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Tensions in current European cultural policy approaches: A case study of Liverpool, European Capital of Culture 2008

Anne Kurzweg

Abstract

In order to celebrate Europe's cultural diversity, the Council of the European Union awards the European Capital of Culture title (ECoC) to European cities every year. The successful bids of the cities chosen generally highlight the broad participation of their inhabitants in the project, suggesting the ECoC as a socially inclusive initiative. However, the possibilities that the ECoC event brings for urban development and improving the city's image seem to outplay this effort at times: through branding the "city's culture" and gentrification processes in the context of creating an attractive city center, certain groups of the city's population are endangered to be excluded from the public space. The case of Liverpool08 is an especially striking example for these countervailing effects of the ECoC title as, on the one hand, the event was celebrated as a big success, but, on the other hand, it was criticized especially by local artists – representatives of the city's remarkable cultural scene that actually brought the title to Liverpool – foremost questioning the sustainability of the intervention. A deeper analysis of the situation of the local artists against the background of current European cultural policy approaches can help to reveal the contradictory effects of cultural policy in the context of ECoC: If important parts of a city's cultural scene are endangered to disappear because of their exclusion from the urban development process, the celebrated positive effects of Liverpool08, and the ECoC title in general, on the local culture become highly questionable. The results from the Liverpool case study show that a more sustainable approach to cultural policy is needed, and provide the basis for encouraging a discussion that includes cultural citizenship as a way to involve the considered communities better in cultural policy.

Keywords: European Capital of Culture, Liverpool, cultural policy, social sustainability, cultural citizenship

Introduction

The European Capital of Culture (ECoC) title is awarded every year to one or more European cities since 1985. It is a prize that not only brings funding to the selected cities, but most of all provides them with a chance to achieve several cultural, tourist and social impacts more easily¹. The ECoC initiative has therefore become a much sought-after high-profile cultural event that involves not only the year-long celebration, but also a five- to six-year long preparation period. While the title was set up to promote European cultural diversity and a feeling of European citizenship, the European Commission points out that the event has also served as an opportunity to raise the city's profile and image locally and internationally, increase tourist and investor attraction and thus encourage the modernization of the cities².

Exactly the latter, however, has evoked growing critique in the last two decades. For example, hosting the ECoC title and the associated reconstruction of city centers led in several cases to strong gentrification processes, meaning that rising property values forced residents to leave the area. In this way, local communities were excluded from important parts of the public space³. This tension that emerges in cultural policy between the urge for economic development on the one hand and the consequence of social exclusion on the other has become a major dilemma for policy makers. It needs to be seen in the context of a wider, prevalent discourse in cultural policy in Europe, according to which cultural strategies can serve as a tool to promote urban development, and at the same time, "cure" urban social problems that they actually aggravate at times. The existing contradictions in European cultural policy may play an important role for the EU in the future, because a common European cultural identity is seen as a way of coming by the Union's legitimacy deficiency⁴ and thus, cultural policies gain importance. It is only logical then that if the EU wants to be seen as a credible cultural actor, its policy approach needs to be coherent. Furthermore, the democratic principle of the EU demands that these policies be culturally and socially inclusive, allowing participation throughout diversity.

Cities hosting major cultural events provide a valuable opportunity to examine closely the nature of the current European cultural policy approaches and their consequences, due to the relative geographic limitation (one city area) and timely restriction (enforced cultural strategies during a 6 years period). Liverpool, that hosted the ECoC title in 2008, represents an interesting example: Its brilliant past as a Victorian world city stands

¹ Palmer-Rae Associates, *European Cities and Capitals of Culture. Study Prepared for the European Commission. Part I*, by Robert Palmer et al. (Brussels: Palmer-Rae Associates, 2004), http://ec.europa.eu/culture/pdf/doc654_en.pdf (accessed 14 May 2012), 178, 183 and 190.

² European Commission, "European Capitals of Culture", http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-programmes-and-actions/doc413_en.htm (accessed 5 March 2012).

³ Philipp Boland, "'Capital of Culture - you must be having a laugh!' Challenging the official rhetoric of Liverpool as the 2008 European cultural capital," *Social & Cultural Geography*, 11 (2010): 640, or Carlos J. L. Balsas, "City Centre Regeneration in the Context of the 2001 European Capital of Culture in Porto, Portugal," *Local Economy* 19 (2004), 396–410.

⁴ See Eriksen and Fossum: "It is (...) recognized that the EU suffers from important legitimacy deficiencies. These are linked not only to aspects of the EU's structural and institutional make-up, but also to the normative justifications that it can readily draw upon." in Erik Oddvar Eriksen and John Erik Fossum, "Europe in Search of Legitimacy: Strategies of Legitimation Assessed," *International Political Science Review* 25 (2004): 463, as well as Dunne and Tonra: "In the context of the European Union the ultimate success of the dynamic process of European integration will depend on the development or existence of a European cultural identity." Denise Dunne (Maynooth College) and Ben Tonra, (University of Dublin), "The European Cultural Identity - Myth, Reality or Aspiration?," Academia.edu, entry from June 14, 1996, http://ucd-ie.academia.edu/BenTonra/Papers/325280/The_European_Cultural_Identity_Myth_Reality_or_Aspiration (accessed 14 May 2012), 2.

in stark contrast to the city's dramatic economic and demographic decline in the last century, which however encouraged a flourishing cultural scene. Using this existing cultural development to bring economic growth and restoration to the run-down city was therefore a highly attractive goal for local policy makers and other interest groups⁵, and surely, it was a very emotional affair for the inhabitants⁶. As a result of the varying expectations towards it, the success of the event has been interpreted in quite diverging ways – a circumstance that with close analysis reveals important insights into the current logic of European cultural policy. The case of Liverpool has drawn academic interest from the moment of the city's nomination for the title until today, so that a good number of academic contributions and primary resources exist. These provide the ground for the reflections at hand, as they will be analyzed and put into the context of the currently predominant cultural policy approaches in Europe. As the discussion surrounding the results of the analysis unfolds, it will go beyond the ideas that led the cultural event in Liverpool: it introduces two concepts that might help to come by the flaws revealed, *social sustainability* and *cultural citizenship*.

At first now, an overview of the specific situation of Liverpool and its ECoC bid will be given. Then, the outline will turn to the diverging perception of the cultural event's performance, which will be the key to enter and discuss the context of recent cultural policies. The theoretical background will be provided mainly on the current discourse of cultural planning and urban regeneration. An overall focus will thereby lie on the local arts sector, as it is central to urban and cultural strategies, and has maybe most suffered a changing fortune in the run of the ECoC event "Liverpool08".

I. Diverging experiences of Liverpool08

Liverpool is a high-contrast city, both from a historical and a present perspective. It has faced severe, multiple declines in the last decades that stand in sharp contrast to its Victorian past as one of the world's greatest trade centers connecting Europe with America and Africa. With a fall of the employment rate by 50 per cent between the 1970s and 1990s, rising poverty rates and social problems like crime and drug dependency, Liverpool became a synonym for a declining way of life. In the 1990s and the beginning of new millennium, Merseyside – the metropolitan county to which belongs Liverpool – was an objective 1 region for EU structural funds⁷. The support showed success in a slight economic recovery of the region, but still today, the city struggles to catch up and faces problems of social deprivation⁸. The emigration of nearly half the city's population during the years of strongest economic decline left large parts of the city's infrastructure orphaned. For a long

⁵ e.g. local economy leaders, national policy makers, etc.

⁶ Liverpool Culture Company, "Liverpool Capital of Culture 2008", <http://www.liverpool08.com/> (accessed 5 March 2012).

⁷ The Objective 1 is one of three objectives of the Structural Fund in the context of the EU's regional policy and aims "to promote the development and structural adjustment of regions whose development is lagging behind." EUROPA, Summaries of EU legislation, *Objective 1* (The European Commission, 2005), http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/regional_policy/provisions_and_instruments/g24203_en.htm (accessed 14 September 2012).

⁸ Stephen Little, "Liverpool '08 – brand and contestation," in *Regional and Urban Regeneration in European Peripheries: What Role for Culture?*, ed. L. Malikova and M. Sirak (Bratislava: Institute of Public Policy, 2008), 6; also Jones and Wilks-Heeg, "Capitalizing culture: Liverpool 2008", 344 and *Liverpool 2008 – Capital of Culture*, directed by Jürgen Cyranek, Rebecca Cyranek and Claudia Christen (D/UK: CityPicture, 2011).

time, any notion of the city as a tourist destination would have provoked rather ironic reactions. However, the shrinkage also meant that plenty of affordable room for creative activities was available. This situation enhanced expressions of culture and creativity in the city and prepared the ground for the rise of a lively alternative culture scene in the 1970s and early 1980s⁹.

Understandably, much hope and expectation was projected to Liverpool's ECoC event – in the bid and even more so after unexpectedly winning the title. The Liverpool08 project had a clear focus on economic regeneration through culture from the beginning and argued that “for Liverpool, the award would be a scholarship, not a cup”¹⁰. The title was also perceived as a chance to restore the city's spirit, showing visitors a city in transition¹¹. What had most impressed the curators, however, was the engagement of local communities with the project, giving the feeling that the bid was “the people's bid” and embraced the whole city¹². For example, the bid was supported by more than 150,000 people, of which 100,000 including school children helped to ‘shape’ the bid. The central theme “The World in One City” and the subtheme “support, participate and regenerate” underlined the effort to involve residents in their diversity¹³ - focusing on the common aim of “regenerating” the city.

I.a. Liverpool08 - A celebrated success

“It's turning out to be one of the most successful Capital of Culture programmes that we have ever had. We are now trying to create a network of European Capitals of Culture to build on Liverpool's experience.” (Jose Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, 2008¹⁴).

In a dominant public discourse, Liverpool08 was celebrated as an overwhelming success. Several aspects provided the basis for this evaluation. The first principal one is the impressive economic benefit: Liverpool08 brought 9.7 million additional visits to Liverpool that had an economic impact of £753.8 million; also, the program generated the highest earned income of any ECoC until then with £4.1 million in total¹⁵. The second, much emphasized outcome is that Liverpool08 succeeded in its key objective to change the negative perceptions of Liverpool, re-branding it as a festival city with an international

⁹ *Liverpool 2008 – Capital of Vulture*, also Boland, “Capital of Culture - you must be having a laugh!”, 629.

¹⁰ Liverpool Culture Company, “Executive Summary of Liverpool's Bid for European Capital of Culture 2008,” Liverpool08 European Capital of Culture, http://www.liverpool08.com/Images/tcm21-32519_tcm79-56880_tcm146-122188.pdf (accessed 27 April 2012), 100.

¹¹ Tony Myers, “Imagine there's a city living for today,” *The Guardian*, 7 February 2008, Communities section, UK edition. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/feb/07/liverpool.captial.culture> (accessed 2 May 2012).

¹² Boland, “Capital of Culture—you must be having a laugh!”, 630 as well as Jones and Wilks-Heeg, “Capitalizing culture: Liverpool 2008”, 342.

¹³ Jones and Wilks-Heeg, “Capitalizing culture: Liverpool 2008”, 349; Boland, “Capital of Culture - you must be having a laugh!”, 633.

¹⁴ Cited in *ibid.*, 631.

¹⁵ IMPACTS08 - European Capital of Culture Research Programme, *Creating an Impact: Liverpool's experience as European Capital of Culture. Final report*, by Beatriz Garcia, et al. (Liverpool: University of Liverpool, 2009). <http://www.liv.ac.uk/impacts08/> (accessed 24 March 2012), “The Impacts” and 41.

standing¹⁶. The IMPACTS08 study, conducted by the Liverpool University to evaluate the impact of the project, finds that the image of the city had bettered remarkably and provided more confidence, making the city now more likely to attract investors. This change, represented in a more diverse and more positive media representation especially regarding culture and arts in the city, is interpreted by the scientists as a major contribution to the sustainability of the impacts of Liverpool08¹⁷. The overall positive pay-off will also resound in the cultural sector as Liverpool's improved image will affect positively the creative industries sector and the broader reputation of the cultural scene. The creation of networks encouraged by Liverpool08 is believed to further support this development¹⁸. IMPACTS08 finds that the city's image bettered also with its inhabitants: over 60 per cent of the residents had a very positive impression of the city after Liverpool08. The study says that the socially inclusive concept of culture applied by the program offered the inhabitants a possibility to relate differently to their city¹⁹. Liverpool08 has repeatedly been interpreted as something that the people could be proud of and that gave them confidence: The Guardian writes for example, "What's most striking is [the city's] renewed sense of pride and confidence. Culture has helped put the heart and soul back in one of Britain's oldest and proudest cities."²⁰ Thus, it seems that the event did "something for everyone" and fostered networking and dialogue between the local communities.²¹ IMPACTS08 states accordingly that Liverpool08 was "geographically and socio-economically inclusive", with 66% of Liverpool's inhabitants taking part in at least one ECoC event²².

I.b. Liverpool08 – A great deception

"In all honesty the year has probably exceeded my expectations. I sometimes feel like Scrooge but I do genuinely believe we missed an opportunity to support some of our cultural and creative industries, especially arts groups and local theatres. But overall, with a note of caution, it's been fantastic." (Councillor Anderson, 2008)²³

Anderson has his finger on something which is not part of the pre-dominant public discourse about Liverpool08, but which equally exists: A notion that casts doubt on the idea that the event was really socially inclusive. Several scholars and representatives of local communities, especially those of the art sector, paint a different image of Liverpool08:

"It is a complete failure... has been... there is no legacy and [it] should never be allowed to happen again" (Minnie Stacey, Artist in Liverpool, 2010)²⁴.

¹⁶Boland, "Capital of Culture—you must be having a laugh!", 631.

¹⁷IMPACTS08 - *Creating an Impact*, "The Impacts" and 32-38, as well as 41-46.

¹⁸ IMPACTS08 - *Creating an Impact*, "The Impacts".

¹⁹ IMPACTS08 - *Creating an Impact*, "The Impacts" and 49.

²⁰ Andy Burnham, "A capital result for culture," *The Guardian*, 12 January 2009, commentisfree section, UK edition. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/jan/12/europeancapitalofculture2008-britishidentity> (accessed 3 May 2012).

²¹ European Communities, *European Capitals of Culture: the road to success. From 1985 to 2010* (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2009), http://ec.europa.eu/culture/pub/pdf/ecoc_25years_en.pdf (accessed 28 April 2012), 57-59.

²² IMPACTS08 - *Creating an Impact*, "The Impacts".

²³ Cited in Boland, "Capital of Culture—you must be having a laugh!", 633.

²⁴ *Liverpool 2008 – Capital of Culture*, directed by Jürgen Cyranek, Rebecca Cyranek and Claudia Christen (D/UK: CityPicture/UK, 2011).

Statements like the one above question that everyone, including the cultural sector, benefitted from Liverpool08. The chapter “Liverpool Arts Sector, Sustainability and Experience” of IMPACTS08 revealed that there was criticism about bringing in cultural producers from outside, instead of employing local artists; it also pointed out that there was concern amongst local artists about the timeframe of the intervention, especially regarding ongoing funding after the event²⁵. And while these issues already raise some concern about the sustainability of Liverpool08, there were more incidents that need to be seen as direct effects of the event and that make a more critical approach towards the success story necessary. Within the first week after the announcement of the title alone, the property values in the city center rose by 10 per cent – ironically taking away space from those culturally diverse activities that had figured so prominently in Liverpool’s successful ECoC bid²⁶: many local artists had to close down their studios and galleries²⁷, and institutions of alternative culture were sometimes literally forced to leave their premises to make space for the urban reconstruction plans²⁸. To name two famous examples, the *Quiggins*, a well established alternative shopping mall of local entrepreneurs from the cultural and creative industries sector, had to move out of its location in the city center in order to make room for *Liverpool One*, a private shopping and housing area in the city centre and the flagship project for the city’s regeneration²⁹. The fact that 100,000 names on a petition and the support of a Member of Parliament at the House of Commons could not invert this decision nourishes a feeling that the external audiences that would bring money to the city were given priority over the protection of local creative talent³⁰. The *Picket*, of similar importance for the city’s cultural scene as it constitutes a complement to the commercial music scene, was supposed to close down as well and survived only thanks to a major Internet campaign and its more or less voluntary relocation³¹.

Paul Jones and Stuart Wilks-Heeg from the Department of Sociology of the University of Liverpool claim that when certain cultural activities are banned from the public space, the very fabric that made Liverpool’s cultural innovation and creativity is endangered – because “culture” means then “official culture”.³² This means that only a certain part of culture is encouraged while others are neglected in order to create a certain image of the city’s culture. Ian Vandewalle, Managing Director of Liverpool Hope Enterprises at Liverpool University, points out that in the process of branding, only some facets are highlighted, so that others are automatically omitted³³. A comment in *The Guardian* regarding the success of Liverpool08 underpins the argument that the event did only partly build on local culture: According to the Newspaper’s Theatre Blog, famous local authors were not included in the ECoC program, which makes the author of the entry

²⁵ IMPACTS08, European Capital of Culture Research Programme: *Liverpool Arts Sector, Sustainability and Experience: how artists and arts organizations engaged with European Capital of Culture 2008*. by Beatriz Garcia et al. (Liverpool: University of Liverpool, 2009). <http://www.liv.ac.uk/impacts08/Publications/project-reports.htm> (accessed 4 May 2012).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ *Liverpool 2008 – Capital of Vulture*.

²⁸ Jones and Wilks-Heeg, “Capitalizing culture”, 353.

²⁹ Boland, “Capital of Culture—you must be having a laugh!”, 634. As Boland points out, this area can be seen as an example for the “consumer-focused re-engineering of the landscape” through privatization of public space, which results in restricting its use to certain social groups by e.g. patrolling security guards or policies.

³⁰ Ibid., 635.

³¹ Little, “Liverpool ’08 – brand and contestation”, 49.

³² Jones and Wilks-Heeg, “Capitalizing culture”, 356.

³³ Ian Vandewalle, “Critical points in City Branding” (Guest Lecture at *Designing City Branding Campaigns*, Kavala Municipality, Greece, 8-9 November 2006), 16.

wonder about a persisting gap between people's theatre and the cultural establishment³⁴ - pointing to Jones and Wilks-Heeg's question: Whose culture is being celebrated with the event³⁵? Several scholars have identified the re-branding of the city as having had especially negative impacts on some of the most important creative activities in the city³⁶, and the art scholar Stephen Little describes the process caused even as threatening the legitimacy of the Capital of Culture project as such³⁷. Similar experiences to Liverpool08 seem to indicate that European cultural policy *structurally* favors or constrains certain expressions of culture. Aware of the multiplicity and complexity of culture as such, the University Network of European Capitals of Culture (UNeECC) chose the topic "Whose culture(s)?" for their second annual meeting in 2008, held in Liverpool³⁸.

Cultural policy is influenced by the prevailing view which role culture has or should have in a society. Who is affected by the positive or negative outcomes of cultural strategies sheds light on the expectations related to the "power" of culture. The example of Liverpool shows very well that there is a twist in the logic used in the ECoC bid, because although building on the existing cultural development has led to economic prospering of the city, but at the same time destroyed part of its very basis – the local culture and creative and cultural industries. So it comes that Liverpool08 is both – a success *and* a failure. The following chapter will explore in depth the approaches currently in vogue in European cultural policies that build the background for such major cultural events. It will be an attempt to solve the question why, or under which circumstances, employing culture for the purposes of economic development contrasts with the community-based development of the local culture and arts sector. In short: Why is it so hard to achieve cultural and economic development at the same time?

II. Liverpool08 in the context of European cultural policy

Two main ideas – urban entrepreneurialism and cultural planning – and their relationship to the culture and arts sector need to be elaborated first. They form the basis of the general approach to use culture as a means for regeneration and economic growth. Seen in conjunction, these concepts facilitate a clear understanding of the prevalent discourse that lies behind the examined European cultural policies.

The concept of urban entrepreneurialism can be seen as the background concept from which that of cultural planning emerged. In contrast to the idea that regeneration impulses governance had to come from the governing authorities, this approach relies more on the forces of the market economy to encourage modernization. In Liverpool, the shift towards urban entrepreneurialism did not become clearly identifiable until 1997. As a

³⁴ Paul Allen, "Liverpool 2008: how was it for you?" *The Guardian*, 23 December 2008, Theater Blog, UK edition.<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/theatreblog/2008/dec/23/liverpool-2008-european-capital-culture> (accessed 3 May 2012).

³⁵ Jones and Wilks-Heeg, "Capitalizing culture", 342.

³⁶ e.g. Jones and Wilks-Heeg, "Capitalizing culture"; Boland, "'Capital of Culture—you must be having a laugh!'", Stephen Little, "Liverpool '08 – brand and contestation," in *Regional and Urban Regeneration in European Peripheries: What Role for Culture?*, ed. L. Malikova and M. Sirak (Bratislava: Institute of Public Policy, 2008), 49.

³⁷ Little, "Liverpool '08 – brand and contestation," 49.

³⁸ UNeECC, Whose culture(s)? Proceedings of the Second Annual Conference of the University Network of European Capitals of Culture, Liverpool 16/17 October 2008, ed. by W. Coudenys, <http://uneecc.org/userfiles/LiverpoolProceedings.PDF> (accessed 1 September 2012).

consequence, the field of regeneration policy in the city and the wider surrounding changed its character: from attempts to tackle e.g. social deprivation through direct measures, policy makers now counted stronger on regeneration with the help of economic growth. The logic of this new approach was, and still is, that business growth in the city center would increase employment for the local population and thus contribute to a more general recuperation of the situation³⁹. The key point for the discussion of this paper is the belief that this growth will be encouraged by the city's culture, especially the artistic infrastructure that attracts tourism and investment⁴⁰. So increasingly, it has become a commonplace that culture is regarded an essential tool for regeneration⁴¹. This applies not only to Liverpool or the United Kingdom, but also to the EU: in the foreword to the publication "European Capitals of Culture: the road to success", José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, underlines that "culture is also essential for achieving the EU's strategic objectives of prosperity and solidarity⁴²". The drive to host major cultural events is therefore a symptom of urban entrepreneurialism⁴³. The regeneration of Liverpool's city center in the context of Liverpool08 is therefore the symbol for the initiated change in thinking, and cultural policy is now at the focus of the policy agenda⁴⁴.

The second policy concept that links regeneration and development to culture is that of *cultural planning*. Cultural planning refers precisely to a strategy to generate urban regeneration by city re-branding through the development of cultural industry⁴⁵. Through arts and creativity, so goes the logic here, creative industries and from them a culture-based economy develop and help to rebrand the city, which is then able to attract investment to stimulate economic growth. Social inclusion is fostered through economic development, because creativeness strengthens the personal development of the people, improving their chances to face unemployment. It enhances their well-being and fosters their role as democratic citizens. In sum, this approach declares culture and creativity as a sort of panacea for practically all sorts of urban problems⁴⁶. However, despite seeming so and despite its increasing popularity, cultural planning is not a coherent approach but rather a blurry, political-interest driven combination of actually antithetical concepts: art is not the same as culture; social justice does not necessarily come with economic development and city centre boosterism, as shows the case of Liverpool, does not necessarily coincide with community development⁴⁷. The proof that arts actually have all these desired impacts is yet to be rendered⁴⁸, and even the causality of re-branding a city promoting its economic growth has not been proven yet⁴⁹. But still – Ron Griffiths from the Faculty of the Built Environment, University of the West of England, elaborates that cities applying for the ECoC title share an underlying discourse about culture and its positive effect on social

³⁹ Jones and Stuart Wilks-Heeg, "Capitalizing culture" 346.

⁴⁰ Connolly, "The 'Liverpool model(s)'" 6.

⁴¹ Vishwas Maheshwari, Ian Vandewalle and David Bamber, "Place branding and the Liverpool '08 brand campaign in 'City of Liverpool'," in *Proceedings of the Second Annual Conference of the University Network of European Capitals of Culture, Liverpool, UK, 16 - 17 October 2008*. The University Network of the European Capitals of Culture (2008), 119.

⁴² European Communities, *European Capitals of Culture: the road to success*, Foreword.

⁴³ Adam Smith, "The Relationship between Major Events, the Urban Fabric and Social Sustainability," in *Social Sustainability in Urban Areas: Communities, Connectivity and the Urban Fabric*, ed. Tony Manzi, Karen Lucas und Tony Lloyd-Jones (London: Earthscan, 2010), 199.

⁴⁴ Jones and Wilks-Heeg, "Capitalizing culture", 346.

⁴⁵ Connolly, "The 'Liverpool model(s)'" 1.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁸ Eleonora Belfiore, "Art as a means of alleviating social exclusion: Does it really work? A critique of instrumental cultural policies and social impact studies in the UK," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 8 (2002): 104.

⁴⁹ Maheshwari/ Vandewalle/ Bamber, "Place Branding", 122.

cohesion, which he sees as embedded in a shift in UK urban policy from economic (“hard”) to apparently more social (“soft”) goals⁵⁰.

The practical implementation in programmes like Liverpool08 is complicated immensely by the flaws of the concept, and the compelling rhetoric becomes much less attractive⁵¹. Because cultural policy is defined by the underlying understanding of culture itself, the very broad approach to culture adopted in current cultural policy results in a policy without parameters. In the case of Liverpool08 also, this wide approach ended up making cultural policy both a surrogate for social and for economic policy⁵². The number of institutions and practices that then fall under “culture” make it impossible to operate such a policy⁵³. Together with the incompatibility of different ambitions, a focus on economic *or* social aims becomes necessary. It is then the policy makers’ decision to center either on economic impacts or social cohesion as results of their strategy⁵⁴. For a major event like Liverpool08 this means that it is taken or as an opportunity to celebrate and promote local culture or to boost economic growth⁵⁵. For Liverpool, its organizer’s wide understanding of culture⁵⁶ was both a blessing and a curse in the end. On the one hand, it gained Liverpool the title but, on the other hand, the contradictoriness mentioned above led to important practical problems regarding the city’s plan for 2008⁵⁷. It is important to emphasize again that the initial Liverpool08 plans were undeliverable because of the theoretical incoherency of an approach⁵⁸ that was however perfectly in line with the generally prevalent discourse, a fact that points to the tensions within European cultural policy.

Regarding the decision for an emphasis on social or economic policy, the case was quite clear for Liverpool. The then leader of Liverpool Council, Mike Story, declared: “08 is not about culture but about regeneration”⁵⁹. But why, then, did Liverpool’s bid put such a great emphasis on local community involvement at all in the first place? In this regard, Liverpool reflects the spread of the discourse of community involvement⁶⁰ – a discourse that goes hand in hand with the increasing calls for more sustainability in policy making generally⁶¹. Especially regarding the ECoC initiative the unresolved question about the definition of culture led to making the definition of culture the first question to answer by the cities in the ECoC bid. The consequence has been that the cities attempt to trump each other with as non-elitist and egalitarian an ethos as possible⁶² – a perfect example for the prevailing discourse of community involvement. In the end, Liverpool won the title with the widest view of culture by simultaneously marketing the bid as “the people’s bid”⁶³.

III. Overcoming incoherence with Social Sustainability and Cultural Citizenship

⁵⁰ Ron Griffiths, “City/Culture Discourses: Evidence from the Competition to Select the European Capital of Culture 2008,” *European Planning Studies* 14 (2006): 415.

⁵¹ Connolly, “The ‘Liverpool model(s)’”, 6.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁴ Jones and Wilks-Heeg, “Capitalizing culture”, 347.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 347-348.

⁵⁶ Boland, “‘Capital of Culture—you must be having a laugh!’”, 629.

⁵⁷ Connolly, “The ‘Liverpool model(s)’”, 10.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶⁰ Jones and Wilks-Heeg, “Capitalizing culture: Liverpool 2008”, 347.

⁶¹ Smith, “The Relationship between Major Events, the Urban Fabric and Social Sustainability”, 199.

⁶² Connolly, “The ‘Liverpool model(s)’”, 8.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 9.

So what is so “bad” about not choosing the social approach, directly profiting the local communities, but choosing the economic way that – according to the urban entrepreneurialism approach – sooner or later will benefit them indirectly anyhow through the “trickle-down”-effect? Maybe one could argue that for a city in a situation like Liverpool, choosing the economic approach is a reasonable choice. However, the cultural policy approach that forms the background of Liverpool08 on one side and the actual outcomes on the other side are highly questionable: they not only fail to provide the sought-after effects for the local cultural scene in the long run, but even contribute to increased social disparities⁶⁴.

It is of great value for the discussion of this paper to consider not only the tensions within, but also the normative aspect of cultural policy. What should it be able to achieve, and by which means? The currently emerging discourse of sustainability was mentioned before in the context of community involvement. Maintaining the idea that social inclusion can actually be achieved through the active involvement of local communities and local ownership, the question remains which would be the way leading to that aim.

Adam Smith points out that too little attention is paid to the social sustainability of event strategies⁶⁵. He related the concept of social sustainability to major cultural events and lists the following positive effects of major cultural events. One is that such events raise the awareness and morale of the inhabitants of the city⁶⁶. From the results of the IMPACTS08 study, this can be confirmed to have happened at least to some extent in Liverpool. Furthermore, one can say that an event is socially sustainable if it creates spaces where people can meet and come together, another aspect that can be confirmed for Liverpool08. However, the organizers of Liverpool08 failed partly in the areas of planning the social and economic legacy of the event⁶⁷ as well as its long-term effects⁶⁸, which become necessary when considering that social sustainability is a long-term objective. It is interesting that the current document on the ECoC initiative includes that “As regards ‘City and Citizens’ the program shall: [...] be sustainable and be an integral part of the long-term cultural and social development of the city”⁶⁹. As mentioned above, local artists and organizations in particular were worried about the temporary oriented infrastructural investment in Liverpool⁷⁰.

To the negative influences that constitute an aspect opposite to achieving social sustainability count, of course, the negative impacts of gentrification on local communities⁷¹. Neither helps the fact that Liverpool has not attempted to address issues of social exclusion, bearing the danger of creating a politics of embracing marginality rather than redress it⁷². In this context, an important aspect is also how Liverpool08 functioned as a “smokescreen” distracting attention from marginalized groups⁷³. The local artists presumably suffered from the circumstance that Liverpool’s creative scene is being

⁶⁴ Ibid, 8.

⁶⁵ Smith, “The Relationship between Major Events, the Urban Fabric and Social Sustainability,” 199.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 202.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 206.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 205.

⁶⁹ European Union, European Parliament and Council, *Decision No 1622/2006/EC of 24 October 2006 establishing a Community action for the European Capital of Culture event for the years 2007 to 2019* (Official Journal of the European Union, 3.11.2006), <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:304:0001:0006:EN:PDF> (accessed 23 April 2012), Art. 4 2.b

⁷⁰ IMPACTS08, *Liverpool Arts Sector, Sustainability and Experience*.

⁷¹ Smith, “The Relationship between Major Events, the Urban Fabric and Social Sustainability,” 207.

⁷² Jones and Wilks-Heeg, “Capitalizing culture”, 353.

⁷³ Smith, “The Relationship between Major Events, the Urban Fabric and Social Sustainability,” 207.

associated with the economic downturn, which did not fit into the city's mainstream narrative of a prospering city in 2008. Stephen Little argued that although the history of riots and financial problems constitute an essential part of the city's present identity, the 2008 narrative denies it⁷⁴. Also, residents in the poorer, outlying areas of the cities felt excluded from the program, because no events were going on at their place⁷⁵. Considering finally that socially sustainable policies should address the existing neighborhoods instead of delivering new communities⁷⁶, the question surges whether the strong, actively created city identity, reduced to an easily consumable package⁷⁷, was not actually doing exactly that – creating a new social reality and a new community, the one that the Liverpool brand claims to represent⁷⁸.

Taking it as a conclusion at this point that local communities need to be given their right in cultural policy, the concept of cultural citizenship is now introduced into the discussion. Cultural events are policies in a top-down approach, but although the claim made is community involvement and inequality reduction, the genuine commitment to these goals remains dubious⁷⁹. In contrast, the example of Liverpool has shown that the prevalent logic of cultural policy produces effects that work against the social sustainability of major cultural events like the ECoC. The analysis of the case made clear that to make the ECoC more socially sustainable, the orientation towards the economic benefit constitutes a hindrance as it leads to city-branding, shaping the public space in a non-inclusive way, and distracts policies from actually tackling social exclusion. Therefore, the standpoint is taken here that an approach is needed that shows ways of empowering the local communities vis-à-vis the market forces.

It shall be argued here that a cultural citizenship approach can provide that to a certain extent. Cultural citizenship as a concept emphasizes the right to be different and puts diversity onto the table where the majority rules – claiming otherness to be a democratic right. The concrete proposal for the set of problems encountered in Liverpool would be to expand the concept of local ownership to the public space: local communities could hold the power not only over institutions and enterprises they are concerned with, but also over the space they live in, including also its representation in the form of e.g. a city brand. This would enhance their active democratic participation and social inclusion. The social researchers Susan Oakley and Fiona Verity present two cases from Australia where the restructuring of urban space was countered by community-led initiatives⁸⁰. For the case of Liverpool, the successful attempts to save the *Picket* as described above fit to these examples, because also here, a community claimed its right to take part in the decision-making over a public space it felt it belonged to. As these communities share a common interest, they build a collective identity across other differences, an identity that is closely linked to a place.⁸¹ This identity could then provide the basis for stronger involvement in public decision-making under more equal conditions, contributing to overcome what Jansen and Olssen called the 'deficiency discourse' that labels certain groups of the society as less valuable – by including them as responsible actors of shaping the public space⁸². This would then be an effective way to avoid that cultural policy can

⁷⁴ Little, "Liverpool '08 – brand and contestation", 50.

⁷⁵ Boland, "Capital of Culture—you must be having a laugh!", 636.

⁷⁶ Smith, "The Relationship between Major Events, the Urban Fabric and Social Sustainability," 216.

⁷⁷ Jones and Wilks-Heeg, "Capitalizing culture", 352.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 357.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 356.

⁸⁰ Susan Oakley and Fiona Verity, "Resisting Urban Entrepreneurialism: Place-based Politics in the Production of Collective Identity," *Urban Policy and Research* 21 (2003), 191–203.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Th. Jansen et. al, "Social Cohesion and Integration: Learning Active Citizenship," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 27 (2006), 189-191.

harm certain areas of the cultural scene as happened in Liverpool, and provide for more social sustainability.

Conclusion

It was the aim of this paper to review and recollect existing material on the “success story” of the ECoC 2008 Liverpool and to present the findings in a critical approach towards current European cultural policy. Liverpool, as other ECoC cities alike, won the title with a strategy that was coherent with the prevailing discourse of cultural policy but faced important conceptual tensions. It was shown that this circumstance can be seen as one reason for more economy-pronounced ECoC event programmes, and that the choice to focus on economic policy instead of social policy for regeneration does not turn out for the better in the long run. Cultural and creative industries are seen as an important tool to foster urban regeneration, but the turn from social to economic aims in cultural policies can end up endangering exactly that medium. The crux of the matter was found to be social sustainability which could ensure the prospering of the cultural basis that regeneration policy relies upon. Here, some ideas about different forms of community involvement in the context of cultural citizenship made clear that a rethinking is needed in European cultural policy. The reflections at hand have in this regard pointed to the circumstance that (re-)considering the role of culture in cultural policy will be crucial – as the following quote by the curator at the Tate in Liverpool illustrates:

“Culture is a successful regenerator because it is an end in itself: the activity is inseparable from the achievement.” (Lewis Biggs, 1996)⁸³.

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