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Portugal hosted in the last twelve years, two editions of the event European Cultural Capital; this paper intends, first, to illustrate the coverage that Portuguese newspapers made to each of the events and on the other hand, to challenge this media construction with the perceptions of the local event managers, two of the communicative dimensions that contributed to its construction. We want to make a confrontation between the 'voices' that shaped the events and then reflect to what extent these cities embrace cultural policy as a route to urban transformation.

The EU Council of Ministers of Culture elects, from year to year, cities of different EU member states to become European Cultural Capital, "contributing to bring together the Europe's people" (words of Mélina Mercouri, Greek Minister of Culture who, in 1985, proposed the launch of this initiative) and encouraging the elected urban space to present new cultural paradigms. In the genesis of this model is the cultural decentralization's vector, a possibility to medium-sized cities of funding public works, restoring heritage and promoting themselves in touristic terms, of giving visibility to cities away from cultural and creative industries' major distribution centers.

Although there is EU funding, it is the local government that plays a key role both in financing and managing such events. The application itself to the title of European Cultural Capital is the responsibility of local authorities. It is they who determine the event management's model and accompany all the implementation steps.

From the content analysis to front page stories of all editions of four daily newspapers (Público, Diário de Notícias, Jornal de Notícias and Correio da Manhã), a weekly newspaper (Expresso) and a weekly magazine (Visão) throughout 2001 and 2012 and from interviews to local policy-makers and cultural managers, it is possible to discuss public and official narratives. From that we are able to define the steps that marked the different moments of each of the events, patterns of action, the major players, planning and programming types.

Through newspapers analysis, it is intended to examine the role that this traditional media has in building the event perception and in the symbolic and material existence of each of the cities. Newspapers merely discloses the events' schedule or instead they question the role that cities, promoting such initiatives, should have as places of innovation in terms of cultural policies, artistic production and innovation, in urban and environmental regeneration, in economic revitalization, in training and creating new artists and new audiences and in boosting the confidence of local communities.

Newspapers, responsible for social construction of reality, add shaping the impact these cultural events have on cities' image, envisaged in local terms, but also in national terms, by stimulating consumption among residents and attracting visitors. This paper's aim is to confront the media's role, through news values, with the local government's strategy in promoting the cities of Porto and Guimarães as cultural destinations.

*Keywords:* newspaper coverage, cultural events, cultural destinations