

Assessing the social and cultural impacts of the European Capital of Culture programme in cross-border regions. A research agenda

Corina TURȘIE*, Thomas PERRIN**

Abstract

The paper delivers a comparative overview of the research on capturing the impacts of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) programme by connecting the literature on urban regeneration with the literature on sustainable development. We observe a shift from assessing mainly the economic impacts towards the challenging task of capturing the social and cultural impacts in the context of the increasing preoccupation for assuring a long-term legacy of the programme. The paper also provides a comparative examination of the research methodology (impacts and indicators) for the self-evaluation proposed by three future ECoCs placed in cross-border regions: Timisoara 2021, Novi Sad 2021 and Esch-sur-Alzette 2022. Comparing data, we observed that different ECoCs have similar discursive understandings of the social and cultural impacts of the title. Still, they use different fine-tunes indicators for measuring these impacts or the cross-border cooperation, which is a neglected aspect of the ECoC evaluation.

Keywords: European Capital of Culture, impact, assessment, social, cultural, cross-border

Introduction

The European Capital of Culture (ECoC) has attracted increasing attention from both academia and policy makers. While the programme started with the symbolic goal of bringing together Europeans, by highlighting the richness and common features of their cultures, it was soon transformed into a kind of magic box for cities, with the capacity of boosting urban transformations, encompassing local economic development and social transformation. At the economic level, ECoC promises a new competitive image for cities and a base for innovation processes. At

* Corina TURȘIE is a PhD Lecturer at the Department of Politics, West University of Timisoara, Romania; e-mail: corina.tursie@e-uvt.ro.

** Thomas PERRIN is a PhD Lecturer at TVES Laboratory, University of Lille, France; e-mail: thomas.perrin@univ-lille.fr.

the social level, ECoC can promote social cohesion and a regeneration of the social fabric, while at the urban level, ECoC is expected to bring investments in the renovation of specific parts of the cities.

The evolution of the ECoC rationale is entangled with the evolution of the scholarly debates on alternative theoretical explanations of urban development, highlighting ‘creative class’, ‘entrepreneurial’ or ‘capability’ strategies (Grodach and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2007; Sacco *et al.*, 2014; Malcom, 2015). While at the policy level, the ECoC programme generally embraced the broader instrumentalisation of culture for urban regeneration, the academia remained more sceptical about a series of “dilemmas” (Bianchini, 1993, cited in Garcia, 2004) of culture-led urban regeneration and its economic, cultural, spatial and social facets, which remain to be solved while planning an ECoC. The debates point to the tensions between cultural consumption, which brings immediate but short-term economic benefits versus production, which can support long-term results; between investing in ‘ephemeral’ activities, such as events or festivals, able to attract tourists or in ‘permanent’ activities, such as facilities or infrastructure, which could better meet residents’ expectations; and also between attention given to the city centre or to its periphery.

The ‘long-term development of cities’ or ‘sustainable legacy’ are key expressions for ECoC cities’ professionals, with rather rhetorical than analytical consistence. The main challenge consists in planning and measuring adequate goals and impacts for the cities’ long-term development. In the ECoC context, culture-led regeneration models, followed by cities, were criticized for instrumentalising culture mainly for economic purposes (Garcia, 2004), without an integrated approach, sought to be more appropriate in offering sustainable local development (Sacco *et al.*, 2013) and sustainable legacies (Liu, 2017a), including the significant, but difficult to measure, long-term social or cultural impacts (Garcia, 2005). As a policy response, the flaws of the programme in terms of lack of sustainability were addressed by several updates of the European legislative framework. Since 2006 (Decision No. 1622/2006/EC), the long-term development of cities has become the desired output of ECoC, pursued by developing long-term cultural policy strategies for cities; since 2014, cities have been encouraged to associate the “surrounding area” (Decision No. 445/2014/EC), opening up to a more regional dimension that may encompass cross-border “Euroregions”, with the objective of strengthening citizens’ sense of belonging to a common cultural area and hence, contributing to the goal of ‘territorial cohesion’ (Podadera and Calderón, 2019). Moreover, after 2019 (Decision No. 445/2014/EU), the cities holding the title are required to perform their own monitoring and evaluation plans, being hence forced to operationalise the used concepts when establishing their goals.

The paper examines the developments in the field of measuring the impacts of the ECoC programme. Our main contribution consists in connecting the literature on urban regeneration, especially regarding ECoC, with debates from the area of sustainable development in the ECoC context, with the purpose of documenting a

research and policy agenda tracking the challenges of measuring the long-term impacts of ECoC. Moreover, we look at the monitoring and evaluation plans of ECoC Timișoara 2021, Novi Sad 2021 and Esch-sur-Alzette 2022. Conducting a comparative study among cities that faced these challenges may be instructive for a clearer understanding of the process. Our selection of these three cities is based on several reasons. They belong to the so-called fourth generation of ECoC, being among the first ones that must include monitoring and evaluation plans in their Bid Books. They will hold the title in consecutive years. At the territorial level, they share a particular ‘border dimension’: they are cross-border cities or they are situated in border regions. This particular ‘border dimension’ allows documenting on how the ECoC goals - to highlight local culture (country and cross-country) and/or to focus on the European culture rooted locally- are articulated and what impacts are planned in this specific territorial context which holds a significant European dimension. Indeed, the EU has long encouraged cross-border cooperation with specific schemes like the Interreg programmes, which fostered numerous cross-border cultural projects (Leloup and Perrin, 2017; Perrin, 2015). The research gathers useful know-how in the field of evaluation of cultural policies and programmes, which can contribute to the further development of evidence-based policymaking in the field of culture and cultural cooperation.

1. Measuring the impacts of ECoC: an evolving research agenda

1.1. The first steps: prevalence of economic and countable data and emergence of a social dimension

Four generations of ECoC have been described and they coincide with the three main sets of ECoC-related legislation: 1985-1996, 1997-2004, 2005-2019, 2020-2033 (Sassatelli, 2009; Garcia and Cox, 2013). The extreme heterogeneity of ECoC cities and programmes was a result of the limited formalisation of a programme created at times when the European cultural policy did not even have a legal basis in a European Union Treaty. Cities’ authorities have increasingly used the autonomy left by this limited formalisation and implemented their own visions for ECoC, which in turn inspired a progressive consolidation of the content of the legislative framework of the programme regarding the procedures and goals (Turșie, 2015a). As a general trend, the programme’s objectives shifted and became “more aligned with equally shifting approaches in urban cultural policies” (Sassatelli, 2009, p. 91).

In the 80’s, the first generation of ECoC, represented mainly by capital cities such as Athens, Paris and Madrid produced cultural festivals, limited in scope and time: they lasted a few months and adopted a restrictive interpretation of culture as “limited to high-arts” (Sassatelli, 2009, p. 96). This vision corresponds to a traditional approach of urban cultural policies in (Western) Europe (Bianchini, 1993, cited in Garcia, 2004). Glasgow ECoC 1990 marked a significant shift to a different

cultural policy approach, which, since then, has become the dominant rationale of ECoC. Glasgow was the “first city to use ECoC as a “catalyst for urban regeneration” (Garcia, 2004, p. 319). It unravelled a wider definition of culture and expanded the distribution of activities beyond the city centre to bring new communities to the cultural programme. It combined flagship national and international productions with more local or emerging ones, temporary events with permanent infrastructures. The trend towards urban regeneration and the instrumentalization of culture for economic ends became the dominant perspective for the second and third generation of ECoC cities, such as Rotterdam, Porto, Genoa, Lille, Liverpool, Pilsen or Mons, cities that were not traditionally associated to cultural capitals.

Although ECoC was generally viewed as playing a key role in enhancing city image, attracting tourists and stimulating urban regeneration, few attempts have been made to measure the actual impacts of the programmes. A key publication by Palmer/Rae Associates (2004) examined the impact and long-term legacies of the second generation of ECoCs by using online questionnaires, interviews with correspondents and content analysis of selected materials. The study argues that the ECoC title is seen as a powerful tool for cultural development, but insufficient attention has been paid to ensuring the sustainability of its impacts. ‘Economic’, ‘visitors’, ‘social’ and ‘cultural’ impacts are described, placing significant emphasis on describing the first two. The study reports that most cities collected data on tourist overnights stays, while others like Rotterdam, Bruges, Salamanca and Graz began to value the importance of monitoring, carrying out forms of visitor survey by undertaking comprehensive visitor research on visitor behaviour, motivations and expenditure.

The study also pinpointed the importance of differentiating between ECoCs’ short, medium and long-term (economic) benefits. They ranged from immediate expenditures generated by the events (such as tickets sales), to expenditures generated by attracted visitors (tourism industry), capital expenditures (urban revitalisation and infrastructure), increase of investments and finally, increase of business image (attractiveness to knowledge and skilled workers) (Palmer/Rae Associates, 2004, p. 105). The proposed framework is anchored in the language of Florida’s creative class theory (2002). It highlights the importance of attracting external resources and flows, without discussing, though, the negative externalities of creative class policies on exacerbating social exclusion and gentrification. Indeed, other analyses argue that the creative class cannot be simply imported into the city but must be organically intertwined in the city’s relations of production, work and social life (Scott, 2006). Despite criticism, Florida’s theory has produced a veritable policy design trend and became a “a truly classicist approach” (Sacco *et al.*, 2014, p. 2810). Several ECoCs adopted this market-view of culture-led development, with early references to creative industries in the Bid Books of both Liverpool and Stavanger for 2008 and a strong emphasis on the bids of cities hosting the ECoC from 2010 onwards (e.g. Riga 2014, San Sebastian 2016 and Valetta 2018) (Garcia

and Cox, 2013, p. 60). Diverse ECoCs (Pecs 2010, Turku and Tallinn, 2011) also planned in their bids urban regeneration projects to create new cultural and creative centres (Garcia and Cox, 2013, p. 82) assuming, at the same time, the risk of cultural over-engineering. The strategic reconversion of space and facilities echoes Porter's competitiveness theory which states that spatial agglomeration of productive activities leads to spill-over knowledge effect. Put into urban contexts, cultural activities are likely to cluster into cultural districts or quarters, whose competitive potential is preserved with the condition of understanding "the specificities of cultural production and of its social embeddedness" (Sacco *et al.*, 2014, p. 2814).

As regards social objectives, Palmer/Rae (2004, p. 137) report that this preoccupation is rather specific to the Northern European ECoC cities (such as Brussels, Rotterdam, Helsinki) than to Eastern or Southern ones, possibly reflecting different political, social and cultural optics. They identify several types of actions and goals to measuring social impacts: access to culture development, community development (such as strengthening voluntary organisations), social inclusion, development of social capital and cultural inclusion (such as participation to cultural production of new and marginalized voices). An important idea found in this report is that ECoCs often considered "community projects" (Palmer/Rae, 2004, p. 138) as the best opportunities to produce lasting local change since they are rooted locally and allow learning experiences. This view echoes Sen's capability theory on the accumulation of knowledge and capability building: endogenous development sparks up when a critical mass of cultural demand is reached, based on residents' motivation to invest in cultural capability building. Translated into the field of cultural policy, this theory favours "a bottom-up, non-market-oriented view of cultural development" by which social participation, social capital and community cohesion gain priority over economic considerations (Goldbard, 2006 cited in Sacco *et al.*, 2014, p. 2815).

However, Palmer/Rae (2004) also note that the second generation of ECoC cities placed little importance on assessing cultural and social impacts, which were often overshadowed by political ambitions and other primarily non-cultural interests and agendas. Only limited measurements were performed, such as attendance figures and number of projects, under the "the bigger the better" dominant rationale (Palmer/Rae Association, 2004, p. 71). The problem of assessing social or cultural impacts is, of course, their intangibility compared to more concrete data like tourist numbers, for example. The study also emphasised a greater impact and sustainability of ECoC when cultural initiatives were part of a long-term integrated vision of urban development (which became one of the goals of Decision No. 1622/2006/EC).

1.2. Expansion of visions and consolidation of tools to assess ECoC

To address the inadequate integration between economic and cultural policies in culture-led development, and to fill the gap between economic regeneration and

community involvement, Sacco *et al.* (2013) elaborated an integrative model of culture-led development - the system-wide cultural district, which describes twelve critical dimensions for successful culture-led development, gathered in four macro dimensions (quality, development, attraction and social). The framework was applied for the evaluation of local development models of ECoC Genoa and Lille 2004 (Sacco and Blessi, 2005). In this view, culture-led development essentially means creating the social and economic conditions that enable culture to perform its roles effectively and sustainably.

The interrelation between culture and sustainable development progressively began a core research topic. Throsby (1999) elaborated three frameworks about culture and sustainability: cultural capital as a sustainable resource, interaction between culture and the environment and sustainability of urban cultural heritage. He uses the term ‘cultural ecosystems’, meaning shared cultural networks and relationships. Several policy documents consider culture to be an important component, if not an additional fourth pillar of sustainable development (UCLG, 2004; UNESCO, 2005; UCLG, 2015) even if discussion remains open on the significance and the applications of the certainly salient, yet still intriguing combination between culture and sustainability (Dessein *et al.*, 2015, Kangas *et al.*, 2017)¹. Moreover, this renewed approach did not entirely fill the research gap about the assessment of long-term impacts.

Impacts 08 - a five-year research programme developed by Liverpool 2008, provided a replicable research framework to explore the impacts of culture-led regeneration programmes in a post-industrial context (Impacts 08, 2010). The framework is integrative and focuses not only on the economic, social and cultural impacts, but also on the operational process management, grouped in five main thematic clusters and sources of data gathering (see Table 1). Impacts 08 was continued by the programme Impacts 18² to capture the legacies of the ECoC ten years after. The main thematic impact clusters of Impacts 2008 were mostly kept and developed in an extended framework (see Table 2).

The European Capital of Culture Policy Group brought further the research agenda on best practices and delivery of ECoC programmes, both inspired by Impact 08 framework and based on the experiences of Liverpool 2008, Stavanger 2008, Essen for the Ruhr 2010 and Turku 2011 (European Commission, 2013). Compared to Impact 08, the new assessment framework includes the ‘European dimension’, which became, at that time, one of the new selection criteria for ECoCs (see Table 2). The study suggested assessment indicators such as activities organised by the ECoC in cooperation with organisations from other European countries (number of

¹See also the Routledge book series “Studies in culture and sustainable development”, <https://www.routledge.com/Routledge-Studies-in-Culture-and-Sustainable-Development/book-series/RSCSD>.

² IMPACTS 18 Official website (retrieved from <http://iccliverpool.ac.uk/impacts18/>)

new cooperation and country of origin); citizen engagement in European projects and exchanges; the number of participants and artists from other European countries, or the changing perceptions of Europe amongst citizens, before and after the ECoC.

Table 1. Impacts 2008 - dimensions of impact and data collection

Cultural access and participation	Economy and tourism	Cultural vibrancy and sustainability	Image and perceptions	Governance and delivery process
audience surveys on attendance and audience origin and demographics, with special attention on audience who came from traditionally excluded groups;	surveys on visitors' number and motivation;	surveys on arts organisations regarding their audience, income and activity;	longitudinal analysis of national and local media coverage as well as social media coverage on ECoC;	ECoC income and expenditure; sponsorship and business support;
events' audience satisfaction surveys;	hotel stock, occupancy and revenues;	surveys on media coverage and local cultural sector peer's perception;		mitigating environmental impact by promoting public transportation and environmentally friendly measures in contract tendering;
evaluation of the volunteers' experience;	employment	size and growth of the creative industries sector;	annual perception surveys on local, regional and national population on Liverpool as ECoC;	building partnerships and engaging stakeholders from public and voluntary sectors by associating them to the board of ECoC;
longitudinal surveys on local population/ neighborhoods regarding their cultural interests and practices	attendance at major city attractions both by tourists and locals; surveys on travel modes to Liverpool; surveys on the perception on ECoC of small and medium enterprises working in tourism and in other businesses	survey on the perception on ECoC of the creative sector	surveys on visitors and local residents' opinion on Liverpool ECoC	surveys on stakeholders' view on ECoC

Source: authors' compilation following Impacts 08

The ‘Image and perceptions’ dimension is expanded to ‘Identity, image and place’ to explore the perceptions and awareness of both the ECoC programme and the host city, and how they change because of the ECoC year. In order to measure ‘identity’ and ‘place’, the study recommended to address the issue of ‘strength of local identity and self-confidence’ and ‘positioning/repositioning of the host-city before and after becoming ECoC’, without detailing on specific indicators though. This evokes the increasing academic interest in the role of culture in creating a type of laboratories for “(re)programming Europe” (Immler and Sackers, 2014) and creating a bottom-up sense of belonging to a common cultural space. The ECoCs are supposed to foster a common European identity and to contribute to “the European Union’s identity politics: to produce self-creating cultural integration in the EU” (Lähdesmäki, 2014).

The theme of ‘Cultural vibrancy and sustainability’ focuses on the creative and cultural ecosystem of ECoC, with both encouragement of innovative artistic productions and skill development in the cultural sector. With regards to the thematic cluster ‘Cultural access and participation’, the study continues the special attention paid by Impacts 08 to traditionally excluded groups and additionally refers to ‘participants’ as well as to ‘non-participants’ to culture. Finally, regarding the cluster ‘economic’ impacts, the study acknowledges the potential negative environmental impacts in terms of increase of gas emissions. These concerns are to be found in critical urban studies and tourism studies related to the negative environmental externalities of mega-events (Liu, 2017b; Perić, 2018).

In parallel to the work of the European Commission policy, the European Parliament commissioned a study to document success-strategies and long-term effects of the ECoC programme from the first three generations (Garcia and Cox, 2013). This study has partially the same authors as Impacts 08 and explicitly draws on the outcomes of this research programme. It discusses four distinct but interrelated areas of impact: cultural and image, economic and physical, social and political impacts. The cultural aspects included impacts on the cultural system of the ECoC city: how activities, organisations, individuals, funding programmes and strategies have been affected by ECoC designation and how projects and activities can continue after the ECoC year. In order to document a sustainable legacy of ECoC, attention was also paid to increasing capacity in the sector and to creating networks and collaborations. The third generation of ECoC proved to be “more aware of the opportunity to build capacity within the sector in order to support post-hosting year sustainability” (Garcia and Cox, 2013, p. 119). Indeed, other works show that ECoC can be a “learning curve” (Quinn, 2009), both in terms of developing the capacity of individuals as cultural managers, as well as developing the operational capacity of organisations, and the intensity of network and cooperative agreements or schemes. From this perspective, indicators for assessing potential long-term impacts can be the creation of formal structures for future shared work. In terms of image impacts, the study points out that ECoC is not just a place-branding opportunity to boost “external”

attractiveness to tourists or creative entrepreneurs, but also a chance to enhance a strong sense of place for local citizens, to promote local narratives and to develop civic pride. Longitudinal media coverage analysis as well as surveys on local, regional, national and international awareness and perception of ECoC are recommended as means to capture image improvement, local pride and sense of identity. The target groups are residents, cultural stakeholders and local business agents. Studies on the touristic impact of mega-events report insightful results when perception studies are applied both to the local population of host cities and to the residents of non-host cities (e.g. any other city in the country), leading to a confrontation of internal and external perceptions (Perić, 2018).

The economic and physical impacts were business as usual, being described as tourism growth (measured as arrivals and overnights) and city competitiveness, with a special focus on the development of the creative sector. The improvement of cultural infrastructure and its potential spill-over effect on the local economy are the most common legacies described by cities. Still, the sustainability of these investments represents a real challenge and evokes a wide range of experiences, including the cities' transformation in so-called 'white elephants' Regarding social impacts, the study reports that the most common ways to measure them refer to building social capital (Putnam, 2000). In the case of ECoC, evidence can be traced related to public engagement (volume and profile), while less researched areas are the impacts on individuals and communities, with a specific emphasis on the role of volunteer programmes. Longitudinal cultural consumption surveys can indicate audience increases. Still, the social dimension of an ECoC does not limit itself to widening access to culture, but also to cultural inclusion or social inclusion, including minority and marginalised population. Individual and community impacts were measured by a limited number of ECoC through perception surveys about the role of ECoC. Volunteer programmes became a key element for ECoC and can be considered a tool for community engagement. Perception surveys on volunteers can document the perceived benefits for the participants. This report also elaborated on the measurement of potential political and policy impacts of ECoC: the effects on the political system of a city, not only on the cultural one, and the extent to which building a cultural system of 'governance' can lead to other long-term governance projects. Cultural governance refers to renewed working habits and procedures, such as multi-level governance networks (Liverpool 2008 and Lille 2004), cooperative modalities, or even installation of permanent structures' cultural cooperation, including at a cross-border scale like after Luxembourg 2007.

1.3. Normalisation and systematisation of ECoC assessment

The current legislative framework of the ECoC programme, adopted in 2014, requires the fourth generation of ECoC, post-2019, to put both monitoring and evaluation processes into place and to envision them as early as the bidding stage.

For the first time, the European Commission issued specific guidelines for cities' own evaluation (European Commission, 2018). The document draws indicators and possible sources of data collection to assess both the impact of the two general objectives of ECoC ('sense of belonging' and 'long-term development of cities'), and the results of the four specific objectives ('European dimension', 'access and participation', 'capacity building in the cultural sector', 'international profile/image') (see Table 2). These guidelines reflect a discursive downgrading of the instrumentalization of culture for economic purposes while highlighting the importance of depicting the social and cultural impacts of ECoC. There is no suggestion made to indicators related to the increase of tourist visits and overnight stays, the most common economic indicator used to measure ECoC's economic impact in previous research. Instead, we found: an improvement of tourists' and visitors' opinions regarding the city image as culturally vibrant, investment in cultural infrastructure, increase in GDP and employment in the cultural and creative sector.

Table 2. ECoC impacts - a thematic agenda

Palmer/Rae 2004	Impacts 08	ECoC Policy Group 2013	Garcia & Cox 2013	Impacts 18	European Commission Guidelines 2018
Economic	Economy and tourism	Economy	Economy and physical	Economy and tourism Physical environment and heritage	Access and participation
Visitors	Cultural access and participation	Cultural access and participation	Social	Participation and engagement Social capital and wellbeing	
Social	Cultural vibrancy and sustainability	Cultural vibrancy and sustainability	Culture and image	Cultural vibrancy	Capacity building in the cultural sector
Cultural	Image and perception	Identity, image and perception European dimension		Image and reputation	International profile of the city
	Governance and delivery process	Philosophy and Management of the process	Political and policy	Governance and leadership	European dimension

Source: authors' compilation

A closer look at the indicators proposed to assess the two general objectives ‘sense of belonging’ and ‘long-term development of cities’, shows an increased attention for identity, community development and innovation: local residents’ sense of belonging to a common cultural space, increased citizens’ participation and engagement in multicultural projects, geographical area covered in the artistic programme, number of local grassroots initiatives, increased support for cultural projects by cultural minorities, civic sector bodies working with the municipality, new public space development, increased number of cultural initiatives linking heritage and innovation. This policy approach discursively proposes an integrated vision of sustainable culture-led regeneration giving culture a significant role both in re-defining urban identity and in creating a sense of belonging but also in addressing long-term economic and social issues through the involvement of the local community.

This background of raised expectations in producing evidence based urban development represents a challenge for the fourth generation of ECoCs. They must adapt the monitoring and evaluation research agenda to the specificity of their own city, connecting goals, impacts and legacies in an original bid, meant to convince of its success in bringing culture-led urban development. The three case-studies in the second section of this paper allow a comparative view on these questions.

2. Planning the legacies - Timișoara 2021, Novi Sad 2021 and Esch-sur-Alzette 2022

Following the experiences of Lille 2004, Luxembourg 2007, Essen for the Ruhr 2010, Marseille-Provence 2013, the European Commission encouraged regional applications for ECoC and, where the situation favours it, applications involving cross-national borders. The reasons for including a wider, even cross-border area can be diverse, from historical-heritage reasons (the same language, the same traditions) to the pragmatic need to have a wider pooling of audience, artists, equipment, staff or expertise. In this regard, both Lille and Luxembourg represent examples of good practices, mainly due to their sustainable structures of cross-border cultural collaborations, which continued after the ECoC year, namely the agency Lille 3000 and the *Espace culturel Grande Région* (Perrin 2010, Bosredon and Perrin 2019). However, the sustainability is not exempt of fragility: the Espace culture Grande Région is undergoing a process of restructuring. The agency Lille 3000 is strongly supported by the City of Lille and the political priorities can evolve according to political majorities, with municipal elections in France in 2020, for instance.

Timișoara 2021, Novi Sad 2021 and Esch-sur-Alzette 2022 represent three cases of ECoC placed in distinct types of cross-border areas in terms of border integration (Decoville *et al.*, 2015): non-existent physical border between Luxembourg and France with a high number of cross-border daily commuters versus

physical borders between a EU non-Schengen country and a candidate-country, with low cross-border mobility. They will take place either simultaneously in 2021, or consecutively between 2021 and 2022. They all developed long-term cultural strategies, cultural programmes, they envisioned the long-term impacts and legacies of ECoC and they planned their monitoring and evaluation activities.

2.1. Timișoara 2021

Timișoara is the capital city of the historical region of Banat, an area of multiconfessionality and interculturality, a city recognised for its spirit. The city hosted a series of premiers in the 19th century, while in the more recent history of Romania, the civic vigour of the city propelled the anti-communist Revolution and the political changes of 1989. The concept of the bid “Shine your light! Light up your city!” used the universal metaphor of light which had particular added meanings in Timișoara: in 1884, during the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, Timișoara was the first city on the European to have street electric lightening; also, the sparks of the anti-communist Revolution were ignited there, in 1989. Through the ECoC title, the spirit of Timișoara could be reignited in these troubled European times, marked by economic, social and political crises.

For Timișoara 2021, success means to put civic energy into motion, to activate society through audience development. The “unwanted past” (Turșie, 2015b) and the negative effects of communism, in terms of lack of trust and civic engagement, were exploited in the bid by mapping “a cultural Journey to overcome passivity” (Timișoara 2021, 2016, p. 3). The key urban development impact is ‘about people’, aiming to promote civic engagement and creative entrepreneurship in an area threatened by the migration of young skilled workers. The long-term legacy of the project was mainly considered in soft terms, as capacity building in the cultural and creative sector, sought to become more competitive, as well as increased citizens’ participation in the cultural life of the city. A multi-functional creative complex, built by regenerating an unused industrial space, was also planned.

2.2. Novi Sad 2021

Also placed in the historic region of Banat, Novi Sad is the biggest city of the Autonomous Province Vojvodina, the wealthiest of the country, and has a long tradition in hosting key cultural institutions, responsible for defining the cultural identity of Serbian people. The concept of Novi Sad’s Bid - “For New Bridges” used the bridge metaphor as a connection, building upon the symbolic meaning of the city’s bridges over the Danube which were built, destroyed by wars and then reconstructed. A recent trauma in the city’s memory was represented by the 1999 NATO bombings, when all three bridges were destroyed. Today, they represent strong *lieux de mémoire*, reminding of the strong sense of solidarity of the local

population who, back in 1999, tried to protect the bridges against bombing at the price of their own lives. The concept also has symbolic connotations in the context of Serbia's European aspirations for joining the EU, hence, new bridges to be built.

Belonging to a non-EU country, the title represents, first of all, a way to "reintegrate" the city and Serbia "into Europe's cultural life, through a dialogue of cultures" (Novi Sad 2021, 2016, p. 3). Secondly, the title represents an opportunity to put creative young people, seen as assets, at the centre of urban regeneration plans. Finally, by promoting the city as a cultural destination, a young city of culture, peace and reconciliation, it was aimed to stimulate citizens' pride. As for the legacy, the main regeneration project refers to the creation of a Youth Creative Polis, a cultural district on the site of a former factory, aimed to renew the so-called China-town. Other soft legacies were described: active involvement of citizens in the city's functioning, capacity-building in the local creative sector and long-term investment in the young generations.

2.3. Esch-sur-Alzette 2022

With a population of 34,500, Esch-sur-Alzette is the second largest city in Luxembourg, placed at the Luxembourg-France border. Southern Luxembourg's industrial heritage welcomed, across time, migrant workers from all over Europe (especially from Italy and Portugal); today, it registers a significant number of daily commuters from France or Belgium, transforming the region into an area of multiculturalism, multilingualism, a neutral transit zone, in the smooth movement across borders.

By using the slogan "Remix Culture", Esch proposed the image of a city as a melting pot of cultures, a large diversity in a small place, a mixture of European and non-European cultures, accompanied by the normality of crossing the borders, an image of "Europe in a test-tube" (Esch-sur-Alzette 2022, 2017, p. 6) and a source of best practices against the revival of nationalist tendencies in Europe. The main urban regeneration project of the area was the creation of the district of Esch-Belval. This former mining and steelworks site accommodated the relocation, from 2015, of the *Université du Luxembourg*, created in 2003, as well as of research centres and start-ups. The Esch-Belval redevelopment performs a sought-for transformation from a post-industrial society to a knowledge society, reflecting the Remix Culture slogan to an even higher extent.

The long-term envisioned impacts of ECoC refer to the transformational impact on Esch, its reputation and its citizens. Working in public spaces, benefitting from the large redevelopment process of the industrial areas is meant to show the sustainable change of the face and image of the region, the 'raw', 'unpolished' 'diamond' in the South of Luxembourg (Esch-sur-Alzette 2022, 2017, p. 100). Improving the city's/region's image in the eyes of its own inhabitants, as well as a new sense of regional identity are key elements of the bid. Success is achieved if

young people get to be proud of living in an exciting, changing region. Also, success refers to the attractiveness potential of Esch for artists, creatives and European audience interested in discovering the Southern region, apart from Luxembourg-city.

2.4. Impacts and indicators

The monitoring and evaluation plans of the long-term impacts of ECoC differ among the three selected cities. For the purpose of simplification and clarification, we will present, in a synthetic manner, the ‘cultural’ and ‘social’ impacts discussed in the three Bid Books. The recurrent impacts and indicators used by the three cities in their monitoring plan are the following:

Table 3. ECoC cultural impacts and indicators

Cultural Impacts	Evaluation Indicators	ECoC
Increased level of European and international cultural co-operation and exchange	No. of international institutional partners	E, N, T
	No. of international co-operation events	E, N, T
	No. of artists involved	E, N, T
	No. of memberships in international networks	E, N, T
	No. of events on European themes	N, T
	No. of partner cities involved	T
Increased participation in culture	% support for EU integration	N
	No. of participants/visitors	E, N, T
	No. of participatory cultural products	E, N, T
Increased quality of existing cultural offer	No. of performers from the population	E
	No. and tone of press and media articles	E
	Qualitative evaluation by critics	E
Increased awareness of the (quality of) cultural offer	No. of innovative cultural products	N, T
	Satisfaction of the visitors/audience	E, N, T
	% people’s awareness of the European cultural diversity	T
	% people’s perception of the city as a cultural centre/ place for creativity	E, N, T
Improved opportunities for artists	Level of coverage of culture by media	E
	No. of artists involved	E, N, T
	No. of events	E, N, T
	No. of art works and productions produced	E, N, T
Improved capacity in the cultural sector	No. of permanent residencies for artists and cultural managers	E, N, T
	No. of trained cultural actors (cultural leaders, cultural managers)	N, T
	No. of public servants specialized in cultural impact assessment	T

	No. and effects of audience development programmes in all major cultural institutions	E
Language skills	No. of visitors to foreign language events	E
Intercultural skills	No. of visitors with a migration background	E
	No. of institutions working with migrants	E
Improved cultural and artistic activities in schools	Number of participating school students	E, N
	Number of events and initiatives	E, N, T
	Number of schools/public institutions involved	E, N, T
	Number of teachers involved	E
	Number of partnerships between local institutions	E

Source: authors' compilation following the monitoring plans of the three ECoCs (Esch-E, Novi Sad-N, Timișoara-T)

Several aspects differentiate the monitoring plans. Both Novi Sad and Timișoara plan to evaluate the European dimension in terms of number of events on European issues, among other indicators, and apparently it does not matter if the events are cultural or not. In the case of Esch, the European dimension is assessed by valuing European collaborations and networking, in terms of “institutions and independent artists active in European networks” (Esch-sur-Alzette 2022, 2017, p.16). For Novi Sad, an indicator for assessing the European dimension aims to measure the level of support for the European integration of Serbia. Esch is concerned with improving opportunities for young artists, while Novi Sad and Timișoara are interested in local artists, in general. Also, while Timișoara and Novi Sad are interested in training cultural managers and leaders, Esch envisages training programmes in audience development and intercultural skills in cultural institutions and improved language skills and openness for foreign language events. Moreover, Esch specifically aims to measure, as separate cultural impacts, the increase of cultural education for young people, as well as cultural and artistic activities in schools. Timișoara also measures the number of schools participating in culture. Novi Sad mentions young people as a specific target group for measuring social impacts and European dimension (“participants in exchange programmes”).

Table 4. ECoC social impacts and indicators

Social Impacts	Evaluation Indicators	ECoC
Activated civil society	No. of volunteers	E, N, T
	No. of participants	E, N, T
	No. of new forms of participation in public affairs/ reinforced democratic citizenship	T

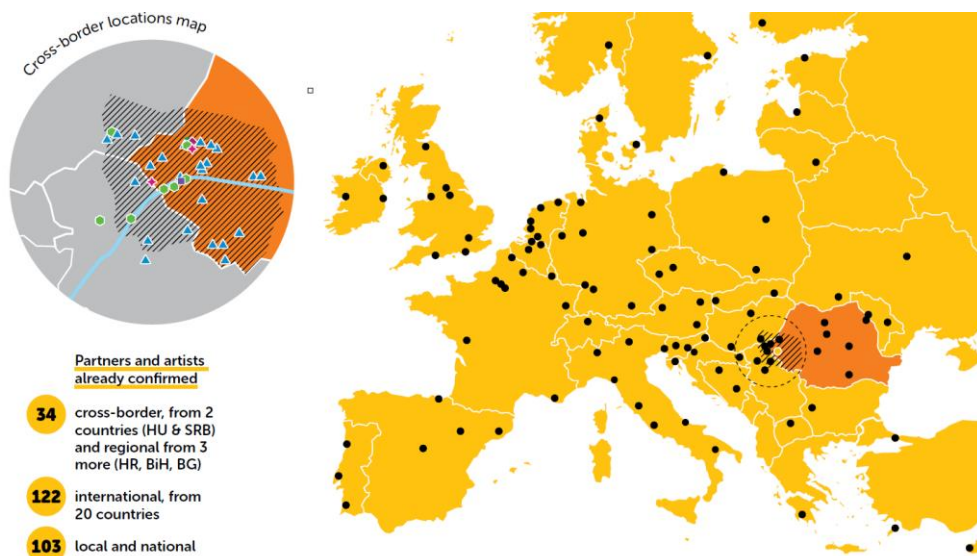
Widened social and cultural access and participation of diverse groups	No. of inclusive cultural products for diverse audiences, including marginalised and hard-to-reach ones	E, N, T
Increased interest in the social issues	No. of events reflecting problems in the local community	E, N, T
	‘Social’ social media analysis – number of users; content of posts	E
	No. of politicians involved	T
Increased civic pride	No. of citizens who are proud of their city/region	E, T
	Level of overall positive perception of ECoC by citizens	E, N, T
Closer regional cooperation between cultural operators	No. of shared initiatives	E
Increased Sense of community / strengthening cross-border links	No. of cross-border cultural products	T
	No. of visitors from beyond the border	E
	No. of participants in the projects from both countries	E
	No. of participants crossing the border for cultural activities	E

Source: authors’ compilation following the monitoring plans of the three ECoCs

There are two main differences in planning social impacts. The first one refers to audiences: Timișoara and Novi Sad consider widening audiences targeting different marginalised groups, starting with ethnic groups, while Esch is specifically targeting migrants. Secondly, the territory: the importance given to the surrounding region, as well as the valorisation of the border is different.

2.5. The cross-border dimension

The three cities do not have the same approach in terms of exploiting the cross-border positioning. Timișoara 2021 chose a regional and cross-border approach for the cultural programme development, including three geographically progressive circles having the city at their centre: the historical region of Banat (including regions from Hungary and Serbia), the DKMT Euroregion and the big league of Central and South-Eastern capital cities. They are presented as key pools for cultural partnerships (See Figure 1), not necessarily for attracting audiences. The significant Romanian diaspora originated from Banat is mentioned as the best possible ambassador for Timișoara 2021.

Figure 1. Timisoara 2021 and the cross-border dimension

Source: Timisoara 2021 Bid Book, 2016, p. 5.

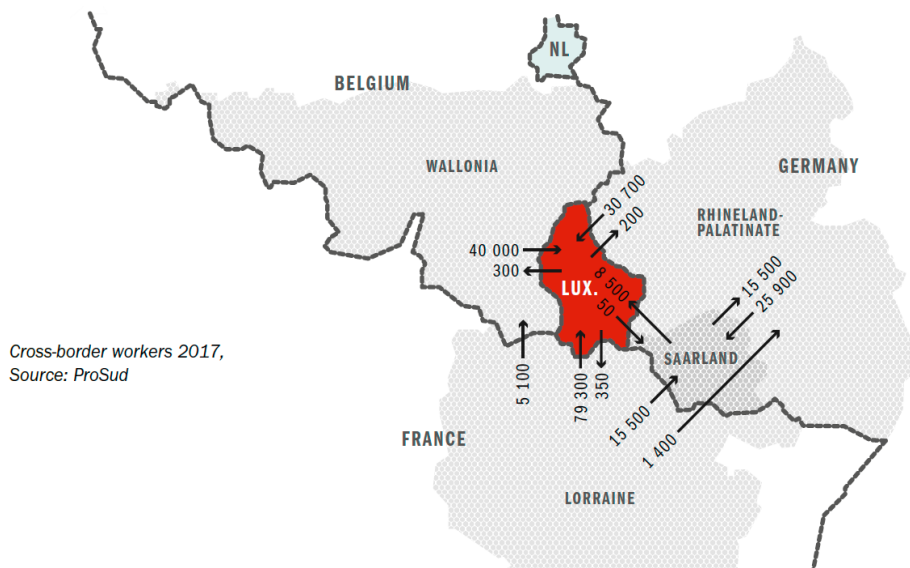
From a territorial perspective, Novi Sad's bid is less obviously placed in a cross-border rationale (Turşie, 2019). Its main focus is on involving ZONE 021, its suburban area and three partner municipalities, without a cross-border dimension; secondly, the former Yugoslavian countries (Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina) are targeted for attracting international audiences due to non-existent language barriers; finally, given the geographical proximity between Pecs 2010, Timișoara 2021, Novi Sad 2021 and other candidate cities (Arad 2021, Debrecen 2023, Mostar, Baja Luka 2024), Novi Sad speaks of this entire region as of an "ECoC area" (Novi Sad 2021, 2016, p. 13).

Esch placed its bid in the name of the so called "ECoC region", which is a cross-border area including eleven municipalities on Luxembourgish and eight on French territory, with a total population of almost 200,000.

The three cities do not place the same importance on planning the assessment of cross-border cooperation in their monitoring plans. Novi Sad and Timișoara generally aim to increase cultural cooperation at all levels (local, regional, national and international) and are probably using the term cross-border in a transnational perspective. Esch is specifically approaching the 'regional' and 'cross-border' cooperation referring to Southern Luxembourg region (*Pro Sud*) as well as cross-border French partners. In terms of regional cooperation, Esch clearly expresses preoccupations for the regional governance of culture, proposing to develop a regional cultural strategy for Southern Luxembourg. It also proposes indicators to

measure the cultural participation from neighbour countries by paying special attention to cross-border commuters as a target audience (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Esch-sur-Alzette 2022 and the cross-border dimension



Source: Esch-sur-Alzette Bid Book 2017, p.8.

Conclusions

Although ECoC is a key European cultural programme, there is a scarcity of comparative evaluations of the legacy and impact of this programme in the concerned cities. Common grounds are missing in terms of evaluation indicators, especially related to social and cultural impacts. Scholars progressively shifted their attention from the production-oriented measurements of the success of ECoC towards studies dedicated to social progress, wellbeing, community pride, community development and sustainable development. The challenging task of ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ (Putnam, 2000) is specifically relevant for the ECoC located in border regions, seen as laboratories for community building, social cohesion and for a proximity-based European integration. The paper investigates the available indicators and research methodologies for assessing ECoC impacts, with a focus on three case studies.

Along with the progressive formalisation of the ECoC programme, a type of cultural isomorphism, which was also observed in our case-studies, emerged. At the discursive level, we have generally found, similar preoccupations of Timișoara, Novi Sad and Esch-sur-Alzette in terms of: fostering the residents’ sense of pride and

belonging; citizens' participation; dealing with local social issues; attention paid to the local cultural scene; capacity building; local entrepreneurship in cultural and creative industries; converting industrial sites for culture and attracting external talents. Both Timisoara and Esch were pilot cities for Agenda 21 for Culture between 2016-2018 and on this basis, some of the commitments of the Agenda 21 were present in their Bid Books. In the case of Esch (which finalised its bid in 2017), fine tunes related to cultural governance, education and environment were observed: the proposal of a regional governance of culture, preoccupation for increasing audiences starting from kindergarten children and preoccupation for environmental impacts. Esch pays more attention to measuring the ECoC impacts from a regional and cross-border perspective, an aspect which differentiates it from both Timișoara and Novi Sad. Despite the heterogenous territorial contexts in which the ECoC programme is implemented, the cross-border cooperation, a rather neglected aspect of ECoC evaluation, could, to a higher extent, be exploited by cities and cultural stakeholders placed in border areas, as a meaningful expression of the European dimension. In order for this to happen, voluntarist public policies meant to consolidate the transformation of European borders into opportunities are necessary: assuring public transportation, eliminating the legal and administrative barriers to economic activities and managing language barriers. This agenda is in line with the latest orientations that the European Commission proposes to "Boosting growth and cohesion in EU border regions" (European Commission, 2017), which could benefit from the next structural funds programming period.

A limit of our research consists in the fact that our case studies are based on the monitoring and evaluation plans included in the bids, which are documents written six years prior to the title. While the official discursive engagement for culture-led long-term development planned in the bids may be an appealing one, it only partially conditions the cities' ability to pursue their objectives, not only until the implementation takes place but also after the ECoC regarding any strategy to install sustainability from the event, be it in social, cultural or economic terms. Moreover, the effects of the COVID-19 crisis, disrupting the implementation of the ECoC programmes, has led to several postponements: Timisoara will hold the title in 2023, while Esch-sur-Alzette and Novi Sad will share the title in 2022.

Acknowledgement: This research is developed within the framework of the "CECCUT" Jean Monnet Network sponsored by the Erasmus + Programme of the European Union (2018-2021) (<http://www.ceccut.eu/en/home/>). Reference number: 599614-EPP-1-2018-1-LU-EPPJMO-NETWORK.

References

- Bosredon, P. and Perrin, T. (2019), Lille 2004: effects and legacy, in: Schneider, W. and Jacobsen, K. (eds.), *Transforming Cities. Paradigms and Potentials of Urban Development within the “European Capital of Culture”*, Hildesheim: Georg Olms, pp. 165-177.
- Decoville, A., Durand, F. and Feltgen, V. (2015), *Opportunities of cross-border cooperation between small and medium cities in Europe*, LISER.
- Dessein, J., Soini, K., Fairclough, G. and Horlings, L. (2015), *Culture in, for and as Sustainable Development. Conclusions from the COST Action IS1007 Investigating Cultural Sustainability*, University of Jyväskylä.
- European Commission (2017), *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament*, Brussels, 20.9.2017, COM(2017) 534 final.
- Esch-sur-Alzette European Capital of Culture 2022 (2017), *Bid-Book* (retrieved from <https://www.esch2022.lu/sites/default/files/pdf/BidBook-Esch2022-ve.pdf>).
- European Commission (2018), *European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) 2020-2033. Guideline for the cities own evaluations of the results of their ECoC*, Brussels.
- Florida, R. (2002), *The rise of the Creative Class and how it’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday life*, New York: Basic Books.
- Garcia, B. (2004), Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration in Western European Cities: Lessons from Experience, Prospects for the Future, *Local Economy*, 19(4), pp. 312-326.
- Garcia, B. (2005), Deconstructing the City of Culture: The Long-term Cultural Legacies of Glasgow 1990, *Urban Studies*, 42(5-6), pp. 841-868.
- Garcia, B. and Cox, T. (2013), *European Capitals of Culture: Success Strategies and Long-term Effects*, Study requested by the European Parliament’s Committee on Culture and Education, Brussels.
- Grodach, C. and Loukaitou-Sideris, A. (2007), Cultural development strategies and urban revitalization, *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 13(4), pp. 1397-1418.
- Immler, N. and Sakkers, H. (2014), Re-Programming Europe: European Capitals of Culture: rethinking the role of culture, *Journal of European Studies*, 44(1), pp. 3-29.
- IMPACTS 08 (2010), *Creating an impact. Liverpool’s experience as European Capital of Culture*, Report.
- Lähdesmäki, T. (2014), *Identity Politics in the European Capital of Culture Initiative*, Publications of the University of Eastern Finland, Dissertations in Social Sciences and Business Studies, nr. 84.
- Leloup, F. and Perrin, T. (2017), La culture objet de coopération : de la marge frontalière au talus transfrontalier, in: Moullé, F. (ed.), *Frontières*, Bordeaux: Presses universitaires de Bordeaux, pp. 267-287.

- Kangas A., Duxbury N. and De Beukelaer, C. (eds.) (2017), *Cultural Policies for Sustainable Development, International Journal of Cultural Policy*, special issue 23(2), pp. 214-230.
- Liu, Y.-D. (2017a), Event and Community Development: Planning Legacy for the 2008 European Capital of Culture, Liverpool, *Urban Science*, 1(4), pp. 1-9.
- Liu, Y.-D. (2017b), Quality of Life as Event Legacy: an Evaluation of Liverpool as the 2008 European Capital of Culture, *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, Springer International Society for Quality-of-Life Studies, 12(3), pp. 653-670.
- Malcom, M. (2005), Interruptions: Testing the Rhetoric of Culturally Led Urban Development, *Urban Studies*, 42(5-6), pp. 889-911.
- Novi Sad European Capital of Culture 2021 (2016), *Bid-Book* (retrieved from novisad2021.rs/en/bidbook/).
- Palmer/Rae Associates (2004), *European Cities and Capitals of Culture - City Reports*, Study prepared for the European Commission, Part. I.
- Perić, M. (2018), Estimating the Perceived Socio-Economic Impacts of Hosting Large-Scale Sport Tourism Events, *Social Sciences*, 7(176), pp.1-18.
- Perrin, T. (2010), Culture et identité dans la Grande Région. Les actions et représentations culturelles à l'épreuve du transfrontalier. *Questions de communication*, 12(2011) série Actes, Presses universitaires de Nancy, pp. 107-120.
- Perrin, T. (2015), Creative Regions on a European Cross-Border Scale: Policy Issues and Development Perspectives, *European Planning Studies*, 23(12), pp. 2423-2437.
- Podadera R. P. and Calderón, V. F. (2019), Rethinking the territorial cohesion in the EU: institutional and functional elements of the concept, *Eastern Journal of European Studies*, 10(2), pp. 41-62.
- Putnam, R.D. (2000), *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Quinn, E. (2009), The European Cultural Capital and cultural legacy: an analysis of the cultural sector in the aftermath of Cork 2005, *Event management*, 13(4), pp. 249-264.
- Sacco, P.L. and Blessi G.T. (2005), European Culture Capitals and Local Development Strategies: Comparing the Genoa and Lille 2004 Cases (retrieved from http://neumann.hec.ca/aimac2005/PDF_Text/Sacco_TavanoBlessi.pdf).
- Sacco, P.L., Blessi, G.T. and Nuccio, M., (2013), Culture as an Engine of Local Development Processes: System-Wide Cultural Districts I: Theory, *Growth and Change*, 44(4), pp. 555-570.
- Sacco, P.L., Ferilli, G. and Blessi T. (2014), Understanding culture-led local development: A critique of alternative theoretical explanations, *Urban Studies*, 51(13), pp. 2806-2821.
- Sassatelli, M. (2009), *Becoming Europeans. Cultural identities and cultural policies*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Scott, A.J. (2006), Creative cities: conceptual issues and policy questions, *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 28(1), pp. 1-17.

- Timișoara European Capital of Culture 2021 (2016), *Bid-Book* (retrieved from http://www.timisoara2021.ro/wpcontent/uploads/2016/08/Bidbook_EN_digital_secure.pdf).
- Turșie, C. (2015a), Re-inventing the centre-periphery relation by the European capitals of culture: case-studies: Marseille-Provence 2013 and Pecs 2010, *Eurotimes*, 19, pp. 71-84.
- Turșie, C. (2015b), The unwanted Past and Urban Regeneration of Communist Heritage Cities, *Journal of Education, Culture, and Society*, 6(2), pp. 122-138.
- Turșie, C. (2019), A la recherche de récits d'identité du lieu dans une logique transfrontalière. Etude de cas sur les Capitales Européennes de la Culture pour l'année 2021, *Eurotimes*, 27(27-28), pp. 201-208.
- Throsby, D. (1999), Cultural capital, *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 23(1-2), pp. 3-12.
- UNESCO (2005), *The 2005 Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*.
- United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) (2004), *Agenda 21 for culture*, Barcelona.
- United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) (2015), *Agenda 21: Actions. Commitments on the role of culture in sustainable cities*.