

European Capitals of Culture: cities as cultural industries?

Some observations as a researcher, a judge in ECoC competitions
and cultural programmer

Questioning the European Capital of Culture initiative

Some of today's challenges

Dealing with the decline of public and Foundation funding

The triple (credit, climate, energy) crunch (New Economics Foundation)

Rediscovering and protecting local distinctiveness

The new information ecology: its potential and dangers

The primacy of politics, the autonomy of culture or a creative solution in between?

There are often conflicts between local politicians and ECoC creative teams, and between City Councils and ECoC companies

The ECoC year is in some cases the exception to the normality of neglect of culture by local politicians

Sustainability is difficult if politicians don't make long term investments

Many different agendas: who owns the ECoC event? The City Council? The EU? The cultural sector? Local citizens? The private sector?

What are the ingredients of successful partnerships?

‘Cultural democracy’ and its limits

Programming and the selection of projects

Transparency, accountability, citizens’ involvement and participatory budgeting are important, but should we also tolerate the ‘benign dictatorship’ of artistic directors?

Defining 'culture' in the ECoC concept

How do we build on the distinctiveness of each city? Do we even know what this distinctiveness is?

Researching and mobilising local cultural resources

A definition of local cultural resources:

- Arts & media activities & institutions
- Sports and recreation
- The tangible & intangible heritage
- The local 'image bank'
- Places for sociability
- Intellectual and scientific milieux and institutions
- Creative inputs into local crafts, manufacturing and services activities

Researching and mobilising local cultural resources

A definition of the urban 'image bank':

- Media coverage
- Stereotypes, jokes and 'conventional wisdom'
- Cultural representations of a city
- Myths and legends
- Tourist guidebooks
- City marketing and tourism promotion literature
- Views of residents, city users and outsiders

Some operational issues

ECoC teams need training in international cultural co-operation

The value of a closer partnership with the European Commission

International is not the same as intercultural

The difficulties of a year-long event

Being serious about monitoring and evaluation, but without over-assessing and over-evaluating

A 360 degrees approach to evaluation?

Economic impacts

Social impacts

Artistic/cultural impacts

Environmental impacts

Educational impacts

A 360 degrees approach to evaluation?

Media impacts

Image and local identity impacts

Creative milieu impacts

Gathering the views of different stakeholders and social groups

See work by Impacts 08 group on Liverpool 2008

Evaluation problems in European Cities/Capitals of Culture

- Limited resources
- Insufficient planning
- Inadequately defined/vague criteria
- Insufficient baseline data
- Limited or no follow-up evaluation
- Lack of independence of evaluators

The central objectives of the ECoC event

City marketing is not enough: the importance of international cultural strategies

Making the ECoC event more European

Stimulating public debate and the revitalisation of the public sphere (Antwerp 1993)

Focusing on equity and social inclusion: the importance of access, connectivity and outreach policies

Integration, multiculturalism or interculturalism?

The central objectives of the ECoC event

Dealing with the effects of the recession

A new focus on production and skills, not on consumption

Creative cities *for* the world (Charles Landry):
beyond destructive forms of urban competitiveness

New priorities:
reducing the negative impacts of unemployment
finding new uses for redundant buildings and sites
fostering a climate of resilience, exploration and
innovation (Copenhagen 1996)
encouraging less materialistic lifestyles

The central objectives of the ECoC event

ECoC as a vehicle for 'creative city' and 'cultural planning' strategies

Urban strategies should learn from the processes of cultural production, which tend to be:

collaborative

e.g. cittadellarte, Biella, Italy
(www.cittadellarte.it)

PROJECT (an initiative by the Arts Council, CABE and Arts & Business in the UK; www.publicartonline.org.uk)

Comedia (www.comedia.org.uk)

Urban strategies should learn from the processes of cultural production, which tend to be:

innovation-oriented, experimental, not narrowly instrumental

need to open up policy systems to young talent, and to set up pilot projects and R&D budgets - e.g. Lewisham (www.creativelewishamagency.org.uk)

Bristol Cultural Development Partnership

Cultural Pathfinder projects in England (www.culture.gov.uk)

Urban strategies should learn from the processes of cultural production, which tend to be:

critical, questioning, challenging

welcoming conflicts and contradictions as a creative resource -
e.g. 'Cities on the Edge' project, Liverpool 2008 and initiatives on
the role of Linz in the Third Reich (Linz 2009)

Urban strategies should learn from the processes of cultural production, which tend to be:

cultured, and critically aware of history, local distinctiveness and of traditions of creativity and cultural expression

- *documenting local distinctiveness (also through cultural cartography)
- *creating a local 'image bank'
- * drawing inspiration from traditions of creativity and innovation

The central objectives of the ECoC event

Making the event more festive

Widening people's mental and spatial horizons

The importance of risk taking, play and playfulness

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