

## **European Capitals of Culture**

Capitalising on Culture: The impact of the European Capitals of Culture on the local independent cultural sector

#### Introduction: Katherine Watson



Between 2007 and 2019, there could be as many as 180 cities bidding for the title of European Capital of Culture, according to a recently launched website for the <u>Association of Candidate Cities to the European</u> <u>Capital of Culture</u>. As more and more cities vie for the title, LabforCulture has been investigating the existing research on the subject, in partnership with <u>Trans Europe Halles</u>, a network of independent culture centres with 49 members in 25 countries.

Our specific focus was on finding research that considered the impact that European Capitals of Culture (ECOC) have had on local independent cultural activity and on cultural cooperation between local communities across Europe.

Many of the Trans Europe Halles members have either participated in a European Capital of Culture programme,

or else they have been or are currently involved in a bid from their own city or region. Just as every member of the Trans Europe Halles network has its own unique and distinguishing character, the cultural capital experience in every city is different too. Nevertheless it was apparent that there was much knowledge and experience that could be shared, especially as more and more local cultural organisations are involved.

## **Research Mapping**

Lidia Varbanova, Editor of the Resources for Research section of LabforCulture, undertook a mapping of the existing research. Although one of the requirements for a city to become a European Capital of Culture is "involving local people and integrating local culture", she has reflected that this aspect of the cities' experience is the least considered and evaluated in the overall body of research. More recent research indicates a decided shift and an increased focus on the ongoing local legacy of the programme, as seen in the research from Lille 2004, Luxembourg 2007 and the ongoing research from Liverpool 2008 and Stavanger 2008.

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## Interviews



Image: 2008 Meeting at Tou Scene, Center for Contemporary Arts in Stavanger, Norway.

Trans Europe Halles interviewed 16 of the network's 18 members from cities that have been or plan to be European Capitals of Culture. The <u>results from these interviews</u> and the LabforCulture mapping were brought together at a panel discussion on 20 September 2008 at Tou Scene in Stavanger, Norway – an appropriate backdrop for the discussion, given Stavanger's status as European Capital of Culture in 2008.

Participants at the Trans Europe Halles meeting in Stavanger also heard from Mary Miller, Director of <u>Stavanger 2008</u>, and from Hilmar Rommetvedt, Head of Research at the International Research Institute in Stavanger (IRIS). They are undertaking comprehensive research on the impact of Stavanger 2008 in partnership with the University of Stavanger.

Trans Europe Halles and LabforCulture posed the questions:

- How can the independent sector organise itself to be a more important partner in ECOC?
- Can the network mobilise itself and take joint actions or advocacy to facilitate greater involvement by the independent sector?
- How can we widen this conversation and share this knowledge? Are there information gaps that need filling?

The discussion is certainly one that will continue and intensify. Success at a local level is dependent upon the meaningful involvement of local organisations at the outset of the bid process and throughout the planning and implementation of the ECOC programme. Spaces for sharing experiences and information are key.

#### Image credits:

Sibiu, 2007 European Capital of Cultural <u>www.sibiu2007.ro</u> Tou Scene Center for Contemporary Arts <u>www.touscene.com</u>



**Research Mapping** 

Lidia Varbanova

## A short background

The "European Capital of Culture" (ECOC) is a title given to a city by the European Union for a period of one year. During this time, the city is given a chance to showcase its cultural life and cultural development on a broad European and international platform. A number of European cities have used this opportunity to transform visibly (and, in some cases, completely) their cultural infrastructure, to boost the local economy, to attract tourists and to improve the city's visibility abroad [1].

# ECOC guidelines recommend that cities should consider four key issues when bidding for the title:

- 1. Strategic vision and planning, incorporating clear cultural tourism objectives.
- 2. Involving local people and integrating local culture.
- 3. Management structures and partnership development.
- 4. Legacy of the process and programme.





Images: Livepool Capital of Culture 2008 promotion

As early as 1991, the organisers of the European Cities of Culture created the Network of European Cultural Capitals and Months (ECCM). Based in Luxembourg, the network enabled the exchange and dissemination of information, primarily among the organisers of the events. In 1994, the network carried out one of the first comprehensive studies on the impact of European Capitals of Culture since its creation.

In December 2006, the <u>University Network of the</u> <u>European Capitals of Culture</u> (UNEECC) was founded in Pécs, Hungary, inspired by the idea that it would be useful for universities and higher education establishments based in European Capitals of Culture to use this platform to stimulate new forms of academic and educational institutional collaboration.

Significant investment has been made by individual cities, cultural organisations and many levels of government into the European Capitals of

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Culture Programme since it was launched in 1985. The impact of this investment and the short- and long-term benefits generated by these major cultural years has also been studied and analysed from a range of perspectives, both by the cities themselves and by external experts. Of particular interest to LabforCulture is the catalysing effect of the ECOC on a local and regional level and the implication of local small- and medium-size cultural organisations and operators and their audiences in the planning and implementation of these major undertakings.

#### Our areas of interest include the impact on:

- local and regional cultural capacity (people not just buildings);
- connection between local arts and cultural activities and diverse audiences;
- cultural cooperation between local communities across Europe as a result of ECOC activities.

## Most common impact/evaluation parameters

Evaluation parameters, identified in the ECOC resources mapped by LabforCulture, are mainly related to: economy; tourism; marketing; infrastructure; social and cultural effects. Here are some examples, extracted from various resources:

- Economic parameters: ability of culture to create jobs; influence of ECOC on the economic structure of the city; economic revival as a result of cultural regeneration; public and private investments for regeneration of public spaces and modernising cultural facilities; private spending on cultural consumption; public spending directly related to cultural programmes; investments in new equipment and facilities; attraction of new investors; long-term multiplying effects on the overall regional and national economies.
- **Tourism parameters**: tourism contribution to local economy; development of a rational tourism policy; inclusion of the city in successful tourist destinations; attraction of visitors; profile of ECOC visitors and their spending.
- **Marketing parameters**: media impact; improving or changing the city's image; creating a long-term image of the city and its culture; improving the city's marketing ("place marketing") as a tool to support and develop the city's uniqueness and attractiveness; promoting sustainable local creative products and facilities; cultural participation.



 Infrastructure parameters: overall long-term development of cultural infrastructure; stimulation and transformation of urban development; development of new creative design.

The early ECOC resources (before 1990) did not give much consideration to economic parameters. The ECOC Glasgow in 1990 developed a new trend in studies related to the effects on cities, emphasising the importance of economic development and image improvement. In recent years, the Capitals of Culture have become major engines for economic development and urban regeneration. In the last three to four years, many authors have become interested in the economic, tourism and marketing impact of ECOC programmes [2].



Image: Fête de cloture – Abschlussfeier, Luxembourg and Great Region, European Cultural Capital 2007 (Compagnie OFF) © Claude Piscitelli.

Only sporadic examples exist of measuring the effects of a designated ECOC on the organisational and managerial changes in the cultural sector of the city, such as: improvement of organisational strength in the cultural sector; confidence in capabilities of artistic and cultural organisations; contribution to the "learning curve" of cultural organisations; boosting local creativity; improved managerial capacities of leaders and staff in the cultural sector; overall institutional capacity building; acquiring of marketing skills in attracting diverse audiences.

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The current resource mapping did not identify resources containing a comprehensive analysis focusing on one city (or comparative analysis) of the intangible "soft" effects of an ECOC, such as: enhancing local pride; improving the sense of community, cohesion and belonging; mobilising residents; levels and tools of connection between local cultural activities and diverse audiences; intercultural dialogue.

The change in the tools, models, patterns and "volume" of cultural cooperation between local communities across Europe as a result of ECOC activities is also not identified as a parameter in the final evaluations and studies (with the exception of the chapter on Regional Cooperation in the Luxembourg 2008 final report).



## Key research work and parameters related to "local cultural capacities" and "cultural cooperation between communities"

The majority of reviewed resources are related to the evaluation of individual cities. One of the first evaluation reports was carried out by J. Myerscough et al related to measuring the impact of Glasgow as European Capital of Culture in 1990 [3]. The 2001 report by GiannaLia Cogliandro assesses the strengths and weaknesses of ECOC cooperation, using this experience to facilitate the development and the implementation of cultural networks in Europe [4]. Porto (2001), Salamanca (2002), Graz (2003), Cork (2005), Sibiu (2007) are among those cities that have made a good attempt to comprehensively evaluate the experience as a result of being an ECOC.



Image: Cork, Ireland - European Capital of Culture 2005: Fête de la Dansewith 'Spectacularly Empty II.'

The research mapping shows that there is no focused research available on the effects of the cultural capitals on the city's social and cultural life, on community development and on parameters related to international cultural cooperation. Only partial answers to these questions could be extracted from the research works, articles and papers.

Comparative analysis between cities was also missing until the establishment of the <u>ATLAS</u> Cultural Capital Research Group in

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2000, which aimed to conduct research on a transnational basis. The first report in a series of studies on the European Capitals of Culture is ATLAS's comparative research, which provides the basis for qualitative research on the effects of ECOC [5].

A 2005 research paper by B. Quinn et al aims to identify any legacies of Cork being European Capital of Culture in 2005 [6]. One of the conclusions in the report is that "twenty eight of the organisations surveyed stated that their involvement in the Year resulted in the formation of new linkages with other organisations, most often within the Cork area but also elsewhere in Ireland and abroad."

From 2002-2005, G. Beatriz led a research project investigating the long-term legacy of Glasgow 1990, based at the Centre for Cultural Policy Research, University of Glasgow.

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A milestone in the research related to cultural capitals is Robert Palmer's 2004 study, "European Cities and Capitals of Culture", commissioned by the EC. The study evaluates the cultural, economic, visitors' and social perspectives of the ECOC for the period 1994-2004, following an earlier evaluation study of the ECOC (1985-1993).

## The study points out the six basic aspects of the need for an ECOC to have a European dimension:

- Presenting events featuring European artists;
- Collaborations, co-production, exchanges;
- Developing European themes and issues;
- Identifying and celebrating aspects of European history, identity and heritage that are already present in the designated city;
- Partnerships between two or more cities;
- Promoting European tourism.

These aspects are indirectly connected with our current area of research interest: "impact of ECOC on cultural cooperation between local communities". The current mapping did not identify any resources or comparative analyses where these aspects are coherently and consistently evaluated.

Palmer's report emphasises a number of critical and important factors for the success of an ECOC city, including: local involvement; partnership; long-term planning; clear objectives; sufficient funding; political will. The study clearly points out that: "Social objectives were not the highest priority for most ECOC, yet almost all included projects with social objectives. Many ECOC also ran projects to create cultural opportunities for social groups outside the mainstream city culture ("cultural inclusion"). Initiatives were most frequently aimed at young people, ethnic minorities and disabled people. A small number of ECOC structured their programme around those objectives. Fewer ECOC ran projects to achieve purely social goals ('cultural instrumentalism').... However there was very little evaluation of social impacts that would allow the drawing of reliable conclusions. More evaluation could be particularly useful in this area as social projects offer significant potential for ECOC to create long-term initiatives."

Based on the findings in the report, the EC made recommendations and subsequently changed the procedures for selecting and monitoring ECOC and for placing increased emphasis on the cultural and European components.

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# Recent research work, evaluation reports and initiatives

The recent study on the impact of the European Capital of Culture in Sibiu, Romania by G. Richards and Ilie Rotariu (2007) examines visitors' profiles in terms of origin, occupation status, motivation for visiting, visitors' experience, travel characteristics, visitors' expenditure, and much more.

The analysis demonstrates generation of significant visitor spending in Sibiu and the improvement of the city's image. However, visitors were slightly less convinced about the social impacts, such as creating social cohesion and improving quality of life. As these impacts are less visible in the short term, this fact is not a surprise.



Image: Lille, France - European Capital of Culture 2004. Les tulipes de Shangri La, Yayoi Kusama © Maxime Dufour

The most recent report by Palmer [7] outlines several important programming trends of ECOC: seasonal programming; multi-annual programming; European dimension of the programmes. The "Regional Partnership" criteria is emphasised in the report as an important selection procedure for the ECOC bid (as a consequence of the decreasing size of candidate cities).

The second key requirement for a city to become an ECOC – "Involving local people and integrating local culture" – is the least

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evaluated in the mapped research works and reports. It is unclear to what extent local cultural groups and communities were involved in the respective ECOC year, by what means and in what kind of programming. Although some sporadic examples exist in the mapped resources:

- Lille 2004 introduced an innovative system of "Ambassadeurs" where anyone could volunteer to receive and transmit regular information, updates, assist in running the events and participate in special activities. More than 17,000 volunteers from all backgrounds acted as ambassadors across Lille, forming a "grassroots information relay system". A special feeling of teamwork and community involvement was created as a result of this action, which led to improving the image of the city, and stronger public support for the whole year.
- One of the objectives of Lille 2004 included "promotion social cohesion and enhancing pride and self confidence by promoting creativity and cultural experiences" [8]. "Monitoring systems were put in place by the

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operational team; but no plans were made to undertake systematic monitoring or impact evaluation" (p.33). The Case Study on Lille in the report is an attempt to produce a comprehensive report on the cultural, social and economic impacts. The authors stress that "the decision to develop community arts facilities rather than just iconic buildings may eventually be seen as a model for other cities". (p.54). Also: "A primary success factor for ECOCs is the mobilisation of local inhabitants as a primary step and preliminary stage of a communication strategy. Successful ECOCs have invariably been well supported by local residents" (p.56).

One of the most comprehensive reports on ECOC is "Luxembourg and Greater Region, European Capital of Culture 2007" (2008). Among the main evaluation characteristics analysed in the report are: cultural development; cultural participation; marketing and communication; tourism effects; economic effects. Chapter 11 of the report pays special attention to social effects, in particular to: audience development, social cohesion (related to migrants, youth, access to events, etc.). Chapter 12 is devoted to regional cooperation characteristics and trends:

#### "The success of the cross-border projects was due to a number of factors:

- The highly professional work of the regional coordinators and the managers of cross-border projects.
- Strong support from politicians, journalists and other key decision-makers.
- The enthusiasm of project partners for collaboration with colleagues across historic borders.
- The organisation of 30 thematic round tables, which established the basis for many fruitful collaborations.
- The positive interaction between the central coordination of the ECOC and the regional coordinators.
- The success of the cross-border projects is underlined by the fact that 15 of the project managers have already indicated their intention to continue their activities after 2007 (p. 84)."

A promising new initiative is <u>Impacts 08</u> – a joint research initiative of the University of Liverpool and Liverpool John Moores University to evaluate the social, cultural, economic and environmental effects of Liverpool ECOC 2008. The importance of this initiative is the attempt to "develop a 'research model' for evaluating the multiple impact of culture-led regeneration programmes that can be applied to events across the UK and beyond".

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Another recent research study focuses on Stavanger 2008 in Norway, to be conducted by the University of Stavanger and the International Research Institute of Stavanger (IRIS). This study seems to be the first that tries to identify the connections between ECOC events and the local life of citizens.

A further recent development in this field is the new Athens Documentation Centre on Capitals of Culture, which aims to gather all information relevant to past, current and future ECOC. Materials from more than 35 past capitals and months of culture have been gathered, following an information grid/questionnaire in the following areas: socio-economic, historical and cultural context; the cultural year experience (objectives, problems faced, results); artistic programmes; social programmes; publications (catalogues, newsletters, etc.); cultural infrastructure (existing and creation of new venues); evaluation.

Hopefully, the results of the centre's enquiries, and the new studies on Liverpool and Stavanger, will provide new highlights on the evaluation and characteristics related to local and regional cultural capacities, the connection between local arts and cultural activities, as well as indicators related to the changes in the scope, methods and tools of cultural cooperation following a city's status as European Cultural Capital.

#### Footnotes:

[1] The "European City of Culture" was launched in 1985 by the Council of Ministers. Since then, the initiative has become more and more successful across Europe and has gained increasing interest from citizens and visitors. Until 2004, the "European Cities of Culture" were designated on an intergovernmental basis. In 2005 Cork City, Ireland, was the first city in Europe to hold the prestigious European Capital of Culture title. Each year the member states unanimously selected the cities most likely to welcome the event and the European Commission granted a subsidy to the selected city. As of 2005, the EU's institutions started to take part in the selection procedure of the cities that will host the event.

In 1990, the Ministers of Culture launched the "European Cultural Month". This event is similar to the European City of Culture but goes on for a shorter period and is addressed to Central and Eastern European countries in particular. The EC grants a subsidy for the European Cultural Month each year. Only European cities within EU member states are eligible. However, the EU council can designate one city from a non-EU country for a given year, if that city's designation is approved unanimously by the Council.



[2] Besson, E. and Sutherland, M., Richards, G., Wilson J., Bianchinni, F.

[3] Myerscough, J., Booth, P. and Boyle, R. (1991-1993).

[4] GiannaLia Cogliandro (2001) "European Cities of Culture for the year 2000. A wealth of urban cultures for celebrating the turn of the century".

[5] Greg Richards, Erik Hitters and Carlos Fernandes (2002) "Rotterdam and Porto: Cultural Capitals 2001: visitor research".

[6] Quinn, B. and O'Halloran, E. (2005) "An analysis of Emerging Cultural Legacies".

[7] Palmer, R. and Richards, G., "European Cultural Capital Report" (2007)

[8] Ibid.

#### Image credits:

Liverpool, European Capital of Culture 2008 <u>http://www.liverpool08.com</u> Luxembourg, European Capital of Culture 2007 <u>http://www.mcesr.public.lu</u> Cork, European Capital of Culture 2005 <u>http://www.cork2005.ie</u> Lille, European Capital of Culture 2004 <u>http://iis22.domicile.fr</u>



## **Interview results**

#### Essi Aittamaa

Trans Europe Halles (TEH) interviewed 16 of 18 TEH members from cities that have been or plan to be European Capitals of Culture (ECOC). The results from these interviews (presented by Essi Aittamaa, Marketing and Communication Manager of Trans Europe Halles) and the LabforCulture mapping were brought together at a panel discussion on 20 September 2008 at Tou Scene in Stavanger, Norway.

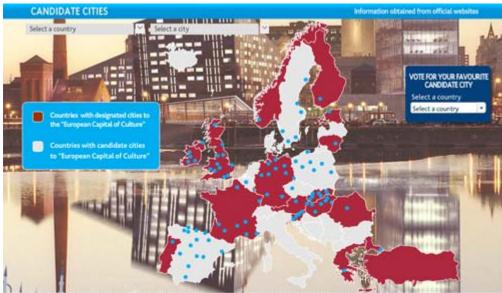


Image: Map of the past and upcoming candidate cities - Screenshot taken November 2008

## Who was interviewed?

The aim of the interviews was to map TEH centres' experiences of the ECOC programme. From July to September 2008, TEH interviewed most of its members that had some kind of involvement in the programme: 18 TEH members and 1 partner organisation, as follows:

- 9 members in cities that have been the ECOC from 1987-2007
- 1 member in a city with current ECOC status
- 1 member in a city that lost the bid
- 3 members in a city that won the bid and are preparing for the year
- 6 members in a city that was in a bid process during the interviews
- 1 had a Capital of Culture month (currently also in the bid process for ECOC)

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## What questions were asked?

The questions to all interviewees were related to the influence of the centre on the ECOC year and the effects of the ECOC programme on the centre, on the independent sector and/or on the community. In the timeframe 1987-2014, the ECOC programme has changed significantly and the experiences vary according to different periods of time. Therefore, comparisons and general conclusions were not drawn, but several important issues arose as a result of the interviews.

Among the centres interviewed, there was only one centre that made a conscious decision not to take part in the ECOC programme. This was because they had a very clear policy and they did not see matching aims and goals with the Capital of Culture year in their city. Also, the resources of the ECOC year were limited and they were directed to more classical culture. Organisations like this centre were expected to participate without financial compensation for their efforts. All the other centres took part in the ECOC year to some extent. For some the collaboration was deep and they were very involved in the planning process. Others' involvement was sending in project proposals or hosting an event or two.

In some cases, the city approached a TEH member that had a role in shaping the bid or the process. Quite often there had just been a general call for proposals and the centres reacted with project proposals. In other cases, the centres were only venues for the events of the ECOC programme. There have also been cases where the reconstruction of centres' buildings were in the ECOC agenda. In a few cases, the engagement was much more profound and included an overall planning role or active participation in the evaluation process (like the case of Stavanger).

## Having an influence

Most of the centres in ECOC cities responded that some of their suggestions were taken into account and others were not. There were as many centres that thought their suggestions were taken into account as those that felt their suggestions were not taken into account. Those involved in the bid process most felt that their voice had been heard.

The organisations in charge of the ECOC year were very different and TEH members' relations to them varied a great deal. On the one hand, there were descriptions of closed organisations with no transparency. On the other hand, there were organisations open to feedback and with whom working relations were fruitful. It seems that TEH members in the bid process described more positive relations than those that had already participated in the year.

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## **Bringing know-how**

Only one TEH member that had taken part in the ECOC year said that it had no influence at all on their organisation. For others there was some kind of influence, either positive or negative. Most of the comments were positive; the year brought know-how to the organisations, including, for example, production, administration and international contacts. Sometimes taking part in the ECOC year helped the organisations to generate bigger audiences and more publicity.

The members could see the impact of ECOC on the local independent sector. The year brought know-how to the independent sector and in some cases the independent sector received recognition as a serious player in their region. Also, concrete activities were mentioned, such as starting new festivals during the ECOC year and their continuation after the year. However, it is important to note that the long-term influence of the year was doubted by some of the interviewees.

On some occasions, TEH members saw some influence on the audiences, or on the communities in their region. However, in general, they could not identify very important effects of the ECOC year to the local communities and audiences.

Most members were aware of the evaluations on the effects of ECOC. There were also critical voices about these outcomes. Most TEH members were also part of the ECOC evaluations for specific cities where they operate. They were interviewed or gave feedback in one form or another.

#### Image credits:

Map of Candidate Cities www.candidatecities.com



## **Research mapping / Annotated bibliography**

Identifying research work (existing and ongoing), evaluation reports, books, articles, viewpoints, publications, etc.; discussing the catalysing effect of European Capitals of Culture (ECOC) on a local and regional level, for small- and medium-size cultural organisations and operators.

**Focus:** How ECOC contribute to local and regional cultural capacity (people not just buildings); What has been (and still exists afterwards) the connection between local arts and cultural activities and diverse audiences; How ECOC contributed to improving cultural cooperation between local communities across Europe.

Search criteria: Documents produced by former and current ECOC; Publications and online resources of European cultural networks; Documents and publications of the European Commission; Government documents – national and regional level; Country specific documents and publications; Academic publications (by universities, training centres, research institutes in Europe); Events of European networks, associations, government bodies. Research methods: Internet searches – general search engines, online library catalogues, specific websites related to the topic; Short inquiry, distributed via email among 30 targeted experts, researchers and ECOC managers. Search keywords used: European capitals of culture; ECOC and local development; Capitals of culture building regional capacities; ECOC and community development; ECOC impact on local communities; Evaluation of ECOC; ECOC and cultural cooperation; Capitals of culture: reports; Capitals of culture: impact; Capitals of culture: long-term effects.

## Annotated bibliography

Many of the following publications are included in the LabforCulture database. The annotations of the resources marked with "\*" are extracted from: European Cultural Capital Report (2007). Robert Palmer and Greg Richards. Arnhem, Atlas. With sincere thanks to Greg Richards for providing this information.

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