

KEA's model to measure the impact of "Mons – European Capital of Culture 2015": a culture-led approach

The European Capital of Culture (ECoC) event is one of the most successful initiatives ever launched by the European Union. Since starting in 1985, this major event has increasingly unveiled culture's potential to contribute to the socio-economic regeneration of cities.

KEA has been commissioned by the Foundation Mons 2015 to complete a longitudinal study (2012-2016) to assess the socioeconomic impacts of this cultural investment before, during and after the event as well as to contribute to future research on ECoCs. KEA is collaborating with the local university UMONS to assess the economic impacts.

Longitudinal evaluations (including ex ante and ex post facto evaluation) help event organisers to plan and implement the event as well as to address specific issues that have arisen through the evaluation exercise, to understand and foster long lasting impacts and, more generally, to adopt evidence-based decisions. However, assessing ECoC's impacts remains a big challenge for several reasons (lack of standardised data, collection and evaluation procedures, limited resources, etc.). Moreover, existing methodologies are not always appropriate for small/medium-sized cities.

KEA has proposed a model that builds on recent theories recognising the spillover potential of culture as a source of creativity and innovation for the economy and society as a whole¹. Culture and its spillover effects truly regenerated the economy and quality of life in cities like Nantes, Bilbao Lille and Liverpool.

Due to the broad impact that culture can have, we propose a "quintuple bottom line" multidimensional model focusing on five potential impact areas of cultural investment:

- Economy
- Sociocultural dimension
- Image, reputation and attractiveness
- Organisation and management
- Governance

About 70 indicators, including 15 key indicators, have been identified to measure impacts under these dimensions. Our methodology includes the preparation of a baseline report before the event (2012) containing data to be compared with data collected in 2015 and 2016 in order to assess results and achievements. It foresees the collection of both second and first hand information, including

quantitative and qualitative data – via official statistics, interviews, focus groups, media monitoring as well as through consultation with key stakeholders (cultural and economic operators, CCIs, citizens,...) to understand the ambitions and expectations of the event. Specific attention is paid to cultural and creative industries (CCIs) as a core contributor to the ECoC programme which is in turn considered as an occasion to test CCIs' growth and innovation potential.

Whilst the KEA model can be adopted to assess the impact of any kind of large cultural event, it particularly takes into account the reality of small and medium-sized cities like Mons in terms of data, collection procedures and resources available. Methodologies are therefore adapted to fit the specificities of this kind of territory.

Mons 2015 – "when culture meets technology" as part of the city's development strategy

Located in a former industrial region, one of the richest in the world in the 20th century thanks to the coal mines, Mons is counting on ICT/digital and creative entrepreneurship, tourism and culture to reinvigorate its economy, create new employment and give citizens innovative development perspectives.

Mons' development strategy is embodied by initiatives such as the "Digital Innovation Valley", a high tech cluster with focus in the digital sector gathering companies such as Google, Microsoft or IBM but also local talents such as i-movix (specialising in extreme slow-motion), Fishing Cactus (video games), Vetasoft (video games), Virtualis (Association of companies specialised in digital media) and Technocité, a training center specialising in new media. The area is currently being extended to welcome more companies.

Mons also features particularly interesting infrastructures for the development of creative and cultural entrepreneurship such as St'Art, a regional investment fund for the creative sector that supported businesses as Vetasoft and Wallimage, the Walloon fund for the development of cinema. Mons has also recently established a House of Design to support designers and help them set up or expand their business.



1. See KEA (2009). The Impact of Culture on Creativity – prepared for DG EAC. Brussels.

Tourism is another key priority in Mons. New infrastructural and architectural Investments are being made as part of the new "Mons 2015 – Tourism Strategy" including a new train station by Santiago Calatrava and Congress Centre by Libenskind. The objective is to reach 500,000 visitors by 2015.

Despite its medium size, the city of Mons can also count on a considerable cultural offer. Already named Cultural Capital of Wallonia in 2002, it benefits from the presence of international institutions such as the World Crafts Council – Belgique Francophone (WCC-BF), or Mundaneum, one of the largest archives in Europe, considered a forerunner of the Internet and Google. Mons is also home to Le Manège, a unique umbrella organisation that, with a budget of € 9.7 million per year and 105 employees, connects cultural institutions in Mons. A new museum pole – mostly funded by Structural Funds – will see the light in 2015.

It is within this socioeconomic context that the Mons 2015 project is taking shape. Developed as a multidimensional scale event, Mons 2015 is conceived in a complementary way to the city's development strategy. The city plans to invest around € 78 million to strengthen the cultural influence

of Mons and its image but also to support the local economy, especially the tourism sector, and strengthen social cohesion through improved cultural participation and citizens' projects. Mons 2015 is thus organised around six themes that guide the cultural programme and give coherence to the project: NewTechnologies, Artists, 20 years old in 2015 (youth), Architecture, Partnerships and Carbon 0.

Baseline report and next steps

A baseline report was successfully completed in 2013. It provides a first overview of the socioeconomic situation in the city before Mons 2015 with a view to identify any change during and after the event.

KEA is going to assess how the investments driven from the event impacts on the city's development. Data collection and analysis will continue during (2015) and after (2016) the event with a view to publish the final evaluation report at the end of 2016.

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KEA is a Brussels-based strategic consultancy and research center providing advice, support and research in relation to creative industries, cultural, entertainment, media and sport sectors since 1999. KEA advises international and European institutions, national, local and city authorities. It design policies to foster creative ecosystems. KEA has offices in Brussels and Shenzhen.



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