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Fashioning a city of culture: 'life and place changing' or '12 month party'?

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FASHIONING A CITY OF CULTURE: 'LIFE AND PLACE CHANGING' OR '12 MONTH PARTY'?

1. Introduction

In 2004 Iowa's Director of Cultural Affairs proclaimed "culture is no longer a frill. It is economic fuel" (cited in Malanga, 2004, p. 3); a decade later culture transmogrifies further into a "force for dialogue, tolerance and social cohesion" (British Council, 2014, p. 3). This reflects the trend in public policy to valorise culture as a tool for social, economic and political transformation. An interesting lens to explore such issues is the cultural fashioning of the city, and an instructive example is the highly prized European Capital of Culture (ECoC)¹. Such is its perceived success the cultural capital concept has 'proliferated around the world' (Ooi et al., 2014). The Liverpool model is one of the most celebrated and provided the inspiration for the UK Government to introduce its own City of Culture (CoC)² Programme (DCMS, 2013). This paper presents an in depth investigation of Derry~Londonderry (D~L) as the inaugural UK CoC, with particular reference to whether it was genuinely 'life and place changing'. The structure of the paper is as follows. The first section explains the research method; then the literature review sets up the conceptual framework for the paper; the main empirical section analyses D~L UK CoC 2013; the final section discusses the lessons for future cities of culture. To date, analysts have tended to focus on the socio-economic legacy of cultural events. We offer a broader canvas to debates on cities of culture; our contribution to knowledge lies in the development of a new trajectory for cultural research examining culture as a resource for peace and reconciliation in a segregated society.

2. Research method

We chose to study D~L for two reasons. First, as the UK's first ever CoC it was important that independent researchers undertook a detailed analysis to complement official reports from vested local interests (e.g. Derry City Council, Culture Company, Ilex Regeneration Company). Second, D~L is a unique city dealing with the fallout from thirty years of violent conflict, contested cultural identities, social and spatial division, and severe socio-economic problems. Given this, the implementation of a major cultural event in a culturally divided city warranted academic attention, especially with regard to testing the contention that culture can play a positive role in

¹ Funded by the European Commission to the sum of €1.5 million. During this annual event host cities develop their cultural infrastructure, showcase their cultural talents and attract cultural tourists. It is designed to enhance the 'development of cities', raise their 'international profile', celebrate the 'richness and diversity' of cultures in Europe and link local culture to a 'common European cultural identity' (European Commission, 2014).

² CoC aims to increase media interest in the host city, stimulate tourism, bring community members together and facilitate professional artistic collaboration on creative projects (DCMS, 2013, 2015). Where CoC differs from ECoC is that there is no public funding attached to the award, it occurs once every four years and smaller spatial areas are eligible.

conflict transformation. Selection of respondents was shaped by three criteria. First, we spoke with elite organisations involved in designing and delivering CoC. Second, we wanted to record the opinions of those often marginalised in official discourses of cities of culture. Third, adopting an interpretivist epistemology (Bryman, 2012; Hay, 2011) necessitated capturing divergent voices to enable triangulation of different experiences and realities of those involved in and affected by CoC. Between October 2013 and July 2015 we conducted 55 semi-structured interviews with influential stakeholders³, plus third sector agencies, tourist operators, cultural, community and voluntary organisations, arts groups, cultural performers, artists and educationalists. We also conducted 4 focus groups with residents (ranging between 10 and 14 in number, and 18 to 70 in age) in two working class Catholic and Protestant areas. These interviews and focus groups aimed to uncover levels of engagement with CoC; understandings of culture; cross-community relations; insights into the economy and jobs; image and tourism; and impact and legacy. The fieldwork was supplemented by secondary sources, for example bid document, legacy plans and evaluation reports; official statistics on demography, employment, tourism and event attendance; plus journalism pieces and Internet commentaries. The findings generated an expansive account of CoC avoiding accusations of being ‘un-theoretically anecdotal’, ‘descriptively uncritical’ or ‘highly critical’ (Evans, 2005; Ooi et al., 2014).

3. European Capitals of Culture: themes for research

Griffiths et al. (2003, p. 154) note the “heightened strategic significance attached to the field of culture”. This is evidenced by significant strategizing on cultural policies and cultural events (Garcia, 2004; Griffiths, 2006; Stevenson et al., 2010). For Colomb (2011, p. 79) “culture, since the 1980s, has played an increasing role in strategies of urban regeneration and local economic development”. The dominant trope is that cultural initiatives attract tourists, investment and jobs (Miles and Paddison, 2005; Pratt, 2010, 2011; Stevenson, 2004). This “transformation of culture into an economic resource” (Tretter, 2009, p. 112) is encapsulated in the prioritisation of the cultural and creative industries (Amin and Thrift, 2007; Castree, 2004; Miller, 2008; Pratt, 2014). Over time the *curing qualities of culture* - “antidote to an ever-broadening range of social, economic and political problems” (Gibson and Stevenson, 2004, p. 2) - have widened. First, ECoC morphed from a cultural initiative to one that is intrinsically economic (Immler and Sackers, 2014; Lähdesmäki, 2014a; O’Callaghan, 2012; Richards, 2000). The European Commission (2014, p. 4) notes that in the 1980s ECoC was “a celebration of arts in the city...Since the 1990s there has been a major growth in the awareness of the role of culture in the...prosperity of a city”. Second, the latest assertion is that cultural policies can achieve conflict transformation (British Council, 2012; UNESCO/UNDP, 2013; World Cities Culture Forum, 2013). The British Council (2014,

³ For example, Derry City Council, Culture Company, Ilex Regeneration Company, Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Police Service of Northern Ireland, elected councillors and three former mayors of the city.

pp. 3-4) argues “culture has a role in bringing people together, even those with very different world views” so that “countries emerge and recover from periods of conflict”. These *transformative powers* attributed to culture – economy and peace – form the analytic foundation of this paper.

ECoC is eagerly sought after due to its brand status, and ability to re-image the city and drive economic growth (Fitjar et al., 2013; Immler and Sakkers, 2014; Lähdesmäki, 2013, 2014b; Ooi et al., 2014; Richards and Wilson, 2004; Sykes, 2011). Since its inception in 1985 some 60 cities across the European continent have held the title. Synthesising studies of ECoC is however ‘far from straightforward’ (Németh, 2015) so we considered the most relevant analyses and extrapolated research themes to guide the empirical study. The first point to make is that host cities adopt a broad view of culture (problematically aligned to Williams’, 1993, notion of culture as a ‘way of life’) with local organisers utilising “a wide anthropological definition of culture...[with] something for everyone” (Palmer/RAE Associates, 2004, p. 16). Given D~L’s contested cultural history and conflictual cultural identities the first research theme was *to examine how culture was conceptualised and operationalised during 2013*.

Evidence shows ECoC enhances cities’ images and increases tourism: e.g. Lille (Paris and Baert, 2011), Istanbul (Gunay, 2010), Dublin (Clohessy, 1994), Bergen (Sjøholt, 1999), Porto (Balsas, 2004), Rotterdam (Richards and Wilson, 2004), Marseille (Andres, 2011). Glasgow (Garcia, 2005) and Liverpool (Cox and O’Brien, 2012) are celebrated examples of cities overcoming negative perceptions of people and place. Glasgow “is no longer associated with its past stereotypes, but a vibrant atmosphere that people want to visit and live in” (Tucker, 2008, p. 30); Liverpool enjoyed “a remarkable image renaissance locally, nationally and internationally” (Garcia et al., 2010, p. 63). A related issue concerns creating a ‘feel good factor’ (Lähdesmäki, 2013; Paris and Baert, 2011) as local people become enthused their city was staging a showcase event. On this, Ooi et al. (2014) refer to the ‘poetics of ECoC’, while Collins (2016) speaks of the emotional geographies of ‘civic pride’. Like Liverpool and Glasgow, D~L suffered from an image problem and pessimistic civic mentality so the second research theme was *to analyse the extent to which CoC improved external perceptions of and internal emotions in the city*.

Then there is ‘the politics of ECoC’ (Ooi et al., 2014) as “the ECoC years...have caused tension, severe debate, objection and even counter-movements in several cities” (Lähdesmäki, 2013, p. 600). O’Callaghan (2012, p. 186) argues “host cities have been increasingly criticised for failing to enable local cultural ownership”. This generates criticism amongst civil society, arts and cultural groups regarding community inclusivity, financial processes, decision making and programme management. For example, Turku (Lähdesmäki, 2013), Pécs (Németh, 2015), Liverpool (Boland, 2010; O’Brien, 2011), Glasgow (Boyle, 1997; Boyle and Hughes, 1994), Istanbul (Gunay, 2010) and Cork (O’Callaghan and Linehan, 2007; O’Callaghan, 2012). Then there is tension between a spectacularised official culture commodified to a global tourist audience

and more rooted cultural realities. In Cork, Glasgow and Liverpool this created a 'cultural politics of place' towards elements of the programme and its implementation. Given that D~L is a highly politicised society the third research theme was *to examine local reactions to the events programme and its implementation*.

Legacy⁴ is "meant to have long-term effects on the cultural, social and economic development of the city" (Németh, 2015, pp. 5-6). In the intense competition to secure ECoC there is a determination to out-bid rival cities which inevitably involves inflating the anticipated impact of the event (Garcia and Cox, 2013; Lähdesmäki, 2014b; Sjøholt, 1999). However, "host cities have been increasingly criticised for failing to...overcome real social divides" (Lähdesmäki, 2013, p. 600). Studies show questionable evidence of substantial job opportunities for disadvantaged local people, and enduring polarisation long after the event (e.g. Cork, Glasgow and Liverpool). So there is a "discrepancy between early promises and actual effects" (Ooi et al., 2014, p. 423). Leading to a disconnect between the 'myth/rhetoric' of success and 'ambivalent legacies' and 'authentic lived realities' revealed in concentrations of unemployment, poverty and multiple deprivation (Boland, 2010; Mooney, 2004). For O'Callaghan (2012, p. 199) *ex post* evaluations present an "unrealistic representation of the impact of the event [on]...alleviating social inequality". Therefore, claims that ECoC fuels long-term socio-economic transformation are subject to scrutiny (Garcia and Cox, 2013). Given that D~L performs poorly on a range of socio-economic indicators a final research theme was *to examine the impact and legacy of CoC*.

To summarise, four research themes will be used to structure our analysis of D~L. One, how culture was conceptualised and operationalised during 2013; two, the extent to which CoC improved external perceptions of and internal emotions in the city; three, local reactions to the events programme and its implementation; four, the impact and legacy of CoC. We now move on to the theoretically informed empirical study of D~L.

4. Case description: political geographies of a (divided) city of culture

Following centuries of colonialism, plantation and uprisings in 1921 Ireland was partitioned, creating the six counties of Northern Ireland⁵ divided along religious, cultural and identity lines (Aughey, 2005). In broad terms one community regard themselves as religiously Protestant (48%), culturally British and politically Unionist or Loyalist, the other Catholic (45%), Irish and Nationalist or Republican (NISRA, 2011). These conflictual senses of identity and sovereignty led to 'the Troubles'⁶ that

⁴ Garcia and Cox (2013) distinguish between *aspirational* impact and *actual* impact, and between impact during the cultural year and the long-term.

⁵ Antrim, Armagh, Derry, Down, Fermanagh and Tyrone.

⁶ Ethno-sectarian violence conducted by Republican (e.g. IRA, INLA) and Loyalist (e.g. UDA, UVF) paramilitaries; the former seeking a united Irish Republic, the latter defending Northern Ireland's British status.

afflicted the country over 30 years during which 3,600 people were killed. In fact, the advent of the 'the Troubles' can be traced to D~L⁷ with regard to the Civil Rights Movement⁸ (Byrne, 2015). One manifestation of the conflict was socio-spatial segregation due to violence and a reduction in inter-community socialising, education, work and wider habituation (Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006).

D~L is the second largest city in the country with a population of 109,150 and is overwhelmingly Catholic⁹ (Murtagh et al., 2008; Shirlow et al., 2005). Like other cities, towns and villages across Northern Ireland in D~L conflictual identities have dramatic political geographies. The most vivid spatial expression is the River Foyle separating the Catholic majority on the Cityside (or West Bank) and the Protestant minority on the Waterside (East Bank)¹⁰. The city's history was marred by an acutely contested politics of place resulting in gruesome atrocities such as Bloody Sunday¹¹, and mass social movement in the exodus of 90% of the Cityside's Protestant population (Byrne, 2015; Cohen, 2007; Dawson, 2005; McSheffrey, 2000; Ó Dochartaigh, 2010). Over time D~L's association with 'the Troubles' fed an image problem and so was not an obvious choice as a city of culture. Despite such external renditions our respondents offered an alternative reading. D~L is a city with a rich cultural heritage, stimulating cultural history, dynamic cultural scene and stunning cultural artefacts. Therefore, for those preparing the bid D~L had a legitimate case to host UK CoC.

In addition, unlike Belfast, D/L had emerged from 'the Troubles' some years before the 1998 Good Friday Agreement¹² and paramilitary ceasefires. This can be attributed to the fact that the "Catholic community has nothing to fear and, acting as a generous majority, has experienced a reciprocity of trust [from Protestants]" (Nolan, 2014, p. 124). Then there was the hugely significant Saville Report into Bloody Sunday. This controversial incident hung like a dark cloud over the city for decades; however, June 15th 2010 the UK Government formally apologises for the actions of the British State which "changed the political weather in the city" (Nolan, 2014, p. 123). In this calmer climate Catholics, Nationalists and Republicans became more amenable to hosting a UK cultural event. This is evidenced by Sinn Féin, an Irish Republican political party, supporting the application to be 'UK' CoC. Exactly one month later it was announced

⁷ Historically known in Irish as *Doire*, Anglicised to Derry. In 1613 following the Plantation of Ulster by Scottish and English settlers it was renamed Londonderry because guilds and liveries from the City of London financed the construction of the city's historic walls.

⁸ Seeking to end discrimination towards the Catholic minority, especially in housing, employment and political office.

⁹ 2011 Census shows 74.83% of local people were Catholic, 22.34% Protestant (NISRA, 2011).

¹⁰ Waterside has a Protestant majority of 52% compared to 44% Catholic, Cityside is overwhelmingly Catholic – over 80% in every electoral ward (NISRA, 2011).

¹¹ On 30th January 1972 in the Bogside British paratroopers massacred 14 unarmed civilians during a peaceful Nationalist civil rights march.

¹² Agreement between the British and Irish Governments, and the main political parties in Northern Ireland, paving the path for peace and a political solution to the conflict.

that D~L would host UK CoC 2013; for seasoned commentators and local people securing CoC was a direct response to Saville.

Most local people refer to the city as Derry, although the Unionist political class and elements of the Protestant community use Londonderry to reflect their British identity¹³ (Murtagh et al., 2008; Shirlow et al., 2005). The documentation and promotion for CoC provided a 'grammatical link'¹⁴ between the two communities to avoid accusations of preference and attract cross-community support (Nolan, 2014; also Gordon-Nesbitt, 2013). Initially this did not prevent controversy. For example, 'Dissident' Republicans opposed to the peace process and any connection with the UK left (non-fatal) bombs at City Council and Culture Company offices (they were subsequently seen enjoying CoC events with their families). Then, Unionist politicians complained about dropping of the UK prefix in some literature and official speeches, and more recently a Council motion intending to change the official name of the city from Londonderry to Derry (Londonderry Sentinel, 2015). Such actions, they claimed, denigrate the Protestant community's Britishness and Northern Ireland's constitutional position within the Union. However, for our interviewees the naming of the city 'had been parked'; indeed, it had become a 'boring non-issue' with locals referring to the city as they chose¹⁵. They also reported local people embraced the neutralising moniker of *LegenDerry* capturing positive aspects of the city's liveliness and eschewing the duality of the city's name:

"The *LegenDerry* nickname was seized upon by the cultural industry and branding/marketing experts who understood the political sensitivities of the town. It was also recognised by the political elite as a golden opportunity to unofficially settle a disputed name" (McDermott et al., 2016, p. 615).

5. Derry~Londonderry 2013: 'life and place changing'

5.1 *Step changes: economic and peace resource*

CoC was to be "life and place changing" as culture would "emerge as a transformative engine" driving economic prosperity and job creation, improving life chances, instilling confidence, enhancing good relations, and facilitating peace and reconciliation (Derry City Council, 2010, pp. 2, 11, 14, 16). This added a new dimension to the rationale of cities of culture. Previously culture was interpreted as an 'economic resource' but in D~L it was also recognised as a *peace resource*. On this, Nolan (2014, p. 12) refers to "a different possibility - culture as a means to overcome division". The Independent Advisory Panel awarding CoC "recognised the potential of the community benefits including helping heal past wounds" (Londonderry Sentinel, 2010). Phil Redmond, the panel chair, talked of a "badge to bring people together...If

¹³ Comedically known as 'stroke city' (Derry/Londonderry).

¹⁴ Official literature used a hyphen (Derry-Londonderry) or curlicue (Derry~Londonderry).

¹⁵ See www.youtube.com/watch?v=RAdeXkZZLiU

that is not the role of culture, I don't know what is" (cited in Nolan, 2014, p. 121). While local elites saw CoC "as a starting point for exploring how communities, fractured by decades of conflict, could co-exist in an environment of...good relations" (Gordon-Nesbitt, 2013, p. 26). Significantly, during the 70s-80s-90s cultural antagonisms were the *cause* of the conflict, whereas in 2013 cultural expression was perceived as *curative*. In addition to peace and reconciliation respondents spoke of the potential for economic change; a Culture Company representative affirmed: "Culture always was a tool for building the economy and peace" (interview, 2015). Given this, D~L represents an important case to critically examine culture as an economic *and* peace resource.

5.2. *Research theme #1: conceptualising culture*

Given the city's divisions the Culture Company articulated a non-prescriptive conceptualisation of culture. Our respondents highlighted the inclusivity towards D~L's different communities; a local tourist operator explained: "The broadness of the concept of culture was deliberate; it was designed to produce inclusiveness. Culture had to be everything; that was necessary" (interview, 2015). An open definition moved away from the enervating 'culture of 'the Troubles'' and narrow separatism of 'Orange and Green'¹⁶ (Graham, 2002); a cultural activist explained: "Culture seems to be everything; it is de-historicising the conflict in a way" (interview, 2013). However, a gallery curator expressed unease with the 'culture is everything' approach (following Stevenson, 2004); in lacking specificity it diluted the essential criticality of culture:

"To drink tea is a part of culture but in terms of what's interesting about facets of culture, and productive, and critical, for us, like that broad idea of culture and supporting and funding culture in the broadest sense is not very interesting...Then you denude the whole point of culture" (interview, 2013).

5.3 *Research theme #2: the 'poetics of CoC'*

During 2013 "many celebrated the perceived opportunity to raise the profile of the city" (McDermott et al., 2016, p. 612). The intention was to construct a 'new narrative/story' with 'positive presentations' of the city (Derry City Council, 2010; Derry City and Strabane District Council, 2016). Following high profile events - e.g. Radio One Big Weekend¹⁷, Lumiere Light Festival¹⁸, Return of Colmcille¹⁹, Fleadh²⁰,

¹⁶ The former reflects Protestants' historical and contemporary identity roots (e.g. King William of Orange and the Orange Institutions), while the latter symbolises Irish Catholicism and nationalism.

¹⁷ Live music event featuring high profile rock and pop performers.

¹⁸ Numerous light sculptures were installed across many of the city's buildings.

¹⁹ Colmcille/Columba is the patron saint of Derry; he has resonance to both Catholics and Protestants so can be a 'contested figure' (McDermott et al., 2016).

²⁰ Fleadh Cheoil is the largest Irish music competition run by the Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (Society of the Musicians of Ireland).

Turner Prize²¹ - "the city became the focus of positive national and international media coverage" (McDaid, 2015, np). As such, CoC "had a very positive effect on the external image of the city as a place to visit" (Derry City and Strabane District Council, 2016, p. 4; Ilex, 2014). A local politician informed: "It has changed outsiders' views of the city" (interview, 2014); for a Council official: "Primarily 2013 this year has just been a big marketing exercise...It's been about changing that black and white image of conflict" (interview, 2013); a community engagement officer emoted: "We've been so starved and kept down here...we wanted this vehicle just to show people that we're not all horrible" (interview, 2014). A previous mayor elaborated:

"We do have an image problem in Northern Ireland and specifically here in our city, that people would think about the city not being somewhere that's safe to stay in because of 'the Troubles'...So you're trying to change the mindset of people...to seeing us as a go-to city for a nice weekend break and a nice time away with family and friends" (interview, 2013).

An improved city image generated "a bonanza year for local hotels, smashing previous monthly records" (Derry City Council, 2013a, p. 7). During 2013 there were 254,314 trips and 936,198 bed nights generating £46.6 million spend; the respective figures for 2012 were 164,264, 704,041 and £26.7 million (NITB, 2013). Between 2012 and 2013 hotel occupancy rose from 61% to 66%, decreased in 2014 and returned to 2012 levels of 62% in 2015 (Derry City and Strabane District Council, 2016; Ilex, 2014). Specific events stood out. The Fleadh attracted 430,000 people during eight days which is the highest attendance in the event's history (Derry Journal, 2013a); 40,000 flocked to three days of Radio One Big Weekend (UTV, 2013); Lumiere Light Festival attracted 180,000 over four nights (BBC NI, 2013a); Return of Colmcille attracted 40,000 over two days (McDermott et al., 2016) and the Turner Prize attracted 60,000 (Tate, 2014). Visitor numbers tailed off in 2014 with trips down -9%, nights -13% and spend -15% (Tourism Northern Ireland, 2014); as elsewhere, maintaining increased tourist numbers beyond the spike year is difficult.

Historically D~L suffered from a 'whining and whinging' mentality and a 'second city syndrome' vis-à-vis Belfast; a councillor explained: "There's always going to be somebody complaining. There is this culture that everybody's a victim" (interview, 2015). However, 'the poetics of CoC' (after Ooi et al., 2014) replaced pessimism with optimism and 'civic pride' (after Collins, 2016). Respondents cited important coups: the first city north of the border to hold the Fleadh, the first time the world famous Turner Prize had been held outside England. These became important signifiers that, in tandem with showcase events, "had given the people of Derry a pride in their city and confidence in their civic leaders" (Derry City and Strabane District Council, 2015, p. 2). Another gallery curator revealed: "The point about confidence is key. Derry has

²¹ Aims to bring contemporary art to as wide an audience as possible.

most definitely overcome the 'second city syndrome'; how proud locals were of this place...It was incredible, the energy and enthusiasm" (interview, 2014). On this, Nolan (2014, p. 124) refers to "the civic pride shared by all residents. This superordinate identity allowed partisan concerns to be trumped by a shared celebration of place". Linking to the literature, another former mayor explained:

"I think we have changed the image of the city massively, and most importantly we've changed how we look at the city. In the very early days people were saying "Oh we could never do it, we'd make a big mess of that, you know, what would Derry know about that, how could we ever pull that off?" If you said to somebody now, you can't have this massive event or this massive concert, they'd say we can, and we're going to deliver it" (interview, 2015).

We were also informed CoC brought divided communities together. The most prominent example was Ebrington Square as a site for numerous events. Its political significance (former British army barracks) and geographical location (on the Waterside) rendered it a contentious space for Catholics. However, in 2011 the Peace Bridge over the River Foyle reconnected the West and East Banks after decades of physical and psychological separation (Ilex, 2011). This enabled residents from the Cityside to walk the short distance to Ebrington. Thus, the river became "a route rather than barrier - a place where events occur rather than a liminal space between two sides of the city" (McDermott et al., 2016, p. 616). Then Ebrington was rebranded a 'neutral and depoliticised space'; a community worker explained: "The main concern about Ebrington was making sure it was open to both communities" (interview, 2015). Clearly Catholic views changed as previously virtually nobody would have considered any cultural encounter at Ebrington whereas during 2013 large numbers of individuals from both communities enjoyed events in this space. This unprecedented scale of community mixing had a significant emotional affect (after Collins, 2016); an arts professional revealed: "This translated into a real cohesiveness and a sense of unity" (interview, 2014). A senior Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) official stated:

"Ebrington is the opening up of that former military site, and the creation of a huge public space...People I think now regard the city as a shared space. I mean I'm not that naïve as to think that that's the problem sorted or resolved, but these are very positive, progressive steps, and if you sort of turn the clock back 5-10 years ago, who would have imagined that that could happen" (interview, 2013).

Then there was cross-community engagement in other venues across the city; for example, the Nerve Centre and Gasyard Centre²² actively involve people from both communities. Other examples include a Loyalist flute band performing at the Fleadh, Catholics attending the Walled City Tattoo²³, Police Service of Northern Ireland pipe band applauded in Guildhall Square and flute bands attending a play about their music at an Irish language and culture centre (Derry City and Strabane District Council, 2016; Nolan, 2014). Previously such cross-community interaction would have been unimaginable; however, in 2013 an arts provider informed us: “This lead to just normal, cultural, social, civic contact” (interview, 2014). During the Council’s Culture Committee discussion of the Fleadh a Sinn Féin councillor stated: “It is important to recognise the significant positive community relations which the event had generated”; a Democratic Unionist Party²⁴ councillor acknowledged: “The active engagement of all sectors of the community” (Derry City and Strabane District Council, 2015, pp. 4-5). As such, CoC enabled people to experience arts and culture without reference to other people’s traditions thereby “significantly enhancing community relations” (Ilex, 2014, p. 23). On this, the official Post Project Evaluation (PPE) states:

“One of the greatest success stories of the CoC programme was the community engagement developed by the Culture Company. It brought cultural activity into the heart of communities and neighbourhoods and removed all obstacles to participation” (Derry City and Strabane District Council, 2016, p. 55).

Related to this was the cross-cutting theme of Edge to Centre in empowering and including people at the margins of society. Eamon McCann, a local political commentator, argues “the biggest impacts were, naturally, made by events which called for mass involvement and created a sense of communal joy” (cited in Nolan, 2014, p. 122). The PPE points to ‘exceptionally high’ levels of attendance during 2013; for example, 81% of all residents and 83% of residents living in the top 10% most deprived parts of the city attended an event “illustrating the inclusivity of the CoC programme of events” (Derry City and Strabane District Council, 2016, p. 25; Ilex, 2014). A poet/writer argued: “There were definitely events last year which made an effort to get people from the edges involved, and took the events to the edges” (interview, 2013). A representative from the BME communities stated: “CoC gave the opportunity for everyone to participate...For some people it was just easy to hide in the crowd as well, so people felt more at ease to participate” (interview, 2015). A respondent from the LGBT community who also works with young people explained:

²² The former is a creative media arts centre, the latter offers a range of cultural/community development facilities.

²³ With its militaristic links to music, performance and dance this event is historically attended by the Protestant community.

²⁴ Major Unionist political party in Northern Ireland supported by the Protestant community.

“I was very heavily involved in [Foyle] Pride²⁵ that year...we were able to actually access a lot of funding so that we could put on events...In terms of young people as well that I work with there were a lot of opportunities” (interview, 2014). Finally, an artist/curator spoke about democratising access to culture:

“We had decided well in advance that what we needed to do, and it ties into that Edge to Centre approach, we needed to take the work that we do inside the gallery space out into the streets...The ethos was to do away with any elitist notions that are associated with contemporary art, and that we would always aim to work with people that wouldn’t ordinarily have that art gallery experience” (interview, 2014).

5.4 Research theme #3: the ‘politics of CoC’

We also encountered an, admittedly less pervasive, negative narrative. First, debilitating tensions between Derry City Council and the Culture Company were played out very publicly in the media (BBC NI, 2013b; BBC Radio Foyle, 21st and 22nd October 2013; Derry Journal, 2013b; Londonderry Sentinel, 2013). This arose from unclear responsibilities between the Council and Culture Company, poor levels of communication and personality clashes between those running both institutions. For interviewees this contested governance hindered the effective implementation of CoC, and portrayed a poor image of the city. Then there were criticisms of the excessive bureaucracy of the funding process; a local artist echoed a wider unease with the obsession with short-term targets: “Artists. It’s mañana, mañana. For us that’s been the most excruciating thing” (interview, 2014). There was also concern that local artists and performers should act as volunteers (‘good for their future careers’) rather than paid employees, and criticism of the long delays in the payment process for those who were to be remunerated for their services.

The ‘politics of CoC’ included criticism of Edge to Centre. A community activist questioned the rhetoric of inclusivity: “I think that the margins, the 10%, the underprivileged community, has been left outside, they’re still on the margins” (interview, 2014). In our focus groups there was a definite sense from working class Catholics and Protestants that CoC had not drawn them into the *centre* of events, nor had it lessened their sense of being on the *edge* of CoC specifically and the city more generally. This is despite significant activities, door knocking and leafletting that (we were told) occurred across the city. A young male opined: “Nothing actually came out to communities” (interview, 2015); a middle aged woman elaborated:

“Oh they did that, they did everything at the start, they just let everybody that was at the edge stay at the edge. That’s my gripe, they didn’t take the centre out to the edges to hold them by the hand and encourage them to come in, or

²⁵ An annual event that seeks to recognise, empower and celebrate the LGBT community in the city.

they didn't turn round and go out and educate people as to what's in" (interview, 2015).

5.5 *Research theme #4: the impact and legacy of CoC*

The official narrative is "2013 has been a memorable year in Derry~Londonderry's history – a magical year of triumph, celebration and transformation" (Derry City Council, 2013a, p. 3). There were 400 events, 1.4 million visitors from 75 countries, £100 million global media reach and £97.1 million economic impact (Derry City Council, 2014a; Derry City and Strabane District Council, 2015, 2016; Ilex, 2014). A study of the Fleadh estimates an economic benefit in excess of £30 million (Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, 2014). Long-term objectives for 2020 are £98 million in additional wages and profits, 2,800 net additional workplace jobs and 25% growth in creative industries (Derry City Council, 2010, 2013b). Respondents sighed at these, and other, excessive expectations; a third gallery curator said: "Culture is expected to have instrumental outcomes. A lot of recording of metrics for short term economic gain. I find that troubling" (interview, 2015). Speaking more generally a local artist stated: "I would never believe that culture can solve anything. It gives us a greater understanding, but it won't solve it. That's an impossibility" (interview, 2014). In a more strident tone Gordon-Nesbitt (2013, p. 30) accuses "those involved in the production of the CoC bid...[of] having little hope that any of the targets will be reached". The original bid document contained 'ambitious targets' (e.g. on investment, jobs, tourism and education) based on the expectation that CoC would generate 'a similar transformative impact' as ECoC in Liverpool and Glasgow (Derry City Council, 2010; Derry City and Strabane District Council, 2016; Ilex, 2014). However, a deepening recession affected the availability of serious public and private funding that was crucial to delivering anticipated economic impacts. In retrospect several objectives and targets now seem unrealistic although they were set, in 2010, during a period of relative economic optimism.

For those at the margins of society their interpretation of success is job opportunities. However, McDermott et al. (2016, p. 622) identify "disappointment among some sections of the population of the inability of CoC to immediately increase employment rates". We too uncovered dissatisfaction with the employment impact of CoC; a Council official acknowledged: "Despite huge investment [on delivery] and image change, that is not translating into jobs" (interview, 2015). Ilex (2014) reports the targets for employment have been 'less successful to date' but were predicated on a significant public sector infrastructure programme that did not materialise. Thus, the "employment and other economic benefits of the project were more limited but may flow in the longer term from improved perceptions of the city and increased tourism" (Derry City and Strabane District Council, 2016, p. 43). It is estimated that only 300-400 jobs were created during 2013. The inability to stimulate substantial job creation is compounded by the fact that (in October 2015) the Council area had an unemployment rate of 6.7% compared to 3.4% for Northern Ireland (DETI, 2015);

while the Foyle parliamentary constituency (as of March 2016) had the highest unemployment rate (10.5%) in the whole of the UK (Dar et al., 2016). Current mayor, Hilary McClintock, explained: "There's a lot more that can be done for the city, in terms of unemployment we have absolutely woeful figures. We do need to bring more jobs" (BBC NI, 2016). Moreover, according to a resident from an impoverished estate: "Before CoC and right to this day, we have the highest levels of social deprivation in this area, and the whole of Derry and Strabane. None of that's changed" (interview, 2015). An experienced economist reflected thus:

"Why did anyone expect that by spending this amount of money on tourism and culture it would create sustainable jobs? Why was there the expectation that you could achieve something transformative? We have a weakened industrial structure, the highest unemployment rates in these islands, we're haemorrhaging young people. Tourism was never going to fix that" (interview, 2015).

A community volunteer spoke of the spatial disparity in income and employment:

"If you were in the centre of the town, the bars made money, the restaurants made money, the centre of town made money, it's great, it's great for the economy, but where is the sustainable jobs? I don't know anybody from up here has got a job from the CoC. Not one. I don't know anybody has got it" (interview, 2013).

A focus group respondent adopted a psychological analogy on the frustrating ephemeral nature of impact:

"It's like a depression. To come back to the legacy, it's a depression, because we had One Big Weekend, a massive event, once that left and everybody went, the Fleadh came, everybody was buzzing for eight days, then once that went away, them pop up bars shut down, some of the young people that worked in the pop up bars had no other jobs, and it's just back to reality then" (interview, 2015).

Others emphasised the qualitative outcomes rather than quantitative outputs. For example, Nolan (2014) argues "the most heartening aspect of the year was the way the city was able to model a post-conflict society" (p. 12), and that "CoC delivered more than could have been thought possible in terms of community relations" (p. 122). Furthermore, the PPE states CoC was "remarkably successful in terms of...the level of participation and engagement by all sectors of the local community", and that "many of the benefits...have been in the 'softer' areas of improved perceptions of the city by residents and in improved community relations" (Derry City and Strabane District Council, 2016, p. 4, p. 7). On this, a respondent informed: "There has been far too much

emphasis on the economic legacy. As a community worker, I see the change in terms of community relations” (interview, 2015). The point is that initiatives prior to and after CoC²⁶ have driven forward improved community relations, and so “the city has continued to play a role in peace building” (Derry City and Strabane District Council, 2016, p. 56). Adopting a balanced view a politician reflected on the positive and negative aspects of legacy:

“The legacy I think is that we know how to live with each other a whole lot better, we know how to celebrate each other’s cultures a whole lot better. I think better than anywhere in the North, and I think we feel different in this place and we feel different than other places, but the legacy has to be that we maximize all those good things and that we get people jobs...CoC was unbelievable, it was fantastic, it was just the best thing ever that we’ve ever done and it makes us feel proud, it shows we can do things. But it’s unsustainable unless people can have a bit more money in their pockets” (interview, 2014).

Resourcing has become a highly contentious issue. Some £25 million (almost entirely public sector) was invested to deliver CoC; for legacy DCAL approved £2 million up until March 2014 then the Council committed £2 million covering 2014-16 (Derry City Council, 2013 a, b). However, March 2015 saw no further legacy funding (Derry Journal, 2015a). A high profile artist was scathing: “There is no legacy here. They’ve given a couple of million pound or something like that for it, that’s nonsense” (interview, 2015). A Culture Company official pointed to local government reform: “The timing of the legacy was horrendous. The change to new regional councils²⁷ meant that the Council were focused on that, and the focus that should have been on legacy planning just wasn’t there” (interview, 2015). There is disagreement on the precise level of funding for legacy. Colm Eastwood, Leader of the SDLP²⁸, accused the Minister for Culture, Carál Ní Chuilín of Sinn Féin, of compromising the legacy of CoC: “In admitting there is no budget for legacy beyond this month, she seems to be saying that as far as her Department is concerned Derry’s CoC legacy is dead” (cited in BBC NI, 2015). The Minister responded:

“Criticism aimed at me and my department in relation to City of Culture Legacy funding is without substance or merit and is grossly unfair...The

²⁶ The Council’s *Good Relations Strategy*, which is ongoing but predates CoC, is focused on equity, diversity and interdependence in the transition from conflict to peace (Derry City Council, 2014b); the 2015 *Hope Beyond Hurt* is an international conference on peace building and conflict reconciliation (Derry Journal, 2015b).

²⁷ Reform of local government in Northern Ireland (1st April 2015) saw the introduction of 11 ‘super councils’.

²⁸ Social Democratic Labour Party draws support from the Catholic community.

Executive has allocated more than six million in additional funding for the North West to support City of Culture legacy” (cited in BBC NI, 2015).

The Bogside Artists²⁹ were largely alone in their dismissal of CoC, particularly legacy, and were happy to go on record lambasting CoC as ‘a 12 month party’ with no long term benefits for ordinary people (also Buckler, 2013). Such accusations drive to the heart of the debate on cities of culture: are they genuinely ‘life and place changing’ or a year-long celebration with no demonstrable end product? The evidence from this paper is at odds with talk of a profligate ‘12 month party’. Criticism of this kind seems particularly harsh given:

“The project was a huge success as the city is physically and psychologically transformed. Its underlying economic and social difficulties remain, but structural, political, and societal challenges were never going to be radically impacted by a CoC designation. Yet, there is tangible and measured impact on how the people of the city view the experience. Indeed, it has gone down as: ‘the happiest year in the city’s history’” (Derry City and Strabane District Council, 2016, p. 59).

Reflecting on these important questions, and with nods to future cities of culture, a cultural activist referred to the dilemma facing those designing and delivering a major cultural event:

“So they’ve had these two horses to ride right from the start, where if this year wasn’t eye-catching and spectacular and great, then Derry’s failed. You know, what’s this, we’re supposed to be a CoC, but if it’s just a year-long party with a hangover at the end of it, we’ve been a failure again. So they’ve had to try and split their efforts and split their money across both” (interview, 2013).

6. Lessons for other cities of culture

Moving beyond the specificity of D-L we reflect upon the wider lessons for future cities of culture. Arguably the most important lesson concerns the excessive expectations associated with a cultural event. This is especially true for investment and employment, those economic materialities that local people make judgements upon. We acknowledge the growing trend of impact inflation during the bidding (‘beauty contest’) process, so there is a delicate balance between setting ambitious targets to impress judging panels and ensuring these are achievable. This is pertinent should the wider economic climate change and/or if funding streams dry up meaning that a longer time period is required to deliver outputs and outcomes. Related to this is the importance of aligning necessary funding streams. With future cities of culture in mind, the PPE states:

²⁹ Three local artists who are responsible for painting the famous People’s Gallery murals in the Bogside.

“If a major event of this nature is expected to have a major impact on the local economy, it needs to be part of a broader strategy with supporting investment if the broader impacts and benefits are to be secured...[and] financial requirements beyond Local Government need to be more defined and confirmed” (Derry City and Strabane District Council, 2016, p. 61).

A second lesson concerns how contested governance is detrimental to the delivery of a cultural event, so there is a “need to establish from the outset a clearly defined partnership between all the agencies and departments involved” (Ibid., 2016, p. 61). This necessitates clear lines of responsibility and effective communication processes between local stakeholders to ensure cohesive relations and avoid inter-institutional politicking. A third lesson is that any company set up to implement a cultural event must have permanent access to staff with the range of skills (e.g. management, regulatory, legal and financial) for efficacious delivery. Such that “clearly defined roles and responsibilities with adequate resources at the outset are paramount”, given “the delivery of a project of this scale requires a range of skills and it is important that the delivery vehicle has access to all these skills” (Ibid., 2016, p. 62).

A fourth lesson relates to monitoring and evaluation (Derry City and Strabane District Council, 2016; Garcia and Cox, 2013). There are several issues here. One, the need for clear roles and responsibilities of those involved in the process; two, the need for longitudinal research to factor in the temporal dimension; three, the need for an agreed model for evaluating impact and legacy; four, the need to focus on social, as well as economic, impacts such as community engagement, social cohesion and civic confidence. Finally, a focus group respondent offered specific advice for Hull UK CoC 2017 in terms of communities’ access to funding:

“Just thinking in terms of Hull again, you were talking earlier about business plans and complicated forms. Why not simplify things, so that the communities in Hull can have access to it more easily? Instead of a big business plan that people are scratching their heads, how do I do a business plan, simplify it a wee bit” (interview, 2015).

7. Conclusions

We have analysed D~L UK CoC and presented important findings. On ‘the poetics’ of CoC there is clear evidence of genuine transformative change regarding image improvement and civic pride; enhanced community relations and sense of unity; intercultural dialogue and cultural exchange; cross-community attendance at events; increased tourism and spend; shared and depoliticised spaces. On ‘the politics’ CoC we found some negative views in terms of an ongoing sense of exclusion in working class estates, and criticism of bureaucracy and the funding process; while most critical commentary concerned the lack of demonstrable impact and legacy especially in

terms of employment. The key finding from our research is that there is more evidence of success regarding culture as a 'peace resource' than its limp legacy as an 'economic resource'. For us, CoC delivered progressive developments enabling D~L to move forward beyond division and isolationism, but largely failed to deliver economic targets of the bid document. In truth, CoC was never realistically going to be a panacea for deep seated and entrenched socio-economic problems in a deprived and peripheral economy.

Moving beyond D~L we contend that it is possible for a major cultural event to be 'life and place changing' in terms of bringing diverse, and even antagonistic, groups of people together. However, we reserve judgement on the economic dimension; we see that as a more ambitious and long term set of objectives that a cultural event cannot tackle alone. It requires additional policy intervention and dedicated financial support. We encourage future cities of culture to be less fixated with aspirational economic outputs, focusing more on achievable social outcomes. It is here that there is more opportunity to be genuinely 'life and place changing'. We end the paper with a discussion of our contribution to knowledge. Culture is regarded as a universal fix for deep seated socio-economic problems; however, we have reservations with this fetishized reading of culture as 'economic fuel'. Thus far, commentators have focused on the socio-economic legacy of cultural events. In contradistinction, we offer a broader canvas to include peace, reconciliation, cross-community interaction and social cohesion, and develop a new trajectory for the literature in examining culture as a 'peace resource' bringing about 'dialogue and tolerance' to a segregated society. In our view, a major cultural event can have more positive impact socio-politically in encouraging residents of a divided city to appreciate cultural difference and reduce cultural prejudice; in so doing, bringing divided communities closer together. In this sense, we have moved international debates forward on cities of culture in a new direction.

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