

ELEFSINA PILOT CITY FINAL REPORT

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culture 21
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PERSEPHONE

So beautiful she was forcibly abducted and imprisoned by the lord of the underworld, only allowing her seasonal return. To this day, she tries to break her bonds, to shake off the wounds of human indifference and industrial brutality, taking restless walks between darkness and light. Yet the complicity of the silent majority buys her more time in confinement. Defying the times that limit her and deprive her of her Freedom, I give her a little more time in the light to cry out from her modern slavery.

by Vassilis Dimopoulos



INTRODUCTION

This final report provides an overview of the work carried out by the City of Elefsina for the Pilot Cities in Europe Programme, jointly devised by the UCLG Committee on Culture and Culture Action Europe, and supported in Elefsina by expert Clymene Christoforou. The final self-assessment workshop was held in the city on the 9th of March 2024, and was convened by Angeliki Lampiri, Focal Point, Elefsina, and facilitated by Clymene Christoforou, Expert, Pilot Cities; Marta Llobet, UCLG Committee on Culture, and Kornelia Kiss, Culture Action Europe. This concludes the Elefsina Pilot City programme, which started in Elefsina, a member of UCLG, in Autumn 2018 with an introductory presentation to the people of Elefsina by Marta Llobet and Clymene Christoforou.



LOCAL CONTEXT

Elefsina (or its ancient name Eleusis, meaning arrival or advent) is one of the five sacred cities of antiquity. With a population of 30,000 it has a natural port in the Gulf of Eleusis, protected by the island of Salamis to the south. Despite the fact that Elefsina is located on the Athens - Peloponnese road axis and is close to Athens, culturally the divide is huge. It receives fewer visits than its accessibility would lead one to expect as in the consciousness of the Greek people, it has been established as a city that was desecrated by industrial development. The awarding of the title of European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2023 has gone some way to countering this narrative. Through the artistic programme, perceptions of the city have been led away from a previous public perception as a disadvantaged industrial city and into its next phase, strengthening its position on the cultural map at a regional, national, and international level.

The city's ten-year Cultural Strategy (2016-2025) is based on two documents approved by the City Council - the adoption of the Agenda 21 for Culture and the Cultural Strategy 2016-2025 in 2016. Consistently with their adoption, Elefsina joined the Pilot Cities Europe programme in 2018.



ELEFSINA PILOT CITY PROGRAMME 2018-2024

In the framework of Pilot Cities Europe, the City of Elefsina joined other European cities to address some of the weaknesses it identified and build on its perceived strengths in the field of culture and sustainable development. As a parallel programme to the ECoC, Pilot Cities invited Elefsinian citizens to consider and assess the role of culture (past, present and future) in the sustainable development of their city.

The following are some of the main activities developed within the programme. As a result of the Covid pandemic, much live activity was suspended and delays due to internal structural changes of the European Capital of Culture team meant that the Pilot Cities programme took at least 3 years longer than originally anticipated.

MAIN ACTIVITIES AND TIMELINE

- Preliminary visit, UCLG and expert Clymene Christoforou (Sep 2018)
- First workshop with radar outlining weaknesses and strengths (Jan 2019)
- Cultural Mediators Group (Active from June 2019)
- Participation in the Culture Action Europe conference, Konstanz (Oct 2019)
- Design of the work plan with pilot measures (Jul 2020)
- Pilot actions carried out in response (2020-2024)
- Peer learning activities - Elefsina hosting other Pilot Cities (Jun 2023)
- Peer learning activities - Elefsina visiting Dublin in the context of the UCLG Culture Summit Nov 2023)
- Final self-assessment workshop (Mar 2024)
- Presentation of the Final Report (Apr 2024)

The Pilot Cities programme in Elefsina has served as an extraordinary opportunity for citizens to participate in an open discussion about their city and frame the value of culture for Elefsina's sustainable development. The process included a self-assessment workshop in January 2019, meetings of the Cultural Mediators group, created in June 2019 and composed by citizens; the development of the work plan with concrete pilot measures and its implementation of projects and programmes with the support of Eleusis 2023; international peer learning exchanges with other Pilot and Leading cities with similar interests and concerns, and the final self-assessment workshop in March 2024.



THE FIRST SELF-ASSESSMENT WORKSHOP. RADAR 1

From the start the strengths and challenges for culture in the city were clear. The first workshop of January 2019, was attended by 46 citizens from across public and private sectors and civil society identifying a culture of solidarity built over a century of industrialisation, folklore tradition and a pride in the history of the city as the ancient site for the worship of Demeter and Persephone, of the [Eleusinian Mysteries](#) celebrating their honour and as the birthplace of [Aeschylus](#).

The first self-assessment workshop, held in Elefsina in March 2019, aimed to highlight the strengths and weaknesses for Elefsina and identify a direction of travel for future programme development that builds on the city's strategic commitment to culture as part of a sustainable city.



Fig. 1. Elefsina Self-Assessment - Radar 1 (2019) and data from the Global Panel (2015)



THE FIRST SELF-ASSESSMENT WORKSHOP. RADAR 1

The participants identified the need to address the governance of culture, capacity building and the development of platforms for communication and knowledge exchange within the city. These priorities were identified in the context of an upcoming European Capital of Culture year, with little established cultural infrastructure.

Following this workshop, a steering group made up of a representative range of workshop participants was called for, the “Cultural Mediators Group”, and a work programme was developed to build on the good work being done and address the issues identified in this first phase of the programme.



WORK PLAN AND PILOT MEASURES

In the first self-assessment workshop, what came from each group and across all commitments was a greater need for a participatory governance of culture. 3 clear strands of activity emerged, and became pilot measures of the work plan of the Elefsina Pilot City programme:

A. CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMMES

From the self-assessment’s report, it was clear that there was a need for capacity building programmes, for professionals and citizens alike. These might consider social inclusion and cultural rights, employability and professional development or communication and audience development. The proximity to Athens has an impact on the cultural activity of the city; based on an amateur level that is empowered by the love and the need of the citizens themselves. This measure targeted organized programmes that could empower the local cultural organizations and associations and could invest in networking with other cultural operators at a national and European level. The need of collaborating with a university was identified as key for the sustainability of this pilot measure.



WORK PLAN AND PILOT MEASURES

B. COMMUNICATION PLATFORMS

As a step towards the development of policies or strategies, the need of communication platforms for public, private and civil society engagement was identified. Platforms to exchange good practices, share knowledge, raise awareness and advocate for the role of culture in the life of the city. This pilot measure focused on the creation of a cultural e-platform, integrating it with a web-radio station and a free-press for those who had no access to digital tools. Thus, creating a digital city's library, highlighting the citizens' narrations.

C. CULTURAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT

There was a perception that the local cultural policy ought to be better tailored to Elefsina. Furthermore, there was a lack of clarity about the role of culture in other policy areas and a marked lack of knowledge of either their existence or the detail of their visions or action plans. All groups highlighted a weakness in the existing cultural policy where each of the Culture 21: Actions commitments would benefit from a clearer shared vision inscribed in a long-term cultural policy that extended beyond political mandates. The Cultural Mediators Group has worked towards this perspective since 2019.



PEER LEARNING ACTIVITIES

The first peer learning visit hosted by Elefsina was held from 8 to 10 June 2023. During three days, representatives of four Pilot and Leading Cities, Dublin, Izmir, Leeds and Timisoara, as well as the Eleusis 2023 team and the Cultural Mediators Group, the expert involved in the programme, and representatives of Culture Action Europe and UCLG, met and exchanged in Elefsina on the occasion the celebration of two relevant cultural events:

- a) the conference Beyond The Obvious 2023 Handle With Care | Culture For Social Well-Being (7-9 June 2023),
- b) the 9th Culture Next Meeting (10-11 June 2023).



PEER LEARNING ACTIVITIES

The second peer learning activity took place on 27 November 2023 in Dublin, in the context of the 5th UCLG Culture Summit. On this occasion, the activity focused on different aspects of cultural policies of Dublin. The event took the shape of an informal dialogue organised at the 14 Henrietta Street premises, and included a guided tour of the museum.

Delegates of the cities and regions of Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Elefsina, Timișoara and Trois Rivières, and the partner organisations Culture Development Network, Melbourne, and Culture pour Tous, Quebec, as well as experts of UCLG Clymene Christoforou and Antoine Guibert, and UCLG and CAE representatives Marta Llobet, Agnès Ruiz and Kornelia Kiss, were welcomed by the Dublin City Council Culture Company (DCCCC) Engagement and Creative Engagement teams, including Tracy Geraghty, Iseult Dunne, Linda Devlin, Laura Keogh, Catherine O'Donnell, Danielle Breslin, Katalin Varnyu and Evan Musgrave.

These activities provided the space for cities to exchange, debate, discuss and expose new realities and approaches to cultural policy-making and cultural initiatives themselves.



THE FINAL SELF- ASSESSMENT WORKSHOP. RADAR 2

The last activity within the Elefsina Pilot City Programme was a final self-assessment workshop based on the draft of “Culture 21 Plus”, the new draft international policy framework for cultural rights. This final activity was held on 9 March 2024.

The aim of the workshop, designed by the UCLG Culture Committee for cities across the world, was to self-assess, for a second time, Elefsina’s cultural practice and policy development, following its participation in the Pilot Cities programme, and with a view to consolidate the legacy of the ECoC, Eleusis 2023 by testing the new toolkit Culture 21 Plus.

THE FINAL SELF-ASSESSMENT WORKSHOP. RADAR 2

The final radar resulting from the March 2024 self-assessment workshop and following the ECoC year, showed an overall growth in confidence across the 9 commitments with the exception of Environment where a conclusion could be drawn that recent ecological disasters of fires and flooding in Greece and specifically the local area has raised consciousness about the scale of the job ahead to prevent global warming and confront the climate crisis.



Fig. 2. Elefsina Self-Assessment - Radar 2 (2024) and data from the Global Panel (2015) and the Radar 1 (2019)



THE FINAL SELF-ASSESSMENT WORKSHOP. RADAR 2

Using the Culture 21 plus tool, with its six Blocks addressing Rights, Communities, Prosperity, Territories, Nature and Governance participants were asked to prioritise 5 key areas for future development. The 66 citizens of Elefsina identified the following 5 key areas for the future development for the city:

1. **Communities - Culture, inclusion and social cohesion, poverty and inequalities** - Implementing cultural programmes and actions to promote social cohesion and the inclusion of all people, in particular those facing, or at risk of exclusion
2. **Governance - Cultural strategies and policies** - Adopting explicit local cultural policies and strategies, based on cultural rights, and with a cross-cutting approach that places culture as a driver of sustainable development
3. **Rights - Cultural public services, infrastructures and spaces** - Creating cultural public services, infrastructures and spaces, reaching all populations and places
4. **Communities - Culture and education** - Promoting cultural education for all, regardless of age, whether in the formal education system, in cultural actions and activities, or through informal education.
5. **Governance - Culture and Citizen participation** - Encouraging active citizen participation in cultural management and strengthening the capacities of civil society to generate an autonomous and independent cultural life

The outcomes of the final workshop can be a crucial input to the city's future cultural strategy and present a blueprint for the future of culture in the city.



FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommendations for Elefsina resulting from its participation in the Pilot Cities in Europe programme:

Strengthen and develop culture in the city through the creation of a Vice Mayor for Culture

To increase the priorities for culture across the municipality and to promote cultural exchange and development between Municipal departments and between the Municipality and cultural organisations and programmes.

Establish a specific cultural body to implement cultural activities and deliver both project management and project development alongside the Municipality - a body whose governance represents public, private and civil society actors with the knowledge to develop meaningful programmes to engage audiences and participants across venues, communities and public spaces and to inform the strategic development of cultural buildings and citywide programmes.

Build on the outcomes of this Pilot Cities Programme to create a new cultural strategy, drawing from the challenges and best practice examples identified within the final workshop with Culture 21 Plus (with identified priorities under Rights, Communities, Prosperity, Territories, Nature and Governance)

Prioritise culture within international development for Tourism, City Profile and for cooperation for funding opportunities.

Continue and grow engagement in national and international platforms for cities and culture to share expertise and build capacity particularly in the areas of environment, social inclusion and working conditions of cultural actors. Becoming part of the network of Leading Cities of the UCLG Culture Committee is recommended as a further step in the internationalisation strategy of the city.



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