
The cultural production of cities: Rhetoric or reality? Lessons from Glasgow

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Matthew Tucker

is a research associate in the Property, Facilities, and Operations Management Research Group in the School of the Built Environment at Liverpool John Moores University.

Abstract

Our cities are under great strain to gain competitive advantage in today's global climate, in which the function of place marketing has never been greater. One of the most prevalent dimensions is the notion of the cultural city, where cities essentially market themselves based on both their traditional and contemporary cultural heritage. A key mechanism is the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) award, a potential catalyst for economic, physical, social *and* cultural growth. But to what extent does the complex nature of culture translate real change within the urban environment? In light of Liverpool's recent award as ECOC 2008 and the scale of current retail and leisure development in the city, this paper draws on the experiences of Glasgow's ECOC 1990 award. Seventeen years on from Glasgow's success, an event that has stimulated much debate, the city has now won the bid to host the Commonwealth Games in 2014. The paper discusses what lessons today's UK cities, like Liverpool, can learn from the Glasgow model, and the impact such hallmark events can have in achieving sustainable urban growth. Concludes that through applying the thoughts of Short (1996) that with such events there will always be a dichotomy between the rhetoric and the reality, we must not underestimate the complexity of urban culture, but still embrace the long-term sustainable potential that events like the ECOC can bring to the urban environment.

Keywords:

European capital of culture, place marketing, urban policy, sustainability, growth, globalisation

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Matthew Tucker
School of the Built Environment
Liverpool John Moores University
Cherie Booth Building
Byrom St, Liverpool L3 3AF, UK
Tel: +44(0)151 231 2630
Fax: +44(0)151 231 2815
E-mail: m.p.tucker@ljmu.ac.uk

INTRODUCTION

Gone are the days of traditional factory industries that were once the heart and sole of the city core. Traditional seaside resorts have been degraded, old industrial centres abandoned and busy docklands unnoticeable to their

original trade. Today, in an era of globalisation, industry has become footloose, where location choices have accelerated from a national to global scale. It is now essential to promote and market on a global frontier, in which Ward (1998) states that 'the place is packaged and sold as a commodity'. Places are selling their urban image (Short, 1996) to compete with each other in order to reap the economic benefits. According to Ward (1998), place marketing strategies involve:

'Place logos, slogans, public relations, subsidies, tax breaks of various kinds, "flagship" development projects, flamboyant architecture and urban design statements, trade fairs, cultural and sporting spectacles, heritage, public art, and much else.'

In a sense, this is about investing in 'high' culture (Ward, 1998), and as Short (1996) emphasises the cultural city as a manicured and sanitised cultural experience, from high-class shopping malls, orchestras and galleries. However, nearly all big cities have such cultural attractions, but do they all know how to promote and sustain them? Critics contend that this is a deliberate manipulation of culture (Kearns and Philo, 1993) as this type of manipulation can be adjudged as inauthentic, giving rise to potential conflicts and tensions. Others acknowledge that culture and growth can be complementary, contending that cities have always had a capacity to generate culture and by inducing high levels of economic innovation and growth (Scott, 2000).

Glasgow has just won the campaign to host one of the most prestigious athletics tournaments in the world, the Commonwealth Games in 2014. At an estimated £288m cost, split 80/20 between the Scottish Executive and Glasgow City Council, with a £50m influx expected through sponsorship, broadcasting and ticket sales (Glasgow City Council, 2007), this is certainly one of Glasgow's most historic moments. And not just as a sporting event we must add. Glasgow 2014 will now put the Scottish city among the global elite of urban economic powerhouses, but more importantly, Glasgow has secured yet another mechanism to further regenerate and sustain the city's physical and social fabric.

Most importantly to this particular bid, is Dalmarnock in the East End of the city. An area traditionally swamped in deprivation and decline, is now set to be the home of the new athletics village for 2014, which is expected to accommodate for around 8,000 competitors and officials (The Observer, 2007). Around 70 per cent of sport infrastructure and venues is already in place, with a remaining 30 per cent of new leisure facilities planned. This will include a National Velodrome, National Indoor Sports Arena, Tollcross swimming complex. Plans have also been given the all clear for the development of a new M74 link road (*ibid*), ensuring the networking of the game will spread across the city. This can only be good news for a city traditionally burdened by heavy industry and steady decline. So when did it all change? When did Glasgow enable itself to shift from a traditional heavy industry city, to a city of global power? And what can other cities learn from Glasgow's progression? These are the questions that will form the basis of this paper, with specific comparison to a more recent, and rapidly emerging UK city, Liverpool.

One would contend that the trigger for such change occurred in 1990, as Glasgow became the European Capital of Culture (ECOC). The ECOC is arguably the greatest accolade to aspire to for our contemporary cities in changing and promoting a cultural mindscape, but at the same time acting as a catalyst to the successful delivery of economic growth. Consequently, the reward is an energised confirmation of city dominance and solidarity in a world where globalisation has brought us closer, and place marketing has become crucial. In order to positively promote our cities' potential, both socially and physically, many have applied the role of culture to achieve this. The most influential case within the UK is certainly Glasgow ECOC 1990, as the city's image only a decade ago was associated with street violence and urban decay (Bianchini and Parkinson, 1993), has now transformed into 'Scotland's economic engine room' (*ibid*), basking in European cultural status. Now aiming to replicate Glasgow's success is Liverpool, recently awarded ECOC 2008. The appeal of Liverpool's ECOC 2008 ambition is to replicate the 'Glasgow effect', using culture to stimulate economic growth and revitalise social integration, with the hope that the 'Liverpool effect' can go even greater still (Jones and Wilks-Heeg, 2004).

As scores of events are now destined to take place across Liverpool, the ECOC award has certainly intensified over time, as bold claims in both the media and Liverpool's Bid team are made regarding the economic benefits that the award will bring (Jones and Wilks-Heeg, 2004). This is however looking evident as the long-term sustainability is being firmly invested in, particularly with regards to the retail and leisure industry as the city develops:

- a £950m development encompassing 42 acres, 40 individually designed buildings, 6 districts and over 1.6 square feet of retail
- a new cruise liner facility with an estimated 12,000 passengers visiting, spending more than £500,000 a year
- the Liverpool Arena, a new state-of-the-art 10,000 capacity conference and entertainment arena on the Kings Dock Waterfront (Liverpool Culture Company, 2007).

These are but three developments currently underway within the city centre, with many more opportunities and developments scheduled. Many are in praise of such initiatives, and like Glasgow, the ECOC has helped transform Liverpool's image and challenge outdated perceptions and stereotypes. However, many have taken a more sceptical stance, as although transformation of former industrial cities is becoming evident, the use of culture to pursue economic growth is imbalanced. So what does it mean to use culture as a catalyst of growth? What does a city possess, or need to possess to achieve such status? How does it grow, and more importantly, how can it learn?

Critique is already apparent (Jones and Wilks-Heeg, 2004), surrounding the dangers of using the ECOC 2008 as viable cause for cultural regeneration in Liverpool. However, this paper contends that in providing critique of Liverpool's progress, or lack of, before long-term

changes and developments have occurred as a result of the ECOC 2008 bid, a more concise evaluation is to look at a past model, and in light of this, determine what the future holds for Liverpool. To this, we focus on the Glasgow model, 17 years on since its ECOC 1990 award.

Glasgow and Liverpool possess similar, and unique characteristics, both have comparable histories of industrial change, city composition and social disparities. This paper aims to provide a critical evaluation of Glasgow's ECOC 1990 accolade, discussing the sustainable impacts of adopting culture as a place marketing initiative to revitalise urban regeneration. The aims, hopefully, are for aspiring cities, like Liverpool, to reflect on their current success and future growth, highlighted already from the sheer scale of retail and leisure development in the city, but more importantly, to discuss what lessons it can take from Glasgow, and the holistic impact such activity can have on a city, through marketing itself on such a fragile entity as culture.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'CULTURE'?

Before going any further, it is important to gain a distinction as to what we actually mean by the term 'culture'. We have introduced how the notion of culture can be implemented as a tool for urban change; however, what do we actually mean by culture, and does this have an impact on our perceptions of change?

Lim (1993) emphasises that the term 'culture' is a very fragile and complex notion that cannot be taken for granted. Lim expostulates that 'defining culture is a notoriously difficult task as there is no singular meaning to this all embracing word'. Nevertheless, Lim explains that it is possible to give broad categories of its definition:

1. defines culture in terms of a particular way of life
2. defines it as a system of symbols, meanings and codes for communication
3. defines it as products of adaptation to a set of given environmental conditions.

Lim also distinguishes that there is a difference between 'culture' and 'arts', as arts is only one manifestation of culture, it is not culture itself. Mitchell (2000) instead focuses on the 'realms of social life: the economic, the political, the social, and the cultural'. Mitchell argues that economics, politics and society create the *material* relations of society, and culture with the *symbolic*. Hence, culture symbolises how our urban climates operate and present themselves. Another perspective Mitchell adopts to understand culture is to think of it as the opposite of nature, emphasising the point that culture is what makes humans human. To conclude, it is 'precisely the complexity of the term culture that is important' (*ibid*) and that is what makes culture such a crucial component in urban society. We now turn to how the impact such notion has had on the city of Glasgow.

GLASGOW'S HISTORY

'These kindred spirits, steeped in maritime history, have suffered the strangulation of their rivers through industrial decline and pollution and have seen their communities experiencing the indignity of low self-esteem' (Merseyside Vision, 2003).

Like Liverpool, this encapsulates the notion that Glasgow is traditionally a city of rich industrial heritage, dominated by shipbuilding and manufacturing production. It developed a unique urban fabric based on a dense housing system located close to industry. However, as many industrial cities in the 1930s witnessed, global depression caused Glasgow's economy to rapidly decline due to its over-reliance on heavy industry, and consequently unemployment peaked in 1930 at 30 per cent (Booth and Boyle, 1993). Economic decline continued over the decades, and the scale of decline is clearly noted during the period between 1971 and 1983 where manufacturing employment fell by 45 per cent, and more alarmingly during this time the city failed to attract additional service sector employment (*ibid*). According to Paddison (1993), Glasgow was thus:

'Identified as a member of a distinct grouping of cities characterised by high (economic) problem zones and rapid demographic decline... and was confined to the core cities of Britain's oldest industrial regions.'

After this point it caused the city to focus efforts on the revitalisation of its urban economy (Lennon and Seaton, 1998), and thus moved into an era of post-industrial development based on cultural regeneration.

TOWARDS CULTURAL REGENERATION

Glasgow eagerly searched for a solution to the negative image that had been accustomed to the city due to its social and economic problems of industrial decline, and found it by realising the significant potential of its arts and cultural characteristics. Thus, the city would use place marketing as an economic tool to regeneration in which 'culture and image were the central features in the promotion of a post-industrial Glasgow during the 1980s' (Gomez, 1998). This was an extremely attractive approach to take as:

'The primary role of the place marketer is to construct a new image of the place to replace either vague or negative images previously held by current or potential residents, investors and visitors.' (Holcomb, 1993)

The place marketing process began most notably in 1982 with the city's Mayfest, which was to be an annual festival celebrating the city's arts. Then in 1983 this was developed further with the opening of the prestigious Burrell Art Collection. However, most significantly, 1983 was the beginning of Glasgow's first major place marketing strategy which was achieved in the form of the 'Glasgow's Miles Better' campaign, a

huge success and ‘post-dated one of the most successful civic self-marketing exercises since the I Love New York campaign’ (Wishart, 1991). The campaign proved very successful and gave a renewed interest in visiting Glasgow; however, the city still had more to offer, and is culminated by Wishart (1991) who expressed that ‘here was a city that badly wanted to reinvent itself; here was a town its residents were desperate to love’. In 1985, the city’s aspirations were further expanded with the opening of the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre, otherwise known as the Armadillo due to its unique design characteristics.

Along with the opening of this distinctive landmark in 1985, was the contribution of Gordon Cullen in designing a plan to improve the environmental and physical quality of the city centre. Most notably, this involved the transformation of Buchanan Street as a central pedestrian street, thriving in retail activity, making it the focal point of the city centre (Gomez, 1998). Glasgow is now credited with an extremely efficient transportation system, including the ‘grid-like layout of the inner city making it easy to navigate’ (Turnball, 2003), which has consequently catapulted the retail and leisure demand within the city centre boundary. Then in 1988, the city hosted the Garden Festival by the River Clyde, and from a tourism increase in 1983 of 700,000 people, this rapidly grew to approximately 2.2 million people (Wishart, 1991), confirming that Glasgow was now a city that was going places. However, it still lacked an established international status that the garden festival could only deliver on a short-term basis.

GLASGOW EUROPEAN CITY OF CULTURE 1990

‘Culture was the “icing on the cake”; today it has become part of the cake itself.’ (Ward, 1998)

Before 1990 the event was mainly symbolic as established cultural centres won the award (eg Athens, 1985; Florence, 1986; Amsterdam, 1987; Berlin, 1988 and Paris, 1989). However, this changed dramatically in 1990 as Glasgow’s primary aim was to use the event again as an opportunity to transform its image by means of cultural regeneration, but more importantly ‘Glasgow would use the title to further its establishment as an international post-industrial city with a growing cultural tourism appeal’ (Booth and Boyle, 1993). Since 1990, ‘the interest of the event has grown dramatically, largely due to Glasgow’ (Centre of Cultural Policy Research, 2002).

The key objectives to become ECOC 1990 were:

1. ‘To maintain momentum already generated by the image building initiatives and the marketing effort.
2. To provide a corporate marketing platform for the city’s various artistic activities.
3. To utilise and build upon the existing organisational experience and cooperative effort within the city.
4. To stimulate increased awareness, participation and cultural developments in Glasgow’ (Glasgow District Council, 1987 in Booth and Boyle, 1993).



Thus, cultural tourism was the fundamental feature of the marketing strategy with the intention of addressing both the local and the universal (Booth and Boyle, 1993). The determination of Glasgow to achieve these goals was confirmed as £32.7m was invested by public funding, mainly by from Glasgow District Council and Scottish Regional Council. Of this, £26.8m was spent primarily on the programme including £5.1m on community events and celebrations; £3.7m on social work/education and £0.8m on marketing and administration. Also, £6.1m was invested from the private sector, which was generated from between 340 and 350 businesses (Centre of Cultural Policy Research, 2002).

Myerscough (1991) found that the event had brought a net economic return between £10.3m and £14.1m. Cultural industries had increased in the city by 3.9 per cent between 1986 and 1990, and there was a 40 per cent increase in attendance at theatres, halls, museums and galleries, from 4.7 million in 1989 to 6.6 million in 1990. Also 61 per cent of residents in Glasgow thought the programme made the city a more pleasant place to live. Hence, the short-term impacts of the event were huge and early indications were that the policy of targeting cultural tourism was successful (Booth and Boyle, 1993). However, after this short-term boom, there became a major question regarding the effectiveness of the event as a long-term strategy to urban regeneration in Glasgow. The debate is encapsulated extremely well by Wishart (1991) identifying:

‘A year of many thousands of events both modest and glittering, and a year that prompted an agonizing and still raging debate. The core of it is this: are the arts, “culture”, and participation in the hype of 1990-style promotion a vital tool in urban regeneration and civic rebirth or have they very little meaning to those many thousands still disenfranchised by unemployment, poor housing and lack of any obvious escape route from endemic poverty?’

Thus, one may interpret this debate as to whether the dominant boom in physical investment within the culture bid period, significantly changing its retail and leisure composition, is a viable tool in determining the city as a place of ‘culture’, arguably taking precedence over embedded social issues?

A LONG-TERM SOLUTION?

One fundamental criticism is that important social and political implications were overlooked by the event. Paddison (1993) was at the forefront of this criticism, and in particular, the ‘focus on hallmark events and the arts as a means to fostering the urban economy’. He argued that the use of ‘hallmark’ events have very little effect in altering the image of the city, as the image of the city becomes ‘compartmentalised’. Paddison summarises by contending that:

‘Hallmark events combined with an advertising campaign may influence specific aspects of a city’s image — its importance as a cultural centre... however, such events may leave relatively unaffected the overall image of a city, and particularly it’s more negative aspects.’

Holcomb (1993) acknowledges that the primary motive of place marketing is to replace any negative images that may exist in a city; however, what Paddison (1993) contends is that the negative image is not replaced, it is merely pushed to one side, or as the old saying goes 'out of sight, out of mind'. Paddison also highlights a problem in maintaining the momentum of such events and their sustainable benefits in the long run. He does not disagree however that using the event as a simple indicator to number of visitors to the city does 'pay dividends', for example visitors increased from 700,000 in 1982 to 3 million in 1990, thus providing retail and leisure industry with significant income and growth. But he emphasises that to 'discuss the city solely in economic terms is to oversimplify its meaning'.

Evans (2003) talks about the 'hard-branding' of cultural cities. By this, Evans means that there is an 'attempt to capitalise on 'commodity fetishism' and extend brand life, geographically and symbolically'. For example, NikeTown in London describes itself as 'more than just a store' (Evans, 2003), as the product has shifted from its material commodity to a new symbolic identity. Evans suggests this is the 'contemporary version of commodified cultural experience' as the process of cultural commodification has created new motives of urban renewal. Evans questions the sustainable impact such branding has on our cities, and pays specific attention to the ECOC, in which the investment in the promotion of European Cities of Culture acts as an effective 'Trojan horse' where economic adjustment policies and funding are diverted to arts-led regeneration.

The argument exists therefore that cities are not like products that can be advertised and sold; they are much more complex. For example, 'recasting a post-industrial image for a city such as Glasgow needs to come to terms with its previous existence as an industrial city' (*ibid*). Paddison (1993) terms this as the 'image-reality gap' as the projection of a new Glasgow has little relevance to the actual realities of social deprivation and poverty within the city's peripheral estates. This is summarised extremely well by Laurier (1993), expostulating that:

'Glasgow's extravagant year of culture in 1990 was not about focusing on rich and vibrant cultural milieu, but was about hiding a grim "working-class" history from tourists and captains of industry.'

This is perhaps reiterated by Evans (2003) who acknowledges the risk in not reconciling cultural development with regional planning, where cultural development therefore suffers due to the de-prioritisation of local diversity and aspirations. Boyle and Hughes (1991) take the same perspective questioning whether the image building strategy actually represents the true identity of the city, and branded the event as a conscious attempt to fashion a new identity for the city of Glasgow 'without having any direct reference back to any external reality'. This is also acknowledged by Booth and Boyle (1993) who contend that the 1990 programme 'failed to relate to the citizen' and 'had little relevance to the working-class cultural heritage of Glasgow'.

Booth and Boyle (1993) are also very critical of the concentration on cultural tourism, without a sustainable strategy for the development of local talent and the cultural industries. They argue that there is an 'ambiguity in

the relationships between culture and the development process'. This is mainly caused by the objective of cultural tourism to be used as an economic and marketing tool for the city centre. Again, linked to Paddison (1993), the main criticism is focused on the long-term legitimacy of the event. Booth and Boyle (1993) feel there is confusion about the 'next step' in the regeneration process, in which 'Glasgow's Festival's Unit assumed the role of cultural impresario rather than policy maker'. There is also the issue that one can have too many images and messages being put across, hence giving 'no clear, consistent message being put across like "Glasgow's Miles Better" (*ibid*), providing an umbrella in which the individually targeted campaigns can fit' (Fretter, 1993).

A POSITIVE OUTLOOK

One of the most recent and fascinating articles regarding Glasgow's change since ECOC 1990 is from Garcia (2005). Garcia acknowledges a clear divide in literature over time, from a predominantly retail and leisure perspective that the city deserves praise for its image transformation from a grim industrial centre to an attractive creative hub, to negative academic perspective that this has only further overlooked the wider social and cultural implications of the city. What Garcia investigates however, is whether the claims of success are purely rooted to economic factors or whether it also takes into account a cultural discourse that appreciates cultural legacies. Garcia achieves this by taking an alternative research approach, using a qualitative longitudinal study of focus group and press content analysis into the development of narratives around Glasgow's image and identity, giving a wider perspective than simply taking one particular economic or cultural stance.

What Garcia found was that 15 years after the event (at the point of Garcia's research), evidence shows that although the findings are much softer to the clear economic benefits, Glasgow has secured important long-term cultural benefits. What Garcia cannot directly prove, is whether the long-term legacies are as a result of culture-led regeneration, hence always giving temptation to continue the debate. However, though the dominant press content promoting the success of the event is extremely useful in providing a positive analysis, it is Garcia's research of personal accounts that provides substance to understanding that in fact cultural legacies also exist, they are simply not publicised or researched heavily enough to obtain a clear perspective. Regardless of Garcia's findings, he concludes that it is still 'misleading to suggest that the ECOC offers a good strategic and operational basis for culture-led regeneration', emphasising that a possible limitation is that culture is likely to be measured in non-cultural terms.

Wishart (1991) does not deny the fact that Glasgow still has many problems, like the issues discussed in the previous section, but:

'An acknowledgement of these policy failures and an appreciation of the scale of the task still to hand should not be mutually exclusive from the applauding the very real transformation that has been wrought in various sectors of the city.'

By this, one may argue that instead of viewing the event as a failure of urban regeneration policy, it should be credited as a 'clear-sighted attempt to achieve a commonly desired goal of urban regeneration and more broadly based prosperity' (Wishart, 1991). The fact is that times have changed. The city is no longer associated with its past stereotypes, but as a vibrant atmosphere that people want to visit and live in. What this paper argues is that regardless of the vast criticisms of imbalance that arise from the ECOC, these are issues that have always been present in the city, or any city for that matter, with or without such initiatives. Reiterating the views of Myerscough (1991) in terms of Glasgow's economic growth, the potential economic gains that the ECOC can bring to a city cannot be dismissed. Evans (2003) states that:

'the environmental and employment benefits attributed to urban culture therefore offer an irresistible cocktail which politicians, cultural producers, but less so private investors, seem unable to resist.'

This is especially true in the case of those cities, like Glasgow and Liverpool, emerging from economic decline, as it provides a unique opportunity to dramatically alter the opportunities for employment which have otherwise been structurally damaged for so long due to industrial decline. As evidenced by the recent 2014 Commonwealth Games success, Glasgow today is considerably more advanced both socially and economically, and the ECOC can only have acted as a catalyst to that process. This is reiterated by Merseyside Vision (2003) who contend that the ECOC 1990 was 'a catalyst to an avalanche of jobs, buildings and tourists'. For example, conservationists have been instrumental in retaining much of the city's architecture that would otherwise be deemed for destruction (*ibid*). Thus without the ECOC 1990 the city would not have cleaned and retained much of its architecture that is without doubt an integral part of the city's heritage, and its future retail, leisure and cultural activities. It is also worth noting that the city has expanded on the success of 1990 by being awarded Glasgow Year of Visual Arts 1996 and UK City of Architecture & Design 1999, accolades that would not otherwise have been possible.

In conjunction with this, there have been a number of key projects to restore the River Clyde, such as the Science Centre which includes the iMAX cinema, 100 metre tower and four-floor science mall. There is also the Glasgow Harbour developments converting former dockland areas into commercial, residential, retail and leisure space. Now in 2007, new growth is ahead in preparation for the 2014 Commonwealth Games.

LEARNING AND GROWTH

Through the literature presented in this paper, it is evident that the ECOC award can create mixed opinion regarding the effectiveness of using such an event as a tool for urban regeneration. At one end of the spectrum, the outlook of the event is sceptical, failing to encapsulate the reality of social and political problems within the wider city, and providing a short-term mechanism for change. At the other end, the outlook of the event is

certainly optimistic, as the ECOC has become a landmark in providing a catalyst to increased prosperity and status.

Short (1996) agrees that the event has led to a significant boost in tourism and a renewed confidence in Glasgow, ‘however — and there is always a however — a cultural campaign does not fill in all the gaps left by economic disinvestment’, and there will always be ‘a dichotomy between the rhetoric of the advertising campaign and the texture of everyday life’. Thus, when using culture as a means of regeneration, it will inevitably cause conflict purely due to the complex and diverse nature of peoples’ interpretation of the term ‘culture’. Again, this is not to deny or demote the importance of culture, merely to reinforce that policy decisions never have a clear answer, but it does provide an opportunity for our cities to carve and create a long-term legacy that will be sustainable and prosperous. No city wants to remain on a plateau and immersed because of a failure to acknowledge change. The ECOC is simply a tool to help initiate a learning and growth process for our cities’ endless lifeline that if given the chance to make healthier at any point, should be taken with both hands. To this it is useful to illustrate a series of key lessons identified by Garcia (2004) that UK planners can consider when embarking on major urban developments:

- It is critical to ensure that capital investment and building schemes have sustainability and long-term costs planned from the outset.
- Ensure that all levels of the community are involved in local consultation.
- Ensure that cultural investment is not merely seen as a matter of importing world-class products, but rather facilitate the sustainable production of local culture.
- Ensure that cultural investment brings people and communities along with it so they are part of the change.
- Ensure that cultural investment is assessed and measured for its cultural impact as well as for its economic and regenerative impacts. This requires increased support for longitudinal studies that monitor long-term progression of impacts and legacies (Garcia, 2004).

The most fascinating factor about the Glasgow model however is sustainability. Seventeen years on from Glasgow’s ECOC success, new prospects emerge in the form of the 2014 Commonwealth Games. Cities are made up of the most complex entities, and the communities and buildings within them have existed longer than most of our lifetimes. Hence, change is gradual; it is unrealistic to expect immediate change to social issues that have existed far longer than we expect them solved. From the literature reviewed however, there is justification that the ECOC was successful in ‘putting the city on the world map as a tourist destination and produced a step-change in the city’s image but offered little to Glasgow’s most needy communities’ (The Herald, 2007). However what this does not add, is that without it, we cannot guarantee that Glasgow would have been able to reach out to its most needy communities to any comparable resemblance. Despite its criticism, there is evidence that the ECOC can act as a sustainable solution, which has now led to the 2014 success, where

Glasgow will hopefully go one better and continue to reach its most needy communities through investment, housing, employment, and retail and leisure growth in otherwise deprived areas.

Liverpool is the latest city to face such opportunities and challenges. Through the literature provided in this paper, we can see distinct similarities to Liverpool's history: deprivation, industrial decline, social tension, unemployment to name a few. There are also similarities in Liverpool's early attempts to move towards culture including the introduction of the Garden City Festival in 1984. However, the once vibrant garden festival site is now home to derelict land. Hence, there are certainly hurdles to overcome, and Liverpool faces the same challenges as Glasgow once faced 17 years ago, the criticisms are the same, and the urban climate faces the same scenarios. An important distinction can now be made.

In applying the thoughts of Short (1996) above, once one acknowledges that there will always be a dichotomy between rhetoric and reality, it then allows us to appreciate the positive impact hallmark events like the ECOC can have to the eventual increased prosperity, both economically, politically, socially *and* culturally, that a city can have as a result. We only have to revisit the work of Garcia (2005) to acknowledge that Glasgow's ECOC success has not just been economical, as positive and sustainable cultural legacies still remain today. This is concluded gracefully by Wishart (1991) in the case of Glasgow as:

'It has, in the oddest way, become a "fashionable" city, and those who examine its inner workings pronounce it exciting, speak of the perennial "buzz" to be found there and compare it to a small-scale New York... Glasgow, pronounce its visiting gurus, is a "can-do" city. That's a hard-won accolade that has constantly to be set in the context of a city where there is still a prodigious amount to be done. Perhaps that progress may be accelerated when those who persist in constantly re-examining their city's historical navel invest similar levels of intellectual energy in helping to fashion its future.'

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