Introduction

European cities and capitals of culture – a comparative approach

Recent years have seen significant interest among urban policy-makers and researchers in the relationships between culture and urban strategies. The articles contained in this special issue address this theme being evolved versions of selected papers presented at workshops organised by the French and British Planning Studies Group in Liverpool and Lille during 2008 on the theme of ‘European Cities and Capitals of Culture’. The French and British Planning Study Group (FBPSG) is a thematic group of the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) and brings together academics and practitioners from both sides of the channel who have an interest in Franco-British comparative study. It does this through a network of members and bi-annual meetings held alternately in France and Britain. Membership of the group is defined only by an interest in, and a willingness to discuss, the differences between spatial planning and urban policy in France and Britain. Themes to be studied in the French and British contexts are selected for each year and papers are invited from members of the group and from outside experts in the chosen theme. Presentations and participant interventions may be made in either French or English, as individuals prefer reflecting a commitment to intercultural dialogue and exchange and ongoing debates on the internationalisation of planning research in recent years (Kunzmann, 2004; Yiftachel, 2006; Stiftel and Mukhopadhyay, 2007). The group’s activities can also be seen against the backdrop of recent work that emphasises the importance of different ‘planning cultures’ in conditioning the nature of planning practices and the nature of the issues or problems that planning is called upon to address in different societies (Knieling and Othengrafen, 2009; Sanyal, 2005; Healey and Upton, 2010). As noted above, in 2008 the theme selected to guide the group’s activities was ‘European Cities and Capitals of Culture’. The theme and the location of the meetings were particularly appropriate and timely given that Liverpool was European Capital of Culture (ECoC) in 2008 and that Lille had been designated as such in 2004. The potential for cross-national learning and comparison was therefore felt to be great and papers were invited on a range of topics relating to culture, planning and urban development. The papers gathered together in the present issue recount the experiences of past and forthcoming ECoCs in France and Britain and

Olivier Sykes is a Lecturer in the Department of Civic Design at the University of Liverpool, Gordon Stephenson Building, 74 Bedford Street South, Liverpool L69 7ZQ; email: ollys@liv.ac.uk

The workshop in Liverpool was organised by Deborah Peel and Olivier Sykes and the workshop in Lille was organised by Michèle Breuillard and Didier Paris.
other cities that have pursued cultural initiatives as part of their wider urban development strategies.

**Situating European cities and capitals of culture**

In his book *Europe, une mauvaise marque?* ['Europe, a bad brand?'], the French marketing expert and academic Georges Lewi argues that ‘Europe’ has become a well-known but unattractive ‘brand’ for citizens that no longer conveys a clear sense of purpose or direction (Lewi, 2004). With the original goals of European integration of securing peace and prosperity having been broadly achieved, the merits and goals of the maturing ‘European project’ have become the subject of more divergent and contested readings among citizens and political parties in the EU member states. The 2000s were a difficult and contradictory decade for the idea and practice of European integration and governance, during which the largest-ever single enlargement of the EU contrasted with a growing ‘euroscepticism’ in a number of longstanding member states – most dramatically manifested by the rejection of the EU Constitutional Treaty by voters in France and the Netherlands in 2005. However, regardless of the vagaries and controversies of wider processes of European integration and governance and the mediation of different nations’ and groups’ relationships with, and understandings of, ‘Europe’ and the EU (which it is far beyond the scope of the present issue to address), the ECoC programme provides a striking example of cities and regions proactively seeking to associate the term ‘European’ with their particular places and territories. In the selection process for the ECoC 2008 for example, there were twelve bidder cities from across the UK, while eight French cities initially submitted bids to be ECoC in 2013. The ongoing attractiveness of the ECoC concept to cities and regions has been noted by recent evaluations of the action (ECOTEC, 2009) and it has also played a wider role in emphasising the role of culture as a component of urban development strategies. Its influence is demonstrated, for example, by initiatives (such as the ‘UK City of Culture’ title) which seek to emulate its success (DCMS, 2010). The paragraphs below briefly retrace the emergence of EU cultural policy and the ECoC action.

Culture has long been viewed as an important building block of closer European cooperation. In surveying the post-war world, Winston Churchill commented that ‘We shall only save ourselves [...] by rejoicing together in that glorious treasure of literature, of romance, of ethics, of thought and toleration belonging to all, which is the true inheritance of Europe’ (Churchill, 1948, 406). The role of the European Community in cultural matters was reinforced in the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, which officially recognised culture as a factor in European integration. The EU took on a role of contributing to the cultural development of the member states. Despite critical analyses of European integration which sometimes see it as potentially displacing national, regional/national or local identities, European cultural policy
has always clearly stated that the key characteristic and value of ‘European culture’ is its rich diversity which sits alongside certain common cultural values. The aim has been to respect national and regional diversity while at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore. The EU’s cultural heritage is thus seen as being based on two fundamental realities: (1) the great diversity of the histories, cultures and traditions that characterise the union and (2) the common heritage within which this heritage exists, which facilitates the bringing together of the peoples of Europe and European integration. Reflecting this understanding, the role of EU policy has been to encourage cultural cooperation and to play a complementary role where necessary to the actions of nation states and regions in full respect of the principle of subsidiarity. Financial support for cultural policy is provided by EU cultural programmes. The EU’s current Culture Programme (2007–2013) has a budget of €400 million for projects and initiatives to celebrate Europe’s diverse cultures and enhance appreciation of shared cultural heritage (CEC, 2007). It seeks to help foster a shared European cultural space by developing cross-border co-operation among cultural creators, players and institutions across Europe. The programme provides support for Cultural Actions (77% of the budget), which includes Special Measures (16% of the overall Programme budget) under which the European Capital of Culture action falls. This was originally launched in 1985 as the European City of Culture action and aimed to ‘highlight the richness and diversity of European cultures and the features they share, as well as to promote the greater mutual acquaintance between European citizens’ (ECOTEC, 2009, i). The title of the action was changed to European Capitals of Culture with the 2000–2006 Culture Programme and in 2010 it celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. Currently the right to host a ECoC is accorded to two member states each year (e.g., in 2011 Finland and Estonia have the right to host the designation). Following a pre-selection and selection process to establish a shortlist of candidate cities, each member state nominates a city to be designated as ECoC. The Cultural Programme for a ECoC is expected to reflect two categories of activity:

• ‘The European Dimension’: (1) Fostering cooperation between 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.

A major study into the impacts of the ECoC action was completed in 2004 (Palmer/Rae Associates, 2004a; 2004b). This estimated that €3 billion of expenditure from
different sources could be attributed to the ECoC initiative in the period 1995–2004. The initiative has also been successful in stimulating a high level of expenditure with modest amounts of EU funding which accounted for only 1.53% of income generated. In the same period, public sector contributions represented 77.5% of total income generated (national, city, region and EU). The study also pointed to the difficulty of sourcing reliable and independent data on the total value of the economic benefits flowing from ECoC and to the difficulties of measuring the longer-term impacts of the initiative in particular cities. The study found that the ECoC action is a powerful tool for cultural development that offers unprecedented opportunities for acting as a catalyst of city change, but that ECoC programmes often do not meet the objectives they set for themselves and there was a need for more precise formulations of expectations. Questions were also raised over the sustainability of the impact of ECoCs with the need to distinguish between the short-term and long-term effects being noted. It was argued that the sustainability of ECoC initiatives has been greater when cultural initiatives have been integrated with other aspects of urban development and that there was a need to focus more on long-term change and community regeneration. More recently a study commissioned by the European Commission examined the impacts of the ECoC programmes held in 2007 and 2008 in the cities of Luxembourg, Sibiu, Stavanger and Liverpool (ECOTEC, 2009). This raised a number of issues including the continuing attractiveness of the ECoC designation to cities, noting that the ECoC title ‘remains highly valued by cities, generates extensive cultural programmes and achieves significant impacts’ and that ‘it is doubtful if any other policy mechanism could have achieved the same impact for the same level of EU-investment in terms of financial resources and effort’ (ECOTEC, 2009, v). Recent evaluations of the impacts on individual ECoC cities have similarly pointed to significant economic and other benefits (Garcia, Melville and Cox, 2010). The ECOTEC (2009) report however also poses the question of whether there may be a ‘natural limit to the extent that the ECoC concept can continually drive urban regeneration’ and whether ‘[i]n the future, it may therefore be that purely cultural objectives recover the prominence that they enjoyed in the early years of the ECoC – or that the ECoC concept requires to be revisited’ (vii). The European Commission is currently consulting on the future of the EU Culture Programme after 2014 against the backdrop of the overarching EU 2020 Strategy for ‘smart, sustainable and inclusive’ growth, and future debate on the nature and purposes of ECoC will take place against this background (CEC, 2010). Though not explicitly addressing this wider European cultural policy context, the present issue aims to contribute to the present state of knowledge on the role of culture in urban development by considering the experiences of cities and regions that have held or are preparing to hold the ECoC title, or who have pursued other cultural initiatives as part of their urban development strategies.
The papers in this special issue

The opening paper from Booth explores the issues associated with comparative research in spatial planning and urban policy, highlighting the importance of such research taking into account the culturally embedded nature of these policy fields. The paper reflects on some of the theoretical and methodological implications of work that seeks to acknowledge the cultural embeddedness of planning. Different typologies of comparative work are presented and explored and the concept of path dependence is considered as a means for more fully articulating and exploring the causal relationships that contribute to the approaches that are pursued in different places. The article concludes by considering the consequences of the ideas it introduces and explores for the conduct of comparative work in the spatial planning and urban policy fields. Booth’s article therefore provides a framework within which to situate the comparative investigation and interpretation of spatial planning and urban policy issues in different countries, including the use of cultural initiatives and projects as part of wider urban development strategies.

The experiences of three cities which have either held, or are preparing to host, the ECoC title – Lille, Liverpool and Marseille – form the focus of the next three articles. The articles appear in the chronological order in which the cities have engaged with the ECoC title, with Paris and Baert addressing the experiences and legacies of Lille 2004; O’Brien reflecting on the governance of cultural planning in the lead-up to, during and since Liverpool 2008; and Andres looking at the context leading to the designation of Marseille Provence 2013 and the ongoing preparations for the city’s year as ECoC.

Paris and Baert outline how, since the early 1980s, politicians and economic decision-makers in Lille and its wider metropolitan area have worked to design and implement a successful international development strategy for the city. The crucial role played by major urban development schemes – such as the creation of the mixed-use Euralille quarter and new transport infrastructure (notably the connection of the city to the northern European high-speed train network and Channel Tunnel) – is outlined. The authors argue that, however significant such development and achievements were, they would not have sufficed to change the city’s image as dramatically as local decision-makers felt was required. Such physical transformations were therefore accompanied by a policy of bidding for major international events – initially a failed bid to host the 2004 Olympics followed by the successful nomination of Lille as the ECoC for 2004. The significance of the mobilisation around such bids is emphasised and the authors analyse the associated processes of cultural regeneration in Lille, including the events of 2004, against a backdrop of the emergence of the current cultural momentum of the city over the last thirty years. The maintenance of this momentum after Lille 2004 and the impact of culture on the redevelopment of Lille
in recent decades are considered. Attention is drawn to the fact that culture has played a role not only in altering the image of the city and encouraging tourism, but has also contributed to local civic pride and self-confidence in a context characterised by industrial restructuring. Cultural mobilisation has also played a role in fostering intra-metropolitan cooperation in the Lille city region and the authors argue that the emergence of a more concrete process of strategic metropolitan cooperation between Lille and its neighbours since 2005 is at least partly a consequence of the hosting of Lille 2004. A current example of the cultural dimension within the metropolitan sphere is the decision to build a new branch of the Louvre Museum in Lens (see also Vivant in this issue).

The article by O’Brien focuses on the governance of cultural planning in Liverpool during the build-up to ECoC 2008, the year itself and its aftermath. It is argued that though cultural planning has emerged in recent years as an important concern for planners and other policy-makers, there has been little attention devoted to critically evaluating the processes and impacts of cultural planning. The article applies itself to this task by drawing on theories of governance to reflect on the case of Liverpool 2008, illustrating how a range of local state and non-state organisations – particularly those from the cultural sector – administer cultural planning in Liverpool. The historical context of Liverpool over the past thirty years and the legacies of past patterns of governance are considered, allowing the author to incorporate a temporal dimension into his contextualised analysis of the recent emergence of governance networks around cultural planning in the city. O’Brien argues that cultural planning can be seen as a new form of networked urban governance in which different agencies come together to deliver a cultural agenda for a given city. He examines this thesis through a consideration of the evolution of the governance networks around culture in Liverpool in the period leading up to the city’s ECoC year, during the year and afterwards.

The importance of grounding analyses of culture’s role in urban development strategies in a full consideration of the spatial and historical context of places also emerges as a theme in Andres’ article on Marseille Provence ECoC 2013. In her article she argues that this can be seen as the last link in the chain of a thirty-year regeneration policy for Marseille. In recognition of this, the article provides an account of the political and historical context within which the ECoC 2013 bid emerged and was pursued. Key developments in the city since the 1950s are discussed, addressing the ‘crisis years’ of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s and the remaining social and economic challenges faced by the city. The significant milestones and projects which have emerged from the local, regional and national authorities’ response to such issues are also outlined, culminating in a discussion of ECoC 2013. The wider territorial dimension of ECoC 2013 is noted, with Marseille being the core city of the Marseille Provence 2013 application, which draws together 130 communes. This generates
tensions within the ‘political consortium’ that has coalesced around the bid and ECoC project, for example, in relation to definitively securing the funding to support it. Andres also evaluates the role of significant alternative cultural initiatives and spaces in the ‘galvanisation’ of the ECoC 2013 bid, demonstrating how actors drawn from beyond the state can penetrate and influence governance networks and help stimulate interest in, and lend credibility to, the use of culture as a component of urban redevelopment strategies (not without sometimes fostering resentment among smaller cultural actors and producers who may feel less included). The conclusion to the article reflects on the paradoxes faced by Marseille Provence 2013, how it fits in with the overall regeneration strategy of the city and metropolitan area and the challenge of engaging local residents with the ECoC project.

Next, Colomb considers the issue of how ‘secondary’ centres within major metropolitan areas have sought to employ culture as part of their urban (re)development strategies. Her paper reflects on current debates on the use of culture as a component of urban development strategies and presents a case study of Roubaix, a former industrial town located in the metropolitan area of Lille. An overview of the current debate in the literature on the impacts of ‘culture-driven’ urban regeneration strategies emphasises the challenges that remain in measuring the effects of cultural interventions on the achievement of urban regeneration objectives. Differing views of the relationships among economic and wider social and cultural ‘benefits’ are discussed, providing a background to the investigation of such issues in Roubaix. Colomb presents an account of how local policy-makers have proactively used culture in urban regeneration strategies for the town, with particular emphasis given to some of the social and distributional questions associated with the pursuit of culture-led approaches. The political construction of trickle-down, i.e. the explicit mechanisms promoted by local actors to ensure that cultural investments benefit vulnerable social groups through job creation and cultural democratisation, is addressed in a context where unemployment has been a key issue on the city’s political agenda for thirty years. Colomb argues that Roubaix’s experience demonstrates that the benefits of cultural investments do not automatically trickle down to deprived and marginalised populations without strong, proactive forms of political and public intervention at various levels. Yet even with significant political commitment and professional efforts to promote employment, economic regeneration, cultural access and democratisation, socio-cultural barriers remain very difficult to overcome. The conclusion is that culture can only be viewed as one element of a larger field of policy interventions that address urban regeneration issues including housing, education, training, employment and welfare policies, the design and pursuit of which are frequently beyond the remit of local planning, urban regeneration and urban development professionals.

The final paper by Vivant brings the analysis down to the scale of specific cultural projects and the role these can play in the transformation of particular places, with
an emphasis on the phenomenon of ‘branch-branded’ museums. Museums around the world are seeing changes in how they fundraise and manage their collections; fundraising efforts increasingly involve the private sector and museums are adopting a more entrepreneurial management approach to growth. To be internationally competitive, one trend for museums is to promote themselves as a brand in order to attract more visitors and private sector funding. The increasingly global recognition of museum brands has resulted in the expansion of many major international museums throughout the world through branches and franchises located in places other than those where the ‘original’ museum was sited. Vivant critically addresses this phenomenon by considering issues such as who is driving this growth and whether museums are opening branches worldwide as part of their own development strategies or in response to approaches from localities keen to use a museum brand as a means of promotion. She investigates the role of local authorities in the development of museum branches by comparing the development of branches of three well-known museums (the Louvre, Tate and Guggenheim) in three cities (Lens, Liverpool and Bilbao). The trend of using of cultural ‘flagship’ projects as part of urban regeneration strategies is noted and Vivant argues that, in racing to embrace these, many cities appear to be placing greater emphasis on a search for competitiveness rather than distinctiveness. Many city leaders and planners wish to host the branch or franchise of a world-renowned museum because they consider a museum brand to be more recognisable and valuable than more local cultural institutions. Thus the establishment of museum branches in the three cities is more a product of locally based urban-regeneration strategies and the motivation of local authorities than of a commodification of culture through the development strategies of the museums concerned. Finally Vivant explores whether opening a branch of a famous museum is a ‘winning strategy’ for cities and the extent to which a museum brand can be used as an effective tool for place-branding.

Comparative Reflections

In the opening article, Booth warns that ‘[c]omparative study, for all its charms, is something of a minefield. The risk of making false analogies is clearly high. The unappetising likelihood of concluding after much study that places apply policies in different ways because they are different is ever-present.’ With this in mind, caution is required when seeking to draw comparative insights from the articles presented in this issue. It is clear however that there are certain communalities of approach, expectation and experience among the cities considered. The importance of place-based mobilisation in driving forward the development of cultural initiatives emerges as a theme, as does the pursuit by localities of external branding or labelling with which to promote a city’s existing or developing cultural ‘offer’ – whether through
Internationally recognised designations such as ECoC or global museum brands. Debates in the literature on the relationships between culture and urban development – in particular those surrounding the wider socio-economic and distributional impacts/benefits generated by ‘culture-driven’ approaches – are also reflected in the cases considered. Issues relating to how cultural projects and programmes contribute to overall urban development and the benefits they bring to different sections of the local population, and other groups such as visitors, local or external cultural producers and businesses emerge as important preoccupations across the cases. Alongside such issues – and reinforcing the message of the opening article by Booth – what also emerges from the different accounts is the context and path dependency that is inherent to the mobilisation of cities around the ECoC programme and other regeneration strategies that seek to foster development through cultural initiatives. The multi-scalar and layered nature of these contexts and paths is also apparent, with the experiences of the cities being embedded in, and influenced by, settings and dynamics at the global, global–‘regional’ (EU), national, regional and metropolitan levels. The significance many authors attribute to new scales of governance at the subnational scale ‘particularly those of major urban regions’ (Brenner, 2004, 447), for example, is clearly supported by the accounts. This poses some interesting questions for cross-national comparative research in establishing the degree to which differences in the approaches adopted by cities in particular policy domains can be ‘read-off’ from contextual factors attributable to different nation-state settings. To what extent, for example, can responses to the ECoC action from Lille (the ‘city of the north’ – Paris and Baert) or Marseille (whose ECoC title stresses the ‘Mediterranean’ dimension of the city, according to Andres) be seen as being inherently conditioned by their characteristics and physical location as ‘French’ cities (i.e. as cities physically located within the current territorial boundaries of the EU member state of France)? Similarly, in the case of Liverpool, whose ‘edginess’ and complex relationship with ‘national centres of political, economic and media power’ (Bianchini, 2008, 98) have often been noted (by observers from within and outside the city), the response to and delivery of the ECoC programme has been seen as being as much a product of more local temporal (historical) and spatial factors as of the city’s location and characteristic as an ‘English’ or ‘British’ city. The other cities considered also present interesting cases of complex territorial and multi-layered identities: Roubaix – a French city whose growth has been fuelled by migrants from Flanders, Portugal, Spain, Italy and the Maghreb and a ‘secondary centre’ of the Lille Metropolitan area whose recent labelling as a cultural city is perhaps more ‘unexpected’ than that of her larger neighbour; Lens – a former mining centre whose major flagship cultural project appears to be being developed from national and regional centres (Lille and Paris); and finally Bilbao – a city located in the strongly decentralised EU member state of Spain in the Basque region which has experienced conflicts over its territorial identity.
It seems that the horizontal orientation of comparative research in comparing conditions, approaches and outcomes between places in different national contexts needs to be increasingly complemented by an openness to, and cognisance of, the full range of vertical settings and relations within which places and processes are embedded. The influence of national histories, geographies, cultures and administrative traditions on urban and spatial policy practices has been an important theme in the literature on comparative research since the 1980s (Masser and Williams, 1986). The consideration of the national settings and ‘planning cultures’ (Knieling and Othengrafen, 2009) within which responses of different cities to challenges and opportunities are developed, including those opened-up by public policies such as the EU’s ECoC action, will remain important. This collection of articles suggests that comparative research increasingly needs to also be sensitive to the ‘cultural embeddedness’ and ‘path dependence’ of practices at other scales – notably the urban, as it strives to fully investigate and articulate the causal mechanisms behind processes and outcomes in urban and spatial policy and planning.

References


ECOTEC (2009), Ex-post Evaluation of 2007 & 2008 European Capitals of Culture, Birmingham, ECOTEC.


Call for Abstracts and Sessions

The challenging times we face expose communities to a range of risks, hazards and perceived threats which have direct implications for planning: climate change and associated environmental issues; financial constraints, access to credit and economic uncertainty; political and security disorders; the effects of social polarisation and migration upon community cohesion; and challenges to existing patterns of governance and leadership styles. But what is the role and remit of planning in these challenging times when places and communities will need to be increasingly resilient? Here resilience is increasingly being focused not upon state institutions but upon citizen and community responses. But do communities have the skills to make effective decisions affecting their resilience and will all voices be heard equally? Moreover, how is planning reconciling the challenge of finding solutions and spatial strategies that will deliver ‘more for less’ whilst balancing future needs and resources?

We invite suggestions for thematic sessions by 28 January 2011 and abstracts of papers by 25 March 2011 to planningconference@contacts.bham.ac.uk

The conference will follow the well-established pattern of plenary sessions, parallel track sessions and mobile workshops. Abstracts addressing British, Irish, European and international approaches to resilient communities are very welcome on the following indicative topics:

- Planning for climate change
- Planning theory
- Sustainable development
- Mobility and transport
- Planning for risk
- Urban and rural regeneration
- Participation and governance
- Urban design and physical forms
- Planning and the economic recession
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