EUROPEAN CAPITALS OF CULTURE

What is it?

The European Capitals of Culture initiative is designed to:

- Highlight the richness and diversity of cultures in Europe;
- Celebrate the cultural features Europeans share;
- Increase European citizens' sense of belonging to a common cultural area;
- Foster the contribution of culture to the development of cities.

In addition to this, experience has shown that the event is an excellent opportunity for:

- Regenerating cities;
- Raising the international profile of cities;
- Enhancing the image of cities in the eyes of their own inhabitants;
- Breathing new life into a city's culture;
- Boosting tourism.

How did it all start?

This program was set up to contribute to the rapprochement of the people of Europe on the 13th June 1985 by the European Council and again driven forward by Melina Mercouri. At this time the Council designated a European city each year. On the 25th May 1999 a decision of the European Parliament and Council set up the 'European Capital of Culture' programme to run 2005 to 2019. This was more than a name change; it also set up a new framework for the activities – two cities would get the title each year and each of the 15 Member States would host the event alternatively.

In 2000 9 cities were symbolically given the title. Such was the success that the programme was extended and in 2005 a decision was taken to add in the new Member States. The idea was that one of the 15 Member States' cities would host alongside a city from the new Members States, but in 2006, following procedural irregularities, a new system was set up. Thereafter a Member State is designated, and a number of cities are selected/invited to compete internally. The new system, which kicked in 2007, also modified the role and the composition of the jury and set up a follow-up period between the selection date and the city taking on the new role. (Note: This new approach only concerns cities from 2013 with a special dispensation for the cities selected in 2012 and 2013. The Member States have currently been appointed right up to 2019.)

How does it work?

1) **Designation of European Capitals of Culture in EU Member States**

- Six years before the title-year, selected host Member States publish a call for applications, usually through their Ministry for Culture. Cities interested in participating in the competition must submit a proposal for consideration.

- The submitted applications are reviewed against a set of established criteria during a pre-selection phase by a panel of independent experts in the field of culture. The panel agrees on a short-list of cities, which are then asked to submit more detailed applications.

- The panel then recommends one city by host country. This city is then formally confirmed.

- The role of the European Commission is to ensure that the rules established at EU level are respected all along the way.

2) **From designation to implementation**

- European Capitals of Culture are formally designated four years before the actual year. This long period of time is necessary for the planning and preparation of such a complex event.

- The panel supports European Capitals of Culture with advice and guidance and taking stock of their preparations.
- At the end of this monitoring period, the panel will consider whether to recommend or not that the European Commission pays the Melina Mercouri Prize (currently €1.5m funded from the EU Creative Europe programme for cities who have a good preparation).

3) **Evaluation of the outcomes**

- Each year, the Commission publishes an evaluation of the year but from 2019, the cities themselves will have one year after the end of the Capital Year to produce this report.

What are the next steps?

European Capitals of Culture have already been designated until 2018:

- 2015 – Mons (Belgium) and Plzeň (Czech Republic)
- 2016 – Donostia-San Sebastián (Spain) and Wrocław (Poland)
- 2017 – Aarhus (Denmark) and Paphos (Cyprus)
- 2018 – Leeuwarden (Netherlands) and Valetta (Malta)
- 2019 – Matera and Plovdiv (Bulgaria)

Source and related documents available here:

http://ec.europa.eu/culture/tools/actions/capitals-culture_en.htm