The Members of Parliament were very interested and well informed, and the exchange with the Panel was clarifying and supportive. V18 is a common goal and a good collaboration seems to be in place.

Management and staffing

The management team shows a strong commitment and is open to recommendations and advice. Their efforts to make the project a success are visible.

The Panel welcomes the recruitment of an International Artistic Advisor and recommends clearly defining its role in relation to the Artistic Director and the Programme Coordinator.

The reporting to the Panel needs though some improvement, providing additional documents (i.e. overview of projects from the bidbook and state of development,

budgetary details and split) allowing for a better understanding of the status of implementation and the budgetary framework.

The management of V18 should ensure a clear split of own projects, co-produced projects and labelled projects, to avoid overloading of staff and increase the involvement of local institutions.

Communication

The clear communication of the artistic vision is key to guide the programming elements, to ensure internal commitment and with regards to first communication activities. The Panel members recommend establishing a regular dialogue with the local cultural stakeholders, with due care to the management of disappointment. As the headquarters of V18 are not easily accessible and visible from outside, a regular dialogue should also be established with the general public.

The Panel members recommend investing in involving local residents as much as possible in the development of the creative quarter. A good practice exchange with other cities in Europe could be of added value.

Finance

The reporting on budgetary issues is still unclear and raises questions about the amount managed directly by the Foundation, the budget devoted to the ECOC project and the split of responsibilities budget-wise. The next report should clearly separate the budget given to other structures and to which projects it will be devoted and the budget that will be disbursed by the Foundation. This is particularly important for co-produced projects.

The Panel members suggest reinforcing the sponsoring efforts based on the flagship projects.

Programme

There is a clear progress concerning the programme definition, though there is a need to go forward in the development of the projects, in particular those which are still in research phase.

The flagship projects under the responsibility of the Artistic Director are on a good way. The Panel members recommend controlling the budget for these projects and stabilising them up to the end of this year.

The projects under the responsibility of the Programme Coordinator show clear progress. The new strand on migration and exile is particularly interesting. The panel recommends devoting some time to the preparation of exhibitions and in particular to the search for co-production partners and the revision of the budget and timetable. The exhibitions preparation should be ready by the end of 2016 to communicate the highlights of the programme to tour operators and to the public.

It is also advisable to further develop and confirm projects in other disciplines, leaving the door open to upcoming projects in the next months.

The right balance should be sought between engagement of local stakeholders and international and European partners.

Conclusion

The Panel welcomes the progress made since the last monitoring meeting, in particular in which regards the definition of crucial programme elements. Efforts should be maintained to further define the feasibility of projects still in research phase and the budget to be allocated. More clarity is necessary in the reporting of the current programme in its relation to the bid book proposals, budget and the responsibility of individual project management.

The Panel kindly asks Valletta 2018 to send a complete overview of the projects in the bidbook, their status of implementation and budget, including the corresponding split of budget where applicable, by the end of July 2016. A short update of the progress in implementation of the ECOC project and the recommendations of the Panel should be sent to the Commission by end of September 2016.