



# **Timisoara European Capital of Culture 2021**

**Second Monitoring Meeting**

**Report by the Expert Panel**

**Timisoara, June 2019**

**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture  
Directorate Culture and Creativity  
Unit D2

*Contact: Sylvain Pasqua and Gerald Colleaux*

*E-mail: [eac-unite-D2@ec.europa.eu](mailto:eac-unite-D2@ec.europa.eu)*

*European Commission  
B-1049 Brussels*

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## Introduction

This report follows the meeting in Timisoara on 5th June 2019 between the panel and Timisoara, one of the three European Capitals of Culture (ECOC) in 2021<sup>1</sup>. Timisoara was designated European Capital of Culture 2021 in Romania on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2016 on the basis of the panel's selection report<sup>2</sup>. Its bid-book is available on the Association's website<sup>3</sup>. There was previously a first monitoring meeting in October 2017 in Brussels and a monitoring city visit by two members of the panel in June 2018. The first monitoring report by the panel can be accessed on the European Commission website<sup>4</sup>.

The present report is addressed to the Timisoara 2021 organisation and will be published on the European Commission's website<sup>5</sup>.

## Attendance

The panel members:

Jiří Suchánek (Chair), Suzana Žilič Fišer (Rapporteur) and Beatriz Garcia, appointed by the European Commission 2017-2019;

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

Paulina Florjanowicz, Dessislava Gavrilova and Pierre Sauvageot, appointed by the Council of the EU 2019-2021;

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

For Timisoara:

Ricolae Robu, Mayor of Timisoara;

Dan Diaconu, Vice Mayor of Timisoara;

Simona Neumann, Executive Director, TM2021;

Christopher Torch, Artistic Advisor, TM2021;

Ionut Suciu, Territory manager, TM2021;

Bogdan Cotirta, TM2021;

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<sup>1</sup> The European Capital 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 Decision at:

[http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L\\_.2014.132.01.0001.01.ENG](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2014.132.01.0001.01.ENG)

<sup>2</sup> See selection report at: [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/files/ecoc-2021-report-romania\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/files/ecoc-2021-report-romania_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See bid-book at:

[http://www.timisoara2021.ro/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Bidbook\\_EN\\_digital\\_secure.pdf](http://www.timisoara2021.ro/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Bidbook_EN_digital_secure.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> See first monitoring report at:

[https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/files/ecoc2021-timisoara-monitoring\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/files/ecoc2021-timisoara-monitoring_en.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/tools/actions/capitals-culture\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/tools/actions/capitals-culture_en.html)

Adrian Negoita, Timis County Counsellor;

Horatiu Rada, Chairman of the TM2021 Supervisory Board;

Ion Ardeal Ieremia, State Secretary, Ministry of Culture and National Identity and Member of the TM2021 Supervisory Board.

Also in attendance as observers were Sylvain Pasqua and Gérald Colleaux from the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture) as well as Irina Ouatu and Cristiana Vlad from the Romanian Ministry of Culture and National Identity.

### **Report from Timisoara 2021**

The "Timisoara 2021 – European Capital of Culture Association (TM2021)" submitted a detailed and comprehensive Second Progress Report before the meeting that outlined its activities from the first monitoring meeting and the interim Progress Report to April 2019.

At the meeting, Timisoara 2021 made a presentation, which included the following points:

#### **Programme**

The Executive Director Simona Neumann and the Artistic Advisor Chris Torch presented the progress of the project. The team has been working on the basis of the three consecutive chronological phases as outlined in the bid-book, though with some delay. The initial StartUp Phase 2017-2018 will finally end up this year. In particular, the team implemented in 2018 its Cultural Programme Action Plan – StartUp as planned. Planning activities involving the independent arts sector to develop engagement activities (Power Station, Engagement Unit) was an important focus of this period. The engagement initiatives have successfully taken place, with several encounters with various stakeholders.

Bogdan Cotirta presented the projects that are currently under development and that involve both local and European artists. In autumn 2018 some (4) larger projects were initiated. However, the reporting/payment mechanisms for projects put great pressure on the Operating Unit.

The team presented the first development of the intermediary Action/Production Phase (2019-2021), highlighting a few new projects that were developed to fill the gaps in the bid-book's programme.

The team also informed the panel that meetings were organised with relevant partners in charge of developing the Cultural Programme in 2019 and that other will take place in the coming months. Thanks to a series of focus groups, new projects were also generated. An independent Advisory Group was set up to evaluate the 72 projects submitted following the Open Call for project ideas. In this context, the team stressed that the current period was heavily impacted by the lack of available funding, as far as projects' support is concerned but also for the recruitment of team's staff members.

#### **European dimension**

The team explained that the European dimension is embedded in each project via the participation of international partners. However, as European partners require a more stable financial situation than the current situation allows, the team has not been able until now to reach acceptable long-term agreements with most international partners.

### **Long-term cultural strategy/legacy**

The city representatives explained that the political engagement from the city continues to be strong. All the activities of the ECOC are part of the long-term strategy of the municipality, which was adopted in December 2014 and runs until 2024. The ECOC legacy plan 2022-2024 will feed into the cultural development activities of the city.

In the frame of an interim evaluation of this strategy, a first sociological research report was produced by an independent body in December 2018. The rationale for such interim evaluation is to have an update on the impact of the preparation of the ECOC year on the cultural life of the city. It shows that the perception of culture as an important element of society has strongly increased in Timisoara. It also reveals a sharp increase in cultural participation. In particular, the independent sector has registered the highest increase in terms of audience. Another result highlighted in the evaluation is the increased degree of satisfaction with the cultural offer in Timisoara. Moreover, the citizens seem to consider the Timisoara 2021's Programme as a very good opportunity for the overall development of the city.

Finally, the Municipality of Timisoara has started to look at the potential of using big data in evaluating projects. The city will launch this summer an open data portal that will provide data about cultural locations and cultural consumption in the city.

### **Cultural infrastructure**

The Vice Mayor presented an update regarding infrastructure. The investment programme for 2017-2023 is in line with the commitment described in the bid-book and includes: Multiplexity (one of the flagships of the city's cultural strategy), Marasesti Synagogue, Palace of Culture, Arta (Cinema), Dacia Cultural Centre, Studio Art Hub, Art theatre hall, Fratelia Community Cultural Centre, Freidorf Community Centre, Iosefin Water Tower Cultural Centre and Kunc – Cultura and an Educational Centre.

Some additional investments were presented, such as the Politehnica Polyvalent Hall, the restoration of Philharmonic and private conference centres. Side works not directly connected with Timisoara2021 include urban revitalization projects, such as the refurbishment of the Park (Central Park).

Though some of the infrastructure projects will be ready only after 2021, the city stated that the refurbishment of existing spaces is considered as a priority to ensure the implementation of the ECOC 2021 programme.

### **Capacity to deliver**

While the report provided by Timisoara – ECOC 2021 states that the year is a national priority, it appears that getting funding from the Ministry requires additional procedures on top of the ECOC selection process. It is hoped that an upcoming Emergency Ordinance [the ordinance was finally adopted on 18 June 2019, but the implementing act is still to be approved at the time of finalisation of this report] will ease the releasing of funding so as to make the State's commitment a reality. Until now, as the State Secretary explained

at the meeting, the budget for ECOC2021 was not included in Romania's state budget plan. Therefore, it was decided to allocate the money for 2019 from the public budget reserve and to secure the funds for the coming years. The abovementioned special regulation will also indicate Timisoara 2021 Association as an entity of public utility, allowing for direct financing from both the State and local budgets, without the need to go through any competition scheme based on a project-by-project approach. For the panel, these measures should have been introduced from the very start, which would have avoided the delays and difficulties faced by the Timisoara 2021 Association today.

The Municipality of Timisoara remains the main public financier until now.

The team explained that the funding obstacles influenced the relations with the programme partners and have sometimes led to the cancellation of parts of the programme. The international projects need long-term stability and multi-annual financing. The delays in staff recruitments resulting from the absence of a stable budget could also cause severe delays for the project.

### **Management**

The organisation has started its restructuring process in 2018. By April 2019, the recruitment of the new members to the Supervisory Board was completed. In March 2019, the Association started the procedures to become an entity of public utility. For the panel, the organisational chart presented in the progress report shows the need to recruit staff members in different units. In particular, the panel suggests that thematic curators could support the Programme Director's endeavour and considers that the recruitment of a communication director is one key milestone in the very near future.

### **Financing**

The CEO and the artistic advisor again highlighted the budgetary restrictions that are taking place from the beginning. As already explained, the financial support committed in the bid-book from different public stakeholders has not concretized due to the procedural obstacles mentioned above. The current financing mechanisms at all public territorial levels (State, County and City) were again presented. They depend on the national legislation in force, and currently involve support on a project basis following the submission of corresponding requests by TM2021. TM2021 is also requested to submit many reports to the Ministry, the Council and the City administrations on how the money provided was spent. This cumbersome procedure endangers the appropriate national but also regional and municipal contributions to be delivered timely to Timisoara 2021, and makes the working environment of Timisoara 2021 fragile, while endangering the ECOC project.

### **Outreach**

Community engagement is fully integrated in the design of the programme. Many meetings with diverse stakeholders enabled establishing partnerships and engaging with different audiences. The main platforms for widening the audience are 1) the Stations, 2) the main events that focus on opening the cultural programme to a large range of citizens, 3) the Trails of cultural programme aiming to deepen the cultural experience of participation by targeting local and regional communities.

TM2021 has commissioned MetruCub to carry out a study about audience development in Timisoara. Taking the results of the study into account, the components of TM2021

Cultural Programme are tailored to target various groups as follows: children and youth, intergenerational dialogue, socially marginalized people, people targeted by discrimination and hate speech and minority groups.

## Discussion

During the subsequent discussion, the panel sought clarification on a number of issues and offered experience and advice. The main topic addressed during the discussion was related to the current budgetary situation, which the panel found particularly worrisome and potentially endangering the whole ECOC project.

It tried to understand where the **financing difficulties** that TM2021 is currently facing resulted from. The panel noted that the TM2021 worked with as little as approximately 25-30% of the budget promised in the bid-book. For example, only an amount of 353.782 Euro has been made available until now from the Ministry of Culture, with some technical requirements for payment that were partly impossible for TM2021 to meet.

The discussion on this topic was intense. It turned out that the Romanian government had not put in place so far the appropriate legal and financial basis to allow a multi-annual funding of TM2021 by public authorities. Also, as already mentioned during the presentation, national funding was not provided in the State budget plans. On a more positive note, it appeared that the Ministry understood that the situation was in a stalemate and that it was willing to find a way out, which would be beneficial for TM2021.

The Ministry reiterated there were no objections to a State's contribution of 12 million Euro and that the obstacles resulting from the former status of the Association would disappear as TM2021 will become a public utility Association, allowing for direct funding. During the discussion, it was stated again that all efforts were made to simplify the legislative procedures through the adoption of a national ordinance.

Additionally, the representative of the County explained that the transfer of money to the Association was currently partly endangered. However, the new regulation expected to come into force at national level should also solve the stalemate at county level. The discussion brought to the fore the importance of the ECOC project for the city, the county and the State as a whole, and the understanding of commitments from all stakeholders.

The TM2021 Association's Supervisory Board (through its Chairman) has the intention to develop plans for sponsorship and fundraising activities including contracting a dedicated company for fundraising activities.

The issue of communication was raised, and it was stressed by the panel that communication efforts should be done by all parties involved.

On the **long-term strategy**, the panel stated that the strategy in place until 2024 was indeed followed and showed already some positive interim results. According to the survey, the positive perception of the local cultural sector is growing. The panel asked about **the legacy** of the Association projects after 2021. The team explained that their vision was to build the community with the inclusion of artists. The participatory approach and the plans for the Multiplexity (to be created in the Tram Museum and depot) will contribute to the legacy of TM2021.

The panel sought clarification on the analysis carried out by the Ministry of the individual projects submitted by the Association to get national funding. This was the opportunity for the panel to stress the TM2021 Association should be responsible for the **programme development and implementation** – therefore in charge of the selection and implementation of the projects, in line with the artistic vision of the bid-book.

The panel also expressed its concerns that the obstacles faced by the Association to involve **international partners** due to the unstable financial situation, undermining international collaboration and therefore the European dimension of the ECOC 2021.

The discussion on **evaluation and monitoring** showed that a plan was in place. The Timisoara 2021 team gave insight on the methodology and data collection plans, and the panel was pleased to see that an agreement with the research institutions is prepared to be in place.

The panel raised the issue of **outreach**. It appears that different groups are involved and that engagement plans are professionally managed. The issue of capacity building is also important for the implementation of the ECOC and for the cultural development of the city – a strong point of the Timisoara 2021 plans.

The panel sought further details on the **management and organisational chart**. The delegation clarified that there are new members in the board and that the Association needs to recruit urgently new staff members.

The panel expects from the TM2021 team to fasten and deepen the collaboration with **the tourism sector** and to implement more engagement activities. During the discussion, the team said that the support from the **business sector** would be important and the panel welcomed such support.

The panel expects from the Association an open communication with all relevant stakeholders and a higher level of cooperation between all levels.

At the end of the discussion, it appeared that all stakeholders understood the funding issue and corresponding procedures was a major issue and that the ECOC was a priority at national, county and city levels.

## **Recommendations and conclusions**

1. Stabilise the commitment, support and financial contribution of all stakeholders.
2. Establish as soon as possible a simplified legislative framework at national level for the financing of the Association and the ECOC and minimizing the number of instalments in this final phase of the ECOC preparations.
3. Introduce measures to improve communication at all levels and ensure the spirit and the progress of the project is well understood by all different stakeholders.
4. Deliver the project contracts so that implementation moves on.
5. Urgently recruit staff members for all positions needed for the implementation of the project.
6. Clarify the roles, hierarchies and team relationships within a revised organisational chart, making sure internal communication is fluid.

7. Engage with the tourism sector at local, county and national level.
8. Prepare and implement the sponsorship strategy.
9. Prepare a detailed breakdown of the programme's projects including partners, budget, and timetable.
10. Define and integrate as soon as possible a new programme production plan, ensuring constructive relationship with all members of the team – adapted to the financial and time framework of the ECOC.
11. Make decisions regarding the project's production scheme, distinguishing clearly between what will be produced in-house, co-produced, externalised or simply labelled, and adjust the staffing needs accordingly.
12. If additional programme projects are considered necessary to fill in some gaps, these should not affect negatively the bid-book programme that shall remain the priority.
13. Develop a strong marketing and communication strategy related to the main messages of the ECOC programme with clear European narratives and adapt it to the different target audiences.
14. Continue with the suggested plan for evaluation and data collection in accordance with the proposed methodology.
15. Continue with the strategy to support audience development and engagement with tactics to increase diversity and inclusion of various audience groups.
16. Follow the realistic infrastructure plan that is related to programme production plan.
17. Develop, together with all relevant stakeholders and publicly discuss and communicate the plans concerning legacy for 2022 and the years after.
18. Invest in the early engagement of the arts and culture sector into the Multiplex project so to promote interesting and distinctive interactions with its scientific and technological dimensions.

### **Next steps**

The panel appreciates that local and national stakeholders treat the ECOC as a priority. However, the panel expected more steps forward after the last in situ visit of June 2018; nevertheless, it recognizes and appreciates the work carried out by Timisoara 2021 team and the city. The panel welcomes the commitment of all stakeholders in attendance towards an honest discussion. However, it would like to stress the need to address quickly the various issues discussed. If unaddressed, the risk that the project would lose track and incur further delays would be very high. In particular, it is essential to solve the problems related to public funding's procedures. It is necessary to start with the implementation of the production plan for the artistic programme that was committed in the bid-book. This is the prerequisite for the project to move forward from programme design to implementation.

The panel therefore invites TM2021 to:

- 1) Update the panel, through the Commission services, on the financial situation at the end of October 2019
- 2) Provide an update of the progress report on the panel's recommendation by the end of February 2020.

The panel puts itself at the disposal of Timisoara 2021 for any questions through the Commission services.

The Commission will call for a third monitoring meeting in the autumn 2020. At the end of the third monitoring meeting, the panel will make a recommendation to the Commission on whether to pay or not the Melina Mercouri Prize to Timisoara 2021.

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 Timisoara 2021 for the informative meeting and looks very forward to the next developments of its European Capital of Culture project.

(Signed) all attending panel's members

