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# local work

# findings

# *Culture Led Regeneration & Local Art Communities*

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## INTRODUCTION

The use of culture as a tool to stimulate local economic development and urban regeneration has been much practised over the past 20-30 years. It is based on the premise of creating distinctive cities that are attractive and inviting to the skilled workers who are needed to fuel the knowledge economy. This large scale re-branding of UK, European and other world cities, has been heralded as a way in which declining industrial cities across the world can salvage their economic base, establishing the 'creative industries', which have a significant impact on the economy in terms of jobs provided and wealth created. Indirectly, the use of culture-led regeneration has, through the harnessing of 'culture' in a city, created cities that resonate vibrancy and cosmopolitanism and provide a 24-hour, café culture for the urban dwellers, thus attracting highly skilled workers who crave this young, urban lifestyle, and, as a consequence, contribute to the development of a city's knowledge economy.

This use of culture and creativity as a tool for growth and development has grown exponentially since the European City of Culture (ECOC) event in Glasgow in 1990. Glasgow represented the initial shift in the ECOC event. From the outset in 1985, ECOC was about creating an opportunity for cities in Europe to promote their cultural heritage and to open up their 'elitist' galleries and museums to local residents and people across Europe, through the use of accessible projects and displays. From 1990 onwards, the primary goal of ECOC became to promote *the city* by bringing in culture from across Europe to produce events that would not only attract a large crowd of adoring fans of 'culture', but also establish the city as a destination for businesses and as a place to invest in. The ECOC event was used to get a city's head above the crowd and to target it for investment in the knowledge economy. This shift in purpose was formally recognised in 1999 when it was decided that the European *City* of Culture event would end after 2004 and be replaced by the European *Capital* of Culture programme, to run until 2019. As Turton (2004) identified, this new title *"is not intended to reward existing cultural excellence but rather to encourage innovation and regeneration".*

Liverpool will be the first city in the UK to experience this newly refocused ECOC programme, when it hosts the event in 2008. As preparations for the event reach boiling point (the finalised programme is due for discussion with the City Council next month), this Local Work

intends to assess the role of culture, and in particular large-scale events such as Liverpool 2008, in cities. The primary concern in this paper is the impact that such events have on local arts and culture communities, the one group who would be expected to benefit the most from a year-long event focusing on the promotion of local culture. Therefore, this Local Work:

- ❑ looks at the historical uses of culture in cities across the world, explaining why it has been employed as a tool for redevelopment;
- ❑ establishes just who is involved in producing and prescribing culture in cities, defining some of the key terms that are often misinterpreted;
- ❑ focuses on the European City/Capital of Culture event, including an overview of Glasgow's 1990 event, and an analysis of the build up to Liverpool 2008;
- ❑ explores the results of surveys conducted with some of the arts and culture organisations based in Liverpool, in order to establish their level of involvement, perceived benefits/losses from the event, and general opinions from the local art community;
- ❑ presents a summary of implications and some recommendations on how culture can be better utilised in cities, with a greater sensitivity to local artists and culture producers.

The research for this Local Work is based on the results presented in a dissertation for an MA at the University of Manchester, which was entitled *The Impact of Culture-Led Regeneration on Local Arts Communities*.

## RECENT APPROACHES

Cultural policy was seen as a response to the globalising corporate structures and the collapse of the Fordist regime of accumulation, which sought to diversify the economic base of cities. There became a reliance on the 'creative industries' as the new economic base, replacing the old industrial one as part of a 'cultural turn' (Miles, 2005). And, as part of the knowledge economy, creative industries aimed to fill the gap between the number of jobs lost in the old industrial sector, and the shortfall in the number created in the new service sector.

Cultural policy was largely based on American strategies to ameliorate the 'doughnut effect' that was occurring in their cities. This resulted in the creation of mixed-use sites on former industrial land, through heritage programmes, which were able to house arts organisations that were desperate for space. In Europe, during the early 1970s, there was a number of cities e.g. Stockholm, Copenhagen, Stuttgart, Lyon, Vienna etc. adopting a 'rediscover your city' strategy for locals, with the primary objective being to 'counteract trends towards social atomisation' and to 're-assert the role of the city centre' as a catalyst for civic identity and public sociability (Landry et al, 1996, p.22-24).

However, during the 1980s there was a shift from social concerns to economic priorities that saw the rise of the, now infamous, cultural flagship policy. This focused on promoting a city's positive image to investors and relying on a 'trickle down' effect, as opposed to dealing with social decline and deprivation directly (Bianchini, 1993, p.13). This became a city branding exercise that Tibbot (2002) argued was vital in order to promote a *"holistic destination brand"* that would benefit all levels of cultural production and assets.

Direct creation of wealth and employment from cultural policies was small, and instead it became focused on attracting tourists, skilled personnel and investors, to diversify and strengthen the economic base through the construction of urban images (Bianchini, 1993, p.15). This is something that Richard Florida (2002) would go on to investigate in his seminal research into *The Rise of the Creative Class*. This created indices of gay friendliness, ethnic mix, and number of bohemians in a city, and compared these with hi-tech growth poles and the growth of cities in the U.S. to see if promotion of a diverse and friendly city was related to attraction of hi-tech graduates and business. His research concluded that there was a

correlation and that cities should therefore emphasise their cultural images in order to attract investment.

This was clear acknowledgement that it was no longer necessary for a city to focus solely on its proximity to raw materials, suppliers and business chains. The new communications and transport infrastructures meant that these dated Fordist pre-requisites could be replaced with the promotion of dynamic city images, aimed at attracting young, intelligent graduates, to be the new fuel for the knowledge economy.

## USE OF CULTURE

The debate over the role of culture in government policy, and as an aid to regeneration of cities and neighbourhoods, splits commentators into two distinct categories:

### Artistic Elite

The first are the core of cultural producers, artists and performers who seek to create truly artistic pieces of work that question our current social frameworks. They see the use of art and culture in government policy as contrary to what they are trying to achieve, since many artists believe that *"ask[ing] questions without providing solutions and shift[ing] understandings without claiming to empower"* (B+B, undated) is a freedom that is central to their role. They do not want to become part of the 'art pill' that recent and current governments have attempted to use to empower deprived and disadvantaged communities.

### Culture Prescribers

The second group are often less creative and are more likely to be employed in prescribing the use of culture, rather than creating culture. They usually work in government, planning, or regeneration consultancy, and they seek to harness the positive outcomes of art production in order to improve the social, economic and environmental fortunes of cities and neighbourhoods. For the 'culture prescribers', their approach to the formulation of a cultural policy or it's implementation as part of a regeneration strategy is centred around three core outcomes:

### Economic Outcomes

Economic interventions are largely driven by the work of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), who have sought to define a new sector of creative industries that include a range of cultural producers and retailers, and which contribute a significant amount to the UK economy. The sector is far broader than the definition of the 'artistic elite', choosing to include a range of digital, publishing, and media producers and retailers (see definition of Creative Industries later). The economic aim is to harness the role these 'creative industries' play in the U.K. economy and utilise this to create more jobs and increased investment.

### Social Outcomes

In social terms, art can be a primary empowerment tool utilised by regeneration and neighbourhood renewal practitioners in order to achieve wider regeneration aims based on educational attainment, health, crime, and social cohesion. Community programmes often involve arts, performance or music classes as part of a tacit attempt to improve an individuals literacy or communication skills, and in order to breed greater community cohesion between all ages, sexes and cultures in a community.

### Environmental Outcomes

In environmental terms, public art can be an effective tool in improving a community's feeling of pride and safety, though the results can be extremely contentious, particularly if proper community engagement is not employed throughout. There is also room for considerable debate as to the artistic merits of a piece of work that has been jointly created through community consultation, rather than something that has been created through the inspiration of an artist. The aim is to improve the perception of the local area and to help to build local pride.

**DEFINITIONS OF CULTURE**

Too often debate over the use of culture is constrained by misinterpretation and misrepresentation of some of the basic terms. For the purposes of this Local Work, I will therefore define these terms from the outset:

*Culture*
An-arts based practice that is grounded in creativity and which seeks to inspire individuals or question current ways of doing things. It will include some form of end product and include the work done by artists (both classical and contemporary), musicians (classical and popular), writers, poets, composers, performers (dance, theatre, film). It will also include the institutions which house or foster this creativity such as art galleries, music studios and theatres.

*Creativity*
An inspired process that results in a product deemed to contain artistic merit, be it a work of art, piece of music or production of a play etc. This does not include the business use of the term involving creative business thinking, or creative accounting or the way by which an individual thinks creatively in order to solve a non-arts related problem.

*Creative Industries*
The DCMS (undated) define the creative industries as *"those industries that are based on individual creativity, skill and talent. They are also those that have the potential to create wealth and jobs through developing intellectual property"*. They also outline thirteen specific sub-sectors that make up the creative industries sector. These are:

1) Advertising
2) Architecture
3) Art and antiques markets
7) Designer fashion
8) Film and video
9) Music
10) Performing arts

4) Computer and video games
5) Crafts
6) Design
11) Publishing
12) Software
13) Television and radio

**EUROPEAN CITY/CAPITAL OF CULTURE**

*Glasgow 1990*
The switch from cultural promotion to economic development agenda was first cited during the last ECOC event to be held in the U.K, that of Glasgow 1990. Garcia (2004, p.319) noted that:

> The selection of Glasgow marked a radical change in orientation for ECOC that reflects a transition into an age of city marketing within cultural policy. Glasgow was the first city to use the ECOC as a catalyst to accelerate urban regeneration, which resulted in an ambitious programme of cultural activity with an unprecedented level of funding from local authorities and private sponsors…[there was an] emphasis on using a wide definition of culture, comprising not only the arts but other elements that reflected Glasgow's identity, such as design, engineering, architecture, shipbuilding, religion and sport.

This placed greater emphasis on regeneration and reflected the idea that it could bring culture to the city rather than the opposite way around, which had been the case in the previous five years where the cultural heritage of Athens, Florence, Amsterdam, Berlin and Paris was already clear. Glasgow 1990 was reported to have created 5,580 new jobs and an almost £15m economic boost to the local economy (BBC, 2003). It is this lucrative potential

for development that has spurred on so many of the recent bidding cities, and has seen the huge sums of money invested in preparing bids.

Many writers and commentators have had a range of things to say about the Glasgow 1990 event, many of them emphasise these economic benefits, and the revitalisation of the central city that has allowed Glasgow to double its international tourist levels. However, the detractors are quick to sight problems with social deprivation, particularly on the peripheries of the city and to claim that many local groups and artists were excluded from taking part, and have been excluded from the benefits that were accrued. Evans (2003, p.425) noted that most of the ECOC infrastructures have been designed as prestige devices, which have succeeded in boosting city images and attracting tourism, but have often disregarded the social and cultural needs of the local community, having a limited impact on employment figures and the long-term economic recovery of the area.

### *Liverpool 2008*
On the 4th June 2003 it was announced that Liverpool would be the Capital of Culture for 2008, beating off competition from its five rival Centre's of Cultural Excellence: Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Oxford and the much-favoured Newcastle-Gateshead joint bid.

Liverpool places its surprise success on its commitment to involving the community, and its bid documents were testament to this idea. Liverpool was lauded, by many, as a true example of how to successfully engage the community in the development of a large-scale project. However, its continued commitment to this cause has recently been questioned. As the 2008 event draws nearer, more and more contributors and locals are becoming disillusioned by the organisation of the event.

In order to deliver the programme Liverpool Culture Company (LCC) was set up, which largely involved the secondment of City Council workers and the appointment of an Artistic Director, Robyn Archer. The initial bid had followed on from Glasgow's re-imaging approach and took a deliberate place promotion agenda, in order to promote its new status. The use of slogans was paramount to this. In 1990, Glasgow had employed the now renowned "Glasgow smiles better", and now Liverpool, attempting to promote itself as a regenerated port city, home to many of the world's different cultures, was opting for "Liverpool: The World in One City". The programme of events was designed not just for 2008, but to provide a build up to it, encompassing Liverpool's 800th anniversary in 2007, and to also create a legacy of events until 2010, in order to improve the chances of long term benefits. Themed years were designed to showcase a different aspect of the city's culture:

> 2003: Celebrating Learning
> 2004: Faith in One City
> 2005: Sea Liverpool
> 2006: Liverpool Performs
> 2007: Liverpool's 800th
> 2008: European Capital of Culture
> 2009: Year of Environment
> 2010: Year of Innovation

Despite this preparation and the heavy consultation with local residents during the bidding process, there appears to have been some deviation from the original plan which has resulted in the LCC unilaterally forging its own path for the event, leading to a number of early projects that were deemed to be self-indulgent, emphasising elitist stereotypes of culture, and lacking accessibility. This led to the resignation of Robyn Archer with her role being absorbed by the Chief Executive, Jason Harborow.

However, this seemed to further anger local residents and artists. They had already been upset by the appointment of Archer, since she was Australian and had been imported in to deliver a range of events that were supposed to have been promoting Liverpool's own

culture, and now Harborow was to take control of the artistic direction of the event, despite many of the local artists questioning his creative credentials. Further criticisms appeared when it was felt that funding for the event was being absorbed largely by the mechanisms of the LCC, whilst the rest was going straight to the 'big eight', which comprised all of the larger organisations in the city, including the Tate Gallery, the Philharmonic Orchestra, the Bluecoat Arts Centre, and Liverpool Biennial, who were in little need of financial support, and whose programmes offered only minor enhancement from their usual offerings.

The biggest embarrassment so far has been the threatened cancellation of the Matthew Street Festival, the largest free music festival in Europe, which has been held in Liverpool for the past 15 years. Despite this being a cultural event, the Music Festival was cancelled due to health and safety concerns related to building work that was taking place near to the site. The building work was part of the economic development legacy acquired as part of the ECOC, but it was now threatening a fundamental part of Liverpool's cultural heritage. After much press coverage, and embarrassment for the LCC, the event was re-instated, albeit in a slightly altered form.

The finalised programme is due for submission to the city council in November and despite the concerns raised, there is still much excitement that the LCC will deliver a fully inclusive and dynamic programme that will allow Liverpool to enhance it's image and for the local artists and residents to benefit from this new status, both now and in the future. However, the criticisms have struck a chord with the city council who are alleged to be drawing up plans to disband the LCC and hand back control of the event to the City Council through a more streamlined delivery team (Bartlett, 2007).

## SURVEY OF THE LOCAL ARTS COMMUNITY

The Liverpool 2008 event has created a great number of opportunities for local artists to become involved and enhance their own image, and to benefit from additional funding to deliver specific projects. The renewed focus on the city, and in particular its art community, is expected to bring lasting benefits to the whole art community in Liverpool. However, not everyone can benefit directly from the event, this brings up some interesting questions over the direction of the event. Through an email questionnaire, administered during July and August of 2007, it was hoped to hear some of the comments of support and the benefits that are anticipated, or have already been accrued by some of the arts organisations in Liverpool, as well as to gain an insight into some of the questions that have been raised.

The survey was sent to arts and culture organisations across Liverpool, and efforts were made to ensure that a fair number of included and excluded organisations were surveyed. 57% of the surveys that were returned were from groups who were in some way involved in the delivery of the Liverpool 2008 programme, and the remaining 43% were not directly involved. This enabled a good mix of positive and negative opinions regarding the event, a summary of which is shown below (Table 1).

| BENEFITS | CONCERNS |
|---|---|
| More Tourists | Maintenance of Tourists after 2008 |
| Improved Image – UK/Europe/World | Influence of 'the big eight' Organisations |
| Increased Ambition | Funding Absorbed by LCC Staff |
| Opportunities for Collaboration & Exchange | Strategy Based on Residential Development |
| Opportunity for Unique Projects | Liverpool Based Artists Overlooked |
| Wider Appreciation for Art | Need to Improve Media Attention / PR |
| More Inward Investment | How do you Measure Success? |
| More Jobs Created | Creation of Only Low Paid Jobs |
| Improved Cultural Infrastructure | |
| Improved Cultural Understanding | |
| Catalyst for Cultural Change | |
| Enhanced Export Opportunities | |

**Table 1 - Benefits and Concerns Identified by Respondents**

### Concerns Raised by Respondents

A major concern raised was the aggressive residential development policy that had been employed. Local artists criticised the high level of residential development in the centre of the city, whilst they struggled to find adequate commercial spaces for their businesses. One respondent said *"the amount of redevelopment taking place had meant that artists workspaces are being lost at a rapid pace (we've been moved out of our workshop and cannot afford another place of the same size or convenience as our last premises)"*. This emphasis of central city development was highlighted in the Matthew Street Festival debacle, and was a major criticism labelled at Glasgow 1990, indicating that lessons had still not been learnt.

Many of the respondents also disagreed that there has been a lot done to involve local artists, with much debate raised around the view that *"there's a tendency among the Council to imagine that anyone based in Liverpool must be second rate"*. The same respondent went on to say that *"The city's artists will continue to be excluded, and will struggle to survive, or move away"*. Another was quoted as saying that Liverpool 2008 was *"an opportunity missed to promote local organisations to the outside world. Most cultural products are only bought in BUT NOT PRODUCED IN Liverpool"* (emphasis in original).

### Benefits Anticipated by Respondents

The most often cited benefit was the increased number of tourists in the city that would generate greater footfall for organisations and allow them to demonstrate their work to a wider audience. Other expected benefits were a greater level of investment in the city providing more jobs and an upward drive in ambition in the city, allowing greater participation and appreciation of the arts in the future.

Specifically in terms of Liverpool's arts community, the renewed focus on the city and its art and culture, was heralded as an opportunity for greater exporting and international networking, with an enhanced ability for exchange and collaboration. One extremely positive review from a respondent saw the Liverpool 2008 event as a "catalyst for cultural change" that would bring about increased cultural infrastructure and create a "better cultural understanding" across the city. It was also claimed that Liverpool 2008 would provide all the city's artists with a chance to create unique work that they would not normally produce, and

that the investment in arts projects has allowed some organisations to evolve from "local organisation[s] delivering local projects…to become players in a national market".

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It appears as though Liverpool Capital of Culture 2008 will be a success in terms of opening up the city to a vast quantity of artistic and cultural events and opportunities, and the image of the City, as a whole, will benefit significantly. There is equally no doubt that Liverpool, as with any subsequent Capital of Culture, will benefit in terms of investment and tourism, and the promotion of their city as a cultural centre. This is due to the realignment of the whole ECOC programme from an artistic based event, to an economic regenerator. In the globalising world and with the backdrop of declining industrial cities falling further and further behind the major players, the ECOC programme offers a chance for those poorer cities to lock in to, at least some of, the benefits that this renewed focus and image creation can bring, validating the realignment of the programme. However, the question has to be asked, at what price?

Truly cultural cities now no longer have the outlet to display their own heritage, instead ex-industrial cities are grasping on to any form of culture that they can associate with their city, in order to demonstrate how they link into notions of European and world cities. And in their attempt to iron out the European-wide inequalities between the globalised and the non-globalised cities, cities that are adopting this place promotion strategy risk polarising their own city and exacerbating inequalities that already exist within it.

As for policy recommendations, cultural policy is clearly a sensitive arena that needs to cater to the improvement of deprived communities; the enhancement of economic, social and environmental aims; and also must ensure that it does not alienate the very creators of culture, the artists themselves. I would suggest therefore that large-scale culture-led regeneration events, like Liverpool 2008, are not a realistic approach for improving cities. Aside from the fact that their appearance is extremely rare - there was 18 years in between the first and second events in the U.K - they are even more competitive to acquire, and are enormously difficult to deliver.

As a policy tool, or example of best practice, they offer some merit but it is exceedingly difficult to replicate the conditions of such an event in cities across the U.K. with differing economic, social and political environments. It would therefore be more beneficial to focus resources around small community-led projects, these have undoubted, if difficult to evaluate, benefits, and while they may only incorporate a small number of people at a time, they can contribute significantly to wider regeneration aims and rarely alienate the communities they are in.

Community arts projects may however, alienate the artistic community given the lack of true artistic merit employed and also due to the projects' desire to empower citizens. However, this is a reason for a clear definition of culture, creative industries and community arts projects, so as to disassociate them from each other and to accept that community arts projects are there to tackle social aims, creative industries are tasked with stimulating economic potential and artists should be left free to continue to question society without providing answers.

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