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EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE 2028: FOR WHICH IDENTITIES AND VALUES? FRENCH BIDS FOR THE TITLE IN 2028

Abstract

The general objectives of the European Capitals of Culture are to safeguard and promote the diversity of cultures in Europe and the common features they share, while strengthening the sense of belonging to a common cultural space. The growing appeal of the title of European Capital of Culture, especially after the success of Lille (2004) and Marseille (2013), both in France, has led to numerous bids in the country, despite the high cost of preparation and implementation. Amiens, Bastia, Bourges, Clermont-Ferrand, Lens-Lievin, Nice, Reims, Roubaix, Rouen and Saint-Denis have already announced their candidacy to the title of European Capital of Culture in 2028, often in connection with their region. The article analyses the cultural and development projects of these cities and territories according to the criteria of European values and identities.

Keywords: European Capital of Culture, France, European values

The general objectives of the European Capitals of Culture are to safeguard and promote the diversity of cultures in Europe and the common features they share, while strengthening the sense of belonging to a common cultural space on the one hand, and to reinforce the contribution of culture to the long-term economic, social, cultural and urban development of cities, taking into account their respective strategies and priorities on the other hand.

To this end, they have to highlight the common aspects of European cultures, history and heritage, as well as European integration and current European issues, and to showcase European artists, collaborate with

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stakeholders or cities from different countries and transnational partnerships. The growing appeal of the title of European Capital of Culture, especially after the success of Lille (2004) and Marseille (2013), has led to numerous bids in France, despite the high cost of preparation and implementation. Amiens, Bastia, Bourges, Clermont-Ferrand, Montpellier, Nice, Reims, Rouen and Saint-Denis have already announced their candidacies to the title of European Capital of Culture in 2028, often in connection with their regions. We will analyze the cultural and development projects of these cities and territories according to the criteria of values and identities.

THE EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE PROGRAMME

The European City (Capital from 1999) of Culture is a city designated by the European Union for a period of one calendar year during which a program of cultural events is organized. The first one was Athens in 1985. The idea of designating a European Capital of Culture was first put forward in 1983 by the actress and Minister of Culture of Greece, Melina Mercouri, joined by Jack Lang, the French Minister of Culture, in order to bring Europeans together by highlighting the richness and diversity of the continent's cultures. The program is managed by the European Commission and the title is awarded each year by the Council of the European Union with the support of a group of cultural experts responsible for evaluating the proposals of candidate cities. More than 50 cities have been nominated since the beginning of the program. The preparations for a European Capital of Culture are often an opportunity for the designated cities to set up urban renewal programs, to highlight or change the image of the city and to give it an international profile.

Any city located in a European country can be a candidate for the "European Capital of Culture 2028" label. The title is open to cities, but may include their surrounding area. Candidate cities must promote their cultural dynamism and heritage through organization of exhibitions, festivals and other events. The program proposed by each candidate city should have a strong European dimension, which should be reflected in the selected themes and in the participation of artists and cultural operators from different countries. Cities must also consider long-term effects of the program on their cultural and social development. The expected benefits are: reinforcement of the international influence of the selected cities,

enhancement of the image of the city among its citizens, reinforcement of the capacities and visibility of their cultural sector, increased awareness and access to culture, as well as stimulation of cultural tourism.

FRENCH CANDIDATURES TO EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE

Nine cities (from north to south of France): Amiens, Reims, Rouen, Saint-Denis, Bourges, Clermont-Ferrand, Montpellier, Nice and Bastia have announced their candidacy to the title of European Capital of Culture in 2028, often in connection with their territory or region, after Paris in 1989 (overshadowed by the bicentenary of the Revolution), Avignon in 2000 (at the time with eight other European cities), Lille in 2004 and Marseille Provence in 2013. Eight cities had applied for 2013: Amiens*, Bordeaux, Lyon, Marseille, Nice*, Saint-Étienne, Strasbourg and Toulouse. Bordeaux was added to the list at the last minute (after the classification of its Port of the Moon as a world heritage site), while Nantes withdrew its application at the last minute.² The growing appeal of the title of European Capital of Culture, especially after the success of Lille and Marseille, has led to numerous bids despite the high cost of preparing and implementing them. This is one of the reasons why several local authorities are grouped around a flagship city, as was already the case of Lille in 2004 and Marseille in 2013. Another important reason is territorial development, but the candidature must be under the name of a city. Nevertheless, both Lille and Marseille were said to have certain delays in terms of cultural and economic development and employment, but were already connected to Paris by the TGV, so the change of image had begun before the European Capital of Culture.

The previous French European Capitals of Culture, Lille and Marseille, were chosen because they needed to catch up on their cultural and territorial development. This aspect is increasingly important in support of medium-sized and even small towns. Group bids, such as Lille (European Metropolis) in 2004 and Marseille Provence in 2013, make it possible to spread the costs somewhat among the municipalities and to obtain support more easily from the public authorities concerned (intermunicipalities, departments, regions, state) in addition to that of the European

² Also candidates for 2028.

Union (Melina Mercouri Prize of €1.5 million – which is not automatically awarded – and often more important structural funds). But the return on investment is largely commensurate with the effort made. Lille 2004 and Marseille 2013 attracted respectively 9 and 11 million visitors and changed the image of the cities. Lille has even continued the process with Lille 3000, which offers themed seasons every three years or so. The application for the title of European Capital of Culture creates a dynamic that makes it possible to support or obtain investments for facilities or monuments, to develop or create major events in the city, without forgetting the outlying districts and territories, and to enhance the value of a territory. Strong economic, social and media spin-offs are expected, as well as the transformation of the cultural offer for the residents. Like the Olympic Games for sports (Lille was firstly a candidate for them but failed in 1997), the title of European Capital has become a powerful catalyst for the development of cultural facilities and an effective booster of image. The formula has been so successful that it has inspired the French Capitals of Culture program, such as in Italy for example, aimed at medium-sized cities, the first of which – Villeurbanne – has been designated for the year 2022.

Pre-bid applications (60 pages) must be submitted by 1 December 2022. The short-list of four candidate cities will be announced in the first half of 2023. The shortlisted cities will have a few months to prepare their final applications (100 pages). After analysis of the applications by a panel of experts in the field of culture, the French European Capital of Culture 2028 will be officially announced by the European Union at the end of 2023. The winner will then have four years to prepare for the event and implement the selected program. Starting from 2001, the European Union designates two member States each year (except in 2005 and 2006, and from 2007 one in the western part of the EU, including Greece, and one from the eastern part) whose cities can apply for this label that offers an international cultural influence for one year. After Kaunas (Lithuania) and Esch-sur-Alzette (Luxembourg) in 2022, it will be cities from France and the Czech Republic in 2028. NB: Eleusis/Elefsina (Greece) is postponed to 2023. Since 2021, it has been possible to select a third Capital of Culture once every three years, located in an EU candidate country. As the selection is open to all candidate states, the competing candidate cities may be from different countries – Novi Sad (Serbia) in 2022, and a city in North Macedonia in 2028.

CANDIDATE CITIES FOR 2028 IN FRANCE

The City of Amiens submitted its candidacy in 2018 and launched a call for projects among cultural actors and consultations among its inhabitants. The application project refers in particular to the Somme Valley, from Saint-Quentin to the Bay of the Somme. The ribbon of the logo refers to the polychromy of the cathedral and to the application of woad, the pastel of the dyers. The case is now carried with the inter-municipalities and several municipalities of the Somme valley. The cathedral and the hortillon-nages are on the Unesco World Heritage List.

Supported by the Collectivity of Corsica and the Pascal Paoli University, the city of Bastia has applied, extending its candidacy to the entire territory under the name “Bastia-Corsica 2028.” Its team aims to bring together the old and the new, the existing and the future long term projects connected with issues such as biodiversity, inclusion, youth or social innovation, and, with the help of a “cultural factory,” to organize consultation and participation of cultural actors and the population.

Bourges also applied in September 2020. It is highlighting its rich historical past and heritage (including the cathedral, a world heritage site), but also its Printemps de Bourges Festival and numerous cultural activities and events. In addition to the city, the application is supported by the agglomeration Bourges Plus, the department of Cher and the region Centre-Val de Loire. The cathedral is on the Unesco World Heritage List.

Clermont-Ferrand declared its candidacy in 2015 and has a very structured profile with cultural events under the banner “Altitudes 2028.” Since that date, many events have shaped this collective project in collaboration with the new Clermont-Ferrand Massif Central 2028 association that is carrying the bid. The region has chosen to focus on its privileged quality of life, its natural heritage, its link between urban and rural areas and the transformation of the city, its working-class past, and the memory of its capital. Unesco recognizes the city and its basilica as belonging to its network of “learning cities” since 2017.

The city of Montpellier and the surrounding areas of the Hérault region, from Sète to Agde, including the foothills of the Cévennes and Lunel, have just launched their bid to become European Capital of Culture in 2028. Its assets include the architecture that combines medieval jewels and ultra-modern buildings, internationally renowned festivals, particularly in the field of contemporary dance and theater, and top-notch museums

and sites. The city belongs to the network of “learning cities” of Unesco since 2019.

The mayor of Nice intends to launch an investment plan of EUR 100 million over five years to strengthen this dimension and prepare the candidacy. For the record, Nice was already a candidate in 2013 and the city is applying to the Unesco World Heritage List as “capital of Riviera tourism.” For the title of European Capital of Culture, Nice’s main handicap is to be located in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur region, which already has two winning cities – Avignon and Marseille.

Reims has announced its candidacy on May 10, 2021. The city’s mayor intends to increase the share of the municipal budget devoted to culture to 14% and to associate the neighboring cities of Epernay, Châlons-en-Champagne, Charleville-Mézières, Troyes, Nancy and Metz with the candidacy. Reims has also Unesco World Heritage Sites and the city intends to capitalize on this asset and on its position „in the heart of Europe” with a process of participation of various actors and citizens.

Rouen-Normandie officially announced its candidacy in April 2019. This brings together under the same banner the city of Rouen, the Rouen Normandy metropolis, the SeineEure agglomeration community, the departments of Eure and Seine-Maritime, and the Normandy region. Rouen wants to develop its relationship with water, the Seine, and ecology by 2022, but is collecting any ideas from residents in “dream boxes.” Several monuments and houses are on the Unesco World Heritage List.

For its part, the city of Saint-Denis, which has also a rich historical past (including the cathedral, which is a World Heritage Site and will see the completion of its spire’s reassembly in 2028) announced its decision to bid in January 2021. Its application covers the entire territory of Plaine Commune, labeled “Territory of Culture and Creation,” and highlights, in addition to the historical dimension, a dense industrial and intangible heritage and an immense multicultural wealth. It is called “PeriFairies 2028.”

REFLECTIONS ON THE APPLICATION PROCESS AND CRITERIA

Some cities started sooner (Amiens, Rouen, Saint-Denis, Bourges, Clermont-Ferrand) but it does not mean that the process has been sufficiently dynamic (e.g. Rouen). Some others are progressing quickly, but will they have enough time?

Some apply again (Amiens; Nice – in the same region as previous capitals Avignon 2000 and Marseille Provence 2013, namely Provence Alpes Côte d’Azur). The relatively small Bourges was also a candidate to French Capital of Culture for 2022, eventually won by Villeurbanne, near Lyon.

Some are newer and more diverse or have declining industries and need support to develop (Saint-Denis, Clermont-Ferrand). Each city organises consultations and calls for projects or other processes of participation with cultural actors, other professionals and inhabitants, as demanded by the application, but each has their specificity and calendar. Marseille was reproached for not including initially enough local cultural actors, which led to calling off a festival. Nature is present in many candidatures, such as water (Amiens, Reims, Rouen, Nice), in relation with sustainable development, as well as collaboration with economic, social, and urban and territorial development. Cooperation with European cities and territories, especially other Capitals of Culture, is encouraged.

The criteria of the application: contribution to the long-term strategy; European dimension; cultural and artistic content; capacity to deliver; outreach; and management, are the same for the pre-selection and the selection stages, but are more detailed and differ a bit in the questions to answer and the details to provide, in particular, if there are some changes between the two steps, and for the monitoring and the evaluation of the long-term sustainable impact (comparisons with previous capitals can be of interest). We will analyze them as soon as we gain access the applications, but we can already focus on the outreach.

Culture plays an important role of creative potential in the sustainable economic and social development of cities. Creative potential is the maximum possible enhancement of the socio-economic performance of a territory through the introduction of creative inputs, such as human capital and investment. The concept of the use and development of creativity has been examined for several decades in different territorial units such as districts, cities, regions.

IDENTITY AND VALUES OF SOME CANDIDATES

BASTIA CORSICA

The team is keen to create a dialogue between the old and the new, the existing and the future projects. This application, whatever the result, must be

a long-term one. It is a project of metamorphosis, of evolution in the scope of contemporary issues such as biodiversity, inclusion and social innovation. The team members are thinking about how Corsica can find a singular, specific path linked to its DNA. They are keen to include cultural players and artists in this approach: both established and emerging artists. Working with young people is also one of their objectives. They are going to build on the existing strengths, consolidate what exists and expand it, instead of reinventing everything. If youth is one of the strong themes of this campaign, the rural areas also have a prominent place. The challenge is to promote access to culture for the youngest. Especially since in terms of education, rural areas are less favoured than urban areas, which have more developed infrastructure. “Fabbriche culturali exist, such as Casell’arte or Providenza, to identify new projects.

BOURGES

Since its creation in 1977, “Le printemps de Bourges” has offered a broad access to cultural event. During its 44th edition, 22-27 June, the music festival once again promoted the artistic values of creation, discovery and sharing. But this year was marked by an additional event: the city’s bid for the title of European Capital of Culture for 2028!

For Bourges, a medium-sized city and prefecture of the Cher department, relatively isolated due to the insufficient transport network, the European Capital of Culture label appears to be a springboard for the transformation of the city. It is an opportunity for the town hall to use culture to revive Bourges. The local government has also announced its plan to make Bourges “the new Villa Medici of Europe” by developing accommodation and workshops for artists, by encouraging artistic encounters and collaborations on its territory and by strengthening the heritage and festival offer already present in the city. Far from engaging in a policy of major projects the elected officials affirm a candidacy of proximity, frugal in terms of public financing, under the banner of abstinence and ecology. With this candidacy, Bourges is therefore committed to strengthening its cultural and mobility offer and to the ecological transition of the city with its outskirts and rural areas by the Metro Europa projects.

CLERMONT-FERRAND

The city is structuring its candidacy around four axes: proximity and good living; a strong natural identity, between water and volcanoes; the

embodiment of dialogue between urban and rural areas; and the reclamation of its working-class heritage for an innovative and sustainable industrial transformation. Following a logo designed by Castelbajac, the city chose the writer Cécile Coulon to chair Clermont-Ferrand Massif Central 2028, the association that will support the city's bid. New perimeter, new association, new programme... The project is growing, but its values remain the same as in the beginning: to create culture with – and not for – the public; to involve as many inhabitants as possible in this adventure of the future.

To win the precious title and gain national and European visibility, the region has chosen to focus on its privileged quality of life, its natural heritage, its link between urban and rural areas and the transformation of the city, the working-class past and the memory of its capital, Clermont-Ferrand. More broadly, the teams are working to involve all the players, cultural or otherwise, and all the inhabitants of the area. Everyone can, at their own level, contribute to the project! They are also working on a new, more accessible, less elitist model of culture, and on the lasting impact of the candidacy. For it is the ability of the candidates to give their project a second life that makes this adventure a success, so that the benefits are reaped over a long term.

REIMS

The approach chosen at the start for the bid is blending. Beyond the reference to champagne, it is concretely expressed in the participatory development process. Thematic working groups called "Houses," involving civil society, are currently being set up on the principle of blending disciplines. The aim is to develop collective skills and devise innovative proposals. These Houses will act as an incubator for projects. In parallel with this citizen consultation, cultural structures have been solicited via a call for projects which requires them to work with actors outside their own sphere, in order to avoid intermingling. All of this content will personalize its application with the intention of presenting the European Union with what it does not necessarily expect from a city like Reims, by not hesitating to play on the flaws that, as much as its assets, are part of its identity. Caring and gaming have been added to the blend. Having proved – if only through Reims Scènes d'Europe, which has become the FARAWay festival – their ability to work together and in proximity with the world, Reims' cultural structures are ardent protagonists of the project, each contributing their expertise and their network.

ROUEN

In the meantime, like a bid for the Olympic Games, the local authority is rolling out a series of proposals, meetings and invitations for the the population. It is nothing more and nothing less than writing a narrative that tells the story of the territory with its identity, its diversity, its heritage, its landscapes and also its future. For example, meetings are proposed with Céline Dubois-Chappée from the Utopically Yours collective. She invites children to create a postcard inspired by their dreams. Accompanied by a short text, it can be sent to relatives, while a copy will be sent to the Rouen Normandie 2028 dream collection. Creative audiovisual workshops, with Les Fantômes production, and interviews with the inhabitants with the Cueilleurs d'histoire (History Gatherers) complete the offer to make the territory more attractive and inspiring for future generations.

SAINT-DENIS – PERIFAIRIES 2028

The historic city of Saint-Denis epitomizes the territory's ancient heritage identity, along with the working-class industrial past that makes up the common urban landscape of a majority of its cities. The whole area is experiencing demographic growth at the heart of the metropolis and becoming one of European and international exchange hubs. On average, one third of the inhabitants have settled here as a result of past and present migratory movements, and the area is home to almost 150 nationalities: they are a hotbed for cultural diversity that constitutes an invaluable asset. Seine-Saint-Denis is both the youngest and the poorest department in France. Between 2010 and 2020, approximately 460,000 young people under the age of 20 lived in Seine-Saint-Denis, representing 30% of the population. There is an urgent need to reduce social and territorial inequalities, especially for young people who soon will be of age, capable to make decisions, build and govern. The territory offers a wide range of jobs, the best of which are reserved for qualified metropolitans who benefit from an exceptional urban mobility network, whereas a large proportion of local workers cross the metropolis during their long commute on overcrowded means of transport. Yet the artistic and cultural sector, with its industries and factories, its heritage and diverse landscapes, is at the heart of the territory's economic dynamics. Its cultural policies must make this diversity the emblem of the territory with the participation of all its inhabitants, thanks to cultural rights. The strength of this project is embodied through four

convictions: a vibrant and pluralistic cultural heritage; a cultural dynamic driven by youth; a World City; merging urban development with cultural rights.

The identity of each city and territory is put ahead (young, industrial, rural, modern, multicultural), coupled with such values as blending, cooperation, diversity, ecology, inter-generations. We think that these elements are very important for the consistency and the relevance of the candidatures, but also that cities and territories that need incentives and support for their development have more chances than cities and territories that already have many facilities, offer many events, and are quite rich and developed, as we can see in the most recently selected European Capitals of Culture.

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