Esperienze e strumenti per cultura e territorio

What's the "city" in the design and implementation of the European Capital of Culture? An open issue

In the last decade, great attention has been given to the study of mega-events and their impacts on an urban and regional scale. Different economic, social, political and urban planning approaches have been developed on this topic by scholars, institutional actors, economic interest groups, civil society and grassroots organisations. Mega-events have been recognised by local governments as opportunities to reconstruct and reinforce cities at the local level, while positioning themselves on the global stage. The European Capital of Culture (ECoC) is a long-standing programme that invites visibility for a cultural mega-event that aims to highlight the richness and diversity of European cultures and the features they share, and also to promote greater mutual knowledge and understanding among Europe's citizens.

The European Capital of Culture programme, originally entitled the European City of Culture, was conceived in 1983 by Melina Mercouri, then Greek Minister for Culture. The purpose of the programme was to give a cultural dimension to the work of the European Community (now the European Union) at a time when it did not have a defined remit for cultural action, and to celebrate European culture as a means of drawing the community closer (Garcia, 2005). From 1985 to 2004, the European Cities of Culture were chosen inter-governmentally by EU culture ministers meeting in the Council. In 2005, the Commission revised the scheme and changes were introduced to the procedure for selecting a newly named European Capital of Culture (ECoC). According to these current rules, countries take turns to host the event in a pre-set order, and proposals from potential host cities are assessed by an international panel against specific criteria. After 2013, the competition between cities within the host countries will become obligatory. The current capitals, Turku and Tallinn, are the 43rd and 44th ECoCs respectively. Future ECoCs have already been selected up until 2015, and the order of host countries up until 2019(1).

The selection criteria state that the cultural programme for an ECoC must reflect two categories of activity:
• 'The European Dimension': (1) Fostering cooperation among cultural operators, artists and cities from the member state and other member states; (2) highlighting the richness of cultural diversity in Europe; and (3) bringing the common aspects of European cultures to the fore.
• 'City and Citizens': Fostering the participation of the citizens living in the city and its surroundings, and raising their interest as well as the interest of citizens from abroad. This should be a sustainable and integral part of the long-term cultural and social development of the city.

The European Commission coordinates and guides the competition for the sought-after title, but contributes fairly little to its financing. ECoC programmes are funded by national, regional and local public funds together with private sponsors. The Commission's financial support, "the Melina Mercouri prize", currently €1.5m per capital, is a minor contribution. The budgets of recent programmes of activity have been: Linz €68.7m (2009), Vilnius €12.9m (2009), Essen for the Ruhr €81m (2010), and Pecs €35.4m (2010) (Ecotec, 2010; Ecorys, 2011). On average, the trend has been a growth in budgets, since average expenditure per ECoC during the period 1995-2004 was €36.9m (Palmer/Rae Associates, 2004a: 85-89). In addition to the costs of the cultural programme, some ECoC title holders report costs in capital investments and infrastructure. Altogether, national ministries and the cities holding the title have been the largest financial contributors. During the period 1995-2004, public sector contributions represented 77.5 per cent of total income generated (Palmer/Rae Associates, 2004a: 90). The sponsors' share (%) in funding the recent ECoCs was: Linz 5.9, Vilnius 14, Essen for the Ruhr 14, and Pecs 2.6 per cent

(Ecotec, 2010; Ecorys, 2011).

The ECoC programme is expected to operate and develop relevant cultural initiatives that are meaningful on two levels: the European and the urban. In this sense, the cooperation among cultural operators, artists and cities from the hosting member state and other member states is central. At the same time, the programme works at the city level to include local cultural operators and engage citizens both as cultural actors and as audience. On many occasions, European cities have nested ECoC title-holding in a longer-term process of cultural and urban development.

The literature on planning and governance features, as well as on the socioeconomic impact of culture-led urban development, is quite extensive. The description, analysis and comparison of ECoC initiatives, however, have not yet covered the spatial aspects satisfactorily. That is why this special issue of Tafter Journal is dedicated to an analysis of ECoCs from the specific point of view of the city, its physical dimension as well as its social and cultural organisation in space. In this introductory paper, we also briefly review how previous reports and studies interpreted the urban and spatial dimensions of the programme.

Urban dimension in policy reports and academic debates

A major evaluation of the ECoC programme, including studies on all cities that had held the title between 1995 and 2004, was completed in 2004 (Palmer/Rae Associates, 2004a; 2004b). It argues that the ECoC programme is a powerful tool for cultural development that operates on a scale that offers unprecedented opportunities for acting as a catalyst for city change. However, the key mission has varied from city to city. Most cities have had multiple objectives, most often referring to the need to raise the international profile of the city and its region, to run a programme of cultural activities and arts events, to attract visitors, and to enhance pride and self-confidence (Palmer/Rae Associates, 2004a: 13).

The urban dimension that the Palmer report first and foremost refers to is urban revitalisation and regeneration. The report notes that alongside their cultural programmes, all ECoCs in the period 1995-2004 invested in infrastructure projects. The most common projects were improvements to public space and lighting, and improvements to cultural infrastructure, including refurbishments and restorations of facilities and monuments, as well as the construction of new cultural buildings such as concert halls and museums. In addition, about one quarter of ECoCs carried out major programmes of urban development, such as developing cultural districts and parks. Many infrastructure projects were not initiated specifically for the ECoC event, but benefited from the catalytic effect of the ECoC and its focus on culture, extra funding, joint publicity and programming in cooperation with the ECoC organisation, as well as from the optimism and ambition that surrounded many ECoCs (Ibid. 16). Public space was also emphasised as a stage for events and public art in all ECoCs; "both the creation of art in public spaces and the organisation of specific events in public space were given considerable attention, and were generally the projects that received the most public and media attention" (Ibid. 59). Cultural inclusion is mentioned as an "emerging form of practice"; "its aim is to enlarge the framework of cultural expression, to enable new voices to be heard and, ultimately, to make the cultural space more open and democratic" (Ibid. 122). Nevertheless, the (socio)spatial impacts of revitalisation or regeneration are not discussed further.

Comprehensive impact evaluations of individual ECoCs have become common only recently. The pioneering five-year Liverpool Impacts 08 programme (Garcia et al, 2010) contained a number of studies (see www.impacts08.net). The evaluation focused on the dynamics of culture-led urban regeneration: how culture had multiple impacts upon regeneration, how Liverpool embedded the ECoC in a much wider and

ongoing regeneration narrative, how the urban environment was branded, how the city succeeded in increasing tourism and media attention, and last but not least, how the residents' and visitors' perceptions and impressions of the city changed. Surprisingly, the Impacts 08 reports do not touch much the physical regeneration, although the ECoC must have had at least a catalytic effect on several developments. The spatial dimension is more explicit in the Ruhr 2010 evaluation (Mit Kultur zur Metropole, 2011), given the spatial character of the main goal of the ECoC – to enforce the idea of the Ruhr area as a unified metropolis. The evaluation largely reflects this core idea, although it discusses the typical components of culture-led regeneration at the same time. The European Capitals of Culture Policy Group (2010) report suggests how to conduct research-based evaluations in future ECoCs. While it provides a useful list of indicators of how to plan and follow ECoC management and activity, it does not touch the spatial dimensions either.

In the last decade, the academic debate has given greater attention to the role of cultural heritage and the arts in revitalising and regenerating central and peripheral areas of contemporary cities. Several scientific journals, representing different disciplines, have recently published special issues on this topic, including Urban Studies (Miles and Paddison, 2005), Local Economy (Wilks-Hegg and North, 2004), and the International Journal of Cultural Policy (Gibson and Stevenson, 2004). In the debate, the ECoC has been considered both ex ante and ex post, in its programming and in its impact on urban and economic development, on cultural and social capital, and on branding and marketing of a more-or-less improved urban image (among others: Balsas, 2004; Garcia, 2004, 2005; Jones and Wilks-Heeg 2004; Miles, 2004; Lucchini, 2006). The criticism towards inconsistencies in culture-led regeneration has been rising since the mid-2000s and it has touched the ECoC programme, too. The contested topics include the distance between cultural policy rhetoric and actual urban effects, mere discursive inclusion of (creative or cultural) market sectors or even target population, and limits in the scope and budget of the initiatives (among others: Mooney, 2004; Miles, 2005; Campbell, 2011). Furthermore, limited attention in the academic debate has been given to the spatial implications of programming and implementing the ECoC.

The special issue of the Nordic Journal of Cultural Policy describes different political goals and processes of the ECoC at the local, regional, national and European levels (Lähdesmäki, 2010a). Lähdesmäki (2010b) provides an overview of the strategies for cities to represent local cultural diversity (e.g. location and historical evolution of the city and its ethnic, cultural and social groups and minorities; its architectural scenery; the common perception of the city and others). There is, however, only limited information regarding the political construction of local spatial visions for the ECoC programme. The study of the multilevel arrangements can highlight tensions and conflicts among actors designing and implementing the ECoC in different instances. Palonen (2010) considered a wide set of recent cases (Sibiu and Luxembourg 2007, Vilnius 2009, Ruhr 2010 and Turku 2011), highlighting the importance of intermediate governance levels for building a consensus and fostering cultural activities in the ECoC. This is another good reason to investigate the spatial dimension of cultural policymaking, linking urban and regional visions to more general features of the ECoC.

The latest special issue on the topic recently appeared in Town Planning Review (TPR), linking ECoCs to wider urban development strategies (Sykes, 2011). Philip Booth's (2011) paper provides a framework for comparing ECoCs and other cultural policy programmes in Europe and beyond. It does not only provide the debate with a methodological and theoretical discussion, but also considers relevant questions such as cultural embeddedness of cultural and spatial planning practice, the path dependency of urban development trajectories and the problems related to inferring simple, linear and causally related explanations from transnational comparison. In this sense, he highlights the importance of referring cultural policy and programmes to contextual planning systems and cultures and wider urban

development strategies. The paper by Paris and Baert (2011) offers an interesting image of Lille's development trajectory (since the 1980s), in which the 2004 ECoC programme was nested. Lille was interpreted in its wider metropolitan area with reference to European infrastructures such as the Channel Tunnel and its spatial development strategy, as in the case of Euralille. The cultural programming referred to these spatial elements and helped to improve the image of the city as a cultural destination as well as in its perception among its citizens, as was intended by economic and political players. It is, however, difficult to maintain that the series of trickle-down effects simply derived from this, but it is clear that the attention to space and cultural networking played a role in new cultural investments in the metropolitan area, such as the new branch of the Louvre Museum in Lens. The cases of Liverpool and of Roubaix show the mechanisms and processes of cultural planning and governance, linking them to other planning initiatives through time, but they pay little attention to related spatial features of the ECoC programme and only partially to their impacts in terms of social cohesion and territorial development (O'Brian, 2011; Colomb 2011). On the contrary, the regeneration process of Marseille 2013 was considered in a clear spatial framework that referred to the metropolitan area in order to show the background and future challenges (Andreas 2011). Furthermore, it considers how the current crisis will intersect not only the implementation of the ECoC but also a longer-term trajectory of urban development in the region. In conclusion, the TPR special issue is an important contribution to comparative studies regarding the relationship between the ECoC programme and urban development strategies and plans, their socioeconomic benefits and governance of cultural policy. Its framework emphasises the contextual variation. There is a demand for contributions with more empirical considerations and case studies regarding specific spatial and urban dimensions of the ECoC.

Urban questions, punctual answers

As noted, the long-standing debate on culture-led urban regeneration has tackled the spatial implications of the ECoC only partially. The objectives of the ECoC (like any other mega-event) imply a great challenge for cities: finding a balance between global ambitions and local needs, while safeguarding place diversity and at the same time boosting the opportunities of the programme. The distance between the city depicted in the proposals and the actual implementation can enhance interesting discussions about the programme, while at the same time providing decision-makers with critical and usable knowledge.

The set of papers in this *Tafter Journal* intends to highlight the relevance of different interpretations of space for cultural policy-making and urban policy design more broadly, as well as their economic, social and cultural implications. The call for papers critically focused the analysis and interpretation on the urban dimension included in the ECoC programme proposed by cities, as well as in the implemented projects. The call for papers proposed several urban questions to start with: Where is the idea of "city" located in the proposal and how much is it relevant? How are the city and its territory conceived, and what are the expectations in transforming their physical, cultural, social and economic elements through the mega-event? What are the visions and images proposed by the candidate city, and do they coincide with the spatial frame for implementing actual cultural and urban policies? How are these places and the related local communities peculiar and diverse? How does each city interpret the ECoC programme in relation to different urban variables?

Tarmo Pikner's discussion of Tallinn 2011 shows how several elements in cultural policy programming and problems in its implementation (not least because of cuts due to the financial crisis) opened up planning-orientated urban transformation opportunities. Inventive locating of projects, together with the design and use of light infrastructures, may have a considerable influence on the perceived form of the

city, as long as it is able to merge several cultural and social practices. This was the case of the formerly closed industrial seashore as a venue partially opposed to the historic city centre of Tallinn, a traditional location of cultural activities. The study of this case shows how experimentation with the form of the city through cultural programming can have relevant effects, although they are not part of the policy narration required by the European policy-making community. From another point of view, this case is also an insight into how a weak and emerging planning system of an Eastern European city faces city image-building and marketing via cultural policy making.

Claire Bullen's paper analyses Marseille 2013, its urban vision, and the planning activities pushing toward a change of scale from the city to the urban region. It looks closely at the ECoC cultural programme in the context of structural and urban development policies and the way in which these are perceived by public officials, political leaders and social and cultural operators. The reconnection of these images to the local identity and community is not an easy task. In this sense, the political and symbolic dimension of cultural policy-making seems relevant for building the image, but it probably has a limited impact on current cultural service improvement.

Antonio Talone reports that in Pecs 2010, the regional level of programming had important results for developing ECoC activities and the relationships among cultural operators and stakeholders in the region. This was partly due to the geographic conformation of the region and the location of different initiatives, as well as the autonomy from the central government in the programme management. It is probably too early to say if this interpretation of Pecs' cultural space will have a long-term legacy, other than social and relational capital among decision-makers. As on many other occasions, the shortage and discontinuity of funding make the survival of this level of cultural policy-making uncertain or dependent on the networking ability of individual cultural-policy actors and institutions.

Joe Costanzo's account of the legacy of Brussels 2000 is to be considered in the light of the long-standing cultural and political crisis in the city. Despite being a multicultural community, one of the crossroads of Europe, and a lively centre for visual and performing arts, the structurally imposed divide between Belgium's French and Flemish communities heavily affects the cultural image and the cultural programming of Brussels. The paper by Costanzo describes the process of implementation of the programme and critically considers the standing separation of cultural and artistic scenes, despite the significant attempts of cultural policy actors to find common ground also through the impulse of the ECoC year. After ten years, despite temporary success in cultural service provision, one can say that in this case the structural problems in cultural polity and policy at the urban and national levels were not really improved by the ECoC programme.

Francesca Battistoni's paper on Liverpool 2008 takes a partisan point of view, describing the mainstream city marketing perspective as opposed to a more grassroots and antagonistic one, based more on the urban experience and local community. In this sense, the paper is not only an account of the "Cities on the Edge" project, but a message: cultural policy and programming depend on the (political) construction of the image of the city, and the inclusion and positioning of values and actors in the cultural policy arena.

In the final paper, Harri Andersson and Sampo Ruoppila analyse the relations between culture and urban space through perspectives of four academic research projects funded by Turku 2011, in order to discuss the complexity of the question of what is "the city" in the ECoC. Already through the four research perspectives, it becomes clear that it is a resource to add economic value, ground for democracy, a container of memories, and physical and social circumstances for art to invite new interpretations. In principle, these viewpoints are complementary, but concrete development plans almost inevitably run into

contrasts between goals and interpretations of their importance. The challenge for cultural and spatial planning and decision-making is how to take these sufficiently into account, and how to include a continuous discussion of what is a "good" city.

This small set of cases and reflections over the urban dimension of the ECoC should be followed by further academic and policy debate. We encourage both scholars and policy-makers to submit papers to *Tafter Journal* and continue this dialogue on viewpoints raised by us or by others.

Notes

(1) For more information, see the European Commission's website
http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-programmes-and-actions/capitals/european-capitals-of-culture_en.htm

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