



Multi-level development perspectives and the European Capital of Culture: Pécs 2010 and Turku 2011

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Abstract

This paper analyses the role of multi-level governance in the development and potential long-term impact of individual European Capital of Culture (ECOC) projects. By introducing the relationship between regional and national development plans and the ECOC, the study reveals why the general guidelines of the ECOC programme are interpreted in dissimilar ways. It illustrates how they are differently adopted not only at European and local local, but also in response to national and regional potentials and preferences. The paper draws on research carried out about two cases; the Pécs 2010 (Hungary) and the Turku 2011 (Finland) ECOC projects.

Key words: European Capital of Culture, multi-level governance, spatial development, Pécs-Hungary, Turku-Finland

Introduction

The European Capital of Culture (ECOC) initiative has been rapidly gaining popularity since its launch in 1985; the competition for the title is increasing, the selection procedure is getting more complex, and project proposals are growing more and more comprehensive. By hosting the event, cities seek to create conditions for enhancing their competitiveness and promoting urban development. However, the initiative means far more than a simple urban development project serving the aims and needs of the hosting cities alone. The implementation of the programme is managed by the European Commission, and the national governments also have an important role in the evolution of the individual ECOC projects both in terms of co-financing and related to development strategies.

Sykes raises the issue of the “multi-scalar and layered nature” of the ECOC projects (Sykes 2011:9). The current paper reflects on this by explaining the processes between these different layers of interest and authority with particular reference to the Pécs 2010 and Turku 2011 projects, thus adopting a multi-level governance perspective. The ECOC initiative is one of the most flexible programmes funded and co-ordinated by the European Union, and throughout its history of nearly three decades, several successful schemes have been developed by participating cities. However, it is important to note that straightforward copies of solutions offered by local success stories often do not fit in their new contexts due to differences both between local socio-cultural environments and country-specific institutional arrangements. Hence this paper continues Booth’s discussion that research on the processes and effects of the ECOC programme need to go way beyond the simple study of “specific inputs and outputs of the localities compared” (2011, 24-25). Furthermore, the analysis is narrowed down to a focus on the latter of the above mentioned reasons for diverse local contexts. Although the study is based on experiences from two particular ECOC cases, it analyses why the general guidelines of the ECOC programme can (and are) being interpreted in different ways and by what processes they are adjusted in response to European and local, but also national and regional, potentials and preferences.

An attractive instrument for urban and regional development

As the decline and abandonment of city centres became a common feature of urban Europe in the 1980s, cities responded by preparing different local strategies to attract new inward investment, diversify their economies by introducing new service sectors, as well as to reduce unemployment and develop local infrastructures. Decision makers paid increasing attention to the expansion of sectors like leisure, tourism, the media and other ‘cultural industries’ in order to compensate for the jobs lost in de-industrialised regions, as well as to improving the safety and accessibility of city centres and encouraging open-air, free events (Bianchini and Parkinson 1993). Even in cases where structural changes did not necessitate functional revitalization and architectural rehabilitation, and especially in the case of non-capital cities, organizing major international events can offer global competitive advantage for cities. One-off ‘mega-events’ (e.g. Olympics and ECOC) are such opportunities, as they have international significance and participation (Apostolopoulos et al. 1996). Notwithstanding their temporal nature (i.e. generally happening only once in the same location in any given period), in the hope of raising their profile and getting a significant economic return, cities are willing to put enormous efforts into applying for, preparing and hosting such events.

This study is focused on one particular urban cultural project, a cultural mega-event of increasing popularity in the last two decades, the European Capital of Culture. The ECOC event is different from other cultural events not only because of its time-frame (the title is awarded for a whole year and the hosting city gains international attention years before holding the actual event) but also because of its expected significance for urban and regional development.

However, a more sustained impact can be achieved only if projects are supported on as many levels as possible, and involve a range of groups and parties from the planning stage through the organisation process to the event year. The major focus in this paper is the role and motivations of local governments and national authorities, as well as partly of regional agencies in carrying out the ECOC projects.

Multi-level governance aspects: a local mix of various European, national and regional interests

In the European context, the phrase ‘*multi-level governance*’ was used first by Marks (1993) to explain developments in EU structural policy after 1988. More recently, the concept has been applied more broadly to EU decision-making. Multi-level governance is a product of two main processes: integration has shifted influence on many fields of policy-making from national states to the European level, while regionalization processes have opened up more space for subnational levels of government. Multi-level refers to the increased interdependence of governments operating at different spatial scales, while governance describes the growing interdependence between governments and non-governmental actors at these different spatial-administrative levels. While it is still the nation state where most of the decision-making occurs, the politics within that policy arena may be heavily influenced by the European context (Hooghe and Marks, 2001). Public administration of the EU member states go through a convergence process (especially in terms of forms and scales) as the implementation of European policies is performed by the national administrations. However, there are still no general schemes for territorial integration; the convergence and Europeanisation of public administration occurs in with the context of different needs, power structures and values (Pálné Kovács 2009, 2011). Importantly, in the multi-level governance concept, the ‘region’ is rendered as a bounded space (where lower-scale spatial entities are contained by higher-level regions) often for the practical purposes of territorial administration, monitoring and measuring development and performance, as well as to facilitate the disbursement of regional assistance programmes.

With respect to governance, the European Capital of Culture initiative provides an interesting example of contradictory processes; the unique combination of local, national and European sets of conditions and interests do not always support each other in every respect.

Currently, the European Capital of Culture action is one of the ‘special actions’ included under Strand 1.3 of the Culture Programme (2007-13) of the EU. Since these ‘special actions’ are considered as one-off actions, there is no particular emphasis on their sustainability, i.e. their continued, long-

term positive impact. This is reflected in the funding policy of the ECOC: the European Commission, through the EU Culture Programme awards a one-off financial support (Melina Mercouri Prize) of a maximum of €1.5 million for the event year. Because the implementation of the programme is managed by the European Commission, it is expected that individual projects have a very strong symbolic focus on the European level. Being one of the main criteria of a successful application for the title, this is often referred to as the “European dimension”, aiming at highlighting the richness and diversity as well as the common features of European culture(s). The objectives of the ECOC initiative therefore are strongly framed around EU policies, such as the ‘European Agenda for Culture in a Globalising World’ and the ‘Article 167’ of the Treaty on the functioning of the EU. The Agenda was built on three interrelated sets of objectives: “promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue; promotion of culture as a catalyst for creativity in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs; promotion of culture as a vital element in the Union's international relations”. (CEC, 2007). The Article states that “the Union should contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore”. The Article states that “the Union should contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore”.

Aiming at grand European-level objectives, but receiving only minimal direct financial support from the EU, the European Capital of Culture programme has developed in specific ways. Despite the fact that funding does not specifically finance sustainability aims related to the individual ECOC projects, the event is generally meant to have long-term effects on the cultural, social and economic development of the city and its region (Rampton and McCoshan, 2010). In other words, while the ECOC initiative is not directly aimed at the promotion of local urban and regional development from the Commission’s point of view, cities try to make the most out of the powerful brand the title gives them. In order to achieve maximum benefits, many of the ECOC cities try to mobilise a great diversity of local actors, and invite ones from beyond their limits, too.

Local/regional and national development plans and the ECOC

The ECOC concept has always been broadly defined, having a set of very general features, which might be due to its intergovernmental origins. As a consequence, it is often considered as the most flexible programme of the EU, providing guidelines for applicant cities rather than outlining strict criteria for participation. Sassatelli (2006, p. 34) claims that indeed, this lack of central control and the relatively small scale of the funding contribute largely to the general popularity and success of the ECOC by “avoiding the feeling that the programme is a top-down invasion of the delicate sphere of cultural identities”. As a consequence, both the way of using the ECOC label and the real budget of the project mostly depend on the hosting country and the city or city-region. Because the funding largely comes from (or at least through) the national and local level, the primary factors driving the individual projects are to be found in regional development strategies and plans. In order to understand the reasons behind the different approaches of the Pécs 2010 and Turku 2011 projects to the European Capital of Culture initiative, we need to be familiar with the main characteristics and directions of the Hungarian and Finnish spatial development concepts, representing the so-called “visible power relations” (VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002) in these two countries.

Pécs 2010

Hungary's urban network is rather monocentric due to the substantial development of the capital and its surrounding region. One of the most important aims of the ECOC programme in Pécs was to support the process of cultural decentralisation in the country, or provide a counter-balance to the dominance of Budapest in cultural life. This very aim of the project fits well into the national development priorities. The Hungarian National Regional Development Concept aims to promote territorially more balanced, polycentric development through six development poles, and strengthen their roles as regional centres. This means the reinforcement of the regional (innovation, economic, cultural, governing and commercial) functions of the

poles, but simultaneously creating the necessary preconditions for spill-over effects: good accessibility, co-operation links, and the development of sub-centres. The different measures of the Development Pole of Pécs programme are defined in the South Transdanubia (NUTS 2) regional Operational Programme in which the Pécs 2010 European Cultural Capital programme was designated as a flagship project (DDOP 2007).

Even though this aspect had not been emphasized in the call for competition, due to a primary focus on the national and regional development concepts, the application by Pécs for the ECOC title concentrated very much on the regional dimension. The promotion of the cultural and tourism sectors is of outstanding importance in Pécs, and the plans proposed in the application document for the ECOC 2010 focused on these two inter-related and strategically important sectors. The main concept of the project was to create a real international-regional cultural centre outside of the traditional development-axis of Vienna-Budapest. Development potentials were envisioned in interregional co-operation; therefore, the inclusion of not only the Hungarian South Transdanubian region but also of the cities of its broader international cultural region was an important feature in Pécs's application. (Takáts 2005)

The regional dimension of the Pécs 2010 project was very clear in the bidding phase. It integrated the smaller towns of Southern Transdanubia and the major cities on the boundary of the region. By the event year, participants and events from over 40 settlements in the region had aligned with the ECOC, even though most of them could not get direct financial support from the project. This kind of inclusion of the wider region was seen as advantageous both by the city and the surrounding areas, especially in terms of tourism. The city of Pécs could only generate and hope for the continuation of longer-term tourist visits if it 'joined forces' with its strong 'hinterland' with rural, wine and health tourism potentials. Equally, other municipalities that were linked to the project hoped to benefit from their use of the Pécs 2010 brand during the cultural year.

Turku 2011

Since the recession of the 1990s, the Finnish national government has prioritized investment into research and development. A key driver was to strengthen the competence bases of urban regions, to integrate them into the national innovation system and link them to global information hubs. A study conducted by Nordregio concluded that Finland was the Nordic country “with the most systematic approach to urban issues in regional and national development strategies”. The development programmes in this country “see urban areas as the main targets” (Nordregio 2006, pp. 59-60). In the framework of the Finnish innovation strategy, the Centre of Expertise Programme (launched in 1994) has had a clear focus on cities at the top of the urban hierarchy (comprising 21 urban regions in 2007-2013). The Regional Development Act of 2003 included an explicit urban-centred articulation of growth dynamics, and the aims of regional development for 2007-2011 follow this closely.

Not only the general regional development aim of strengthening the urban centres is supported well by the ECOC programme in case of Finland, but the project aims of the Turku 2011 programme also reflected the same development priorities. Two of the five priority axes in the Southern Finland Operational Programme (representing a NUTS 2 region), namely, the development of large urban areas and supporting special interregional themes (e.g.: networking between the business and public sectors, environment, well-being, international co-operations) are identical with the main objectives of the Turku 2011 project, i.e. increasing well-being, developing creative industries and cultural exports and strengthening internationality (Määttänen, 2010). Echoing the national development priority of increasing well-being, the Turku 2011 project evolved in a rather particular way: the practice of the so-called 'cultural prescriptions' had been introduced for the cultural year, which promoted culture by free tickets to events prescribed by 'municipal healthcare'. This is perhaps indicative of the Finnish national ambition to retain the strong welfare state and support social equality (Andersson and Ruoppila 2011).

Turku is the centre of the Finland Proper Region (Varsinais Suomi, NUTS 3), and the majority of the region's population (approximately 300,000 people) lives in the Turku Region (Turun seutukunta, LAU 1) with 180,000 people within the limits of the city itself. Based on interviews with the city government (Akkanen 2010) and the Turku 2011 Foundation (Hätönen 2010), the inclusion of the region was not the most important aim of the project. Because of the high spatial concentration of the population, by organising some events with the Turku 2011 label in the nearer surroundings of Turku (which are the most populated municipalities), regional participation was still embraced in the Turku 2011 project, but – in contrast with the Hungarian ECOC - concrete initiatives for the more extensive inclusion of the wider region (e.g.: Southwest Finland) were not apparent.

Effects of local conditions and interests

Pécs 2010

The constrained finances of local municipalities in Hungary from the beginning of the 1990s for general urban refurbishments and developments resulted in the emergence of an opportunistic development strategy. As with other applicant cities in the country, Pécs viewed the ECOC nomination as an opportunity for large-scale urban regeneration, and a chance to access resources for long-desired urban developments (not only cultural buildings, but also public spaces, such as squares, parks, playgrounds, etc). Consequently, from the very beginning, a key pillar of the Pécs 2010 European Capital of Culture Programme was urban infrastructural investment, with high expectations for economic regeneration in the city and its region. This intention was reflected in the budget of the Hungarian ECOC project. Over €160 million euro was spent, 80% of which was spent on 'hard' construction projects, leaving only 20 percent assigned to actual cultural events.

The promotion of a strong civil society is still in the process of evolution in Hungary (Kuti 2008) and the disconnect between the idea of (local, regional) civil initiatives and existing (more centralised) structures was highlighted by the Pécs 2010 programme. Similarly to other European

Capital of Culture projects, the cultural program for the ECOC year in Pécs was organised by a separate, temporary organisation set up during the preparation phase: the Pécs 2010 Management Centre. However, as the cultural year approached, the national government took more control over the preparations through an Art Council set up in March 2008 (with three local members, two members from Budapest and one international). As programme development was not considered efficient enough, the government gave support through the Budapest-based national event organiser company, Hungarofest Ltd. to organise the final program for the cultural year. The original local initiative of the ECOC project of Pécs was gradually taken over by national control, including a growing number of actors in the fields of cultural planning and production from outside the city and its region.

Turku 2011

In contrast, local decisions on cultural planning and production were one of the most important aspects of the Turku 2011 project. There is a tendency among the European Capital of Culture projects to create a separate management organisation for the purpose of the event, but the degree of independence varies among the cases. In Finland, the cultural program of the ECOC year was managed by the Turku 2011 Foundation (building on the positive experience of the Helsinki 2000 ECOC), supported by the Turku City Council but relatively independent from the city (as well as national) administration (Rampton et al. 2012). The Foundation was operational from 2008 and took charge of all preparations and the cultural programme. Through the establishment of a separate organisation the aim was to build a temporary, politically more independent institution to engage with the cultural sector, private organisations in other sectors as well as the wider public.

The majority (65%) of the actual content of the Turku 2011 programme came from open project applications; around 1,000 project proposals were submitted to the Foundation following an open call as early as in the spring of 2008. In contrast with the Pécs 2010 ECOC, a single artistic director was not appointed for the whole programme, instead, each project had their own artistic director and the Foundation's role was to provide assistance.

Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to analyse one evident influential force that effects the implementation of the individual projects; institutional frameworks and governing powers at different scales. This study does not touch on the social embeddedness of the projects, which is an equally important element in the evolution of the individual ECOC projects. However, the complexity of the issue is well explained by looking at the visible, multi-level governance processes surrounding the European Capital of Culture programme. When a city aims to use the ECOC brand and the direct kick-off fund from the European Commission, various complementary local, regional and national resources need to be recruited.

Existing national development plans already provide a project framework to a large extent. Hungarian national and regional development strategies aim to work against the long-standing monocentricity, focussing on the development of second-tier cities and strengthening the regional hinterland. This trend could be detected in the majority of the applications in the national competition for the ECOC title, and was especially visible in the winning Pécs 2010 project. Finnish spatial plans have a clear focus on the further development of strong urban centres to promote national competitiveness and innovation. Beyond this, the Turku 2011 project reflected other national development priorities such as promoting healthy lifestyles and general well-being or developing creative industries.

Not only European or national priorities shape the projects, but the different local power-relations and interests influence them in various ways, too. For example, the local combination of urban regeneration-oriented strategies and the availability of financial resources can move ECOCs towards hard-infrastructural developments. Management of the event can also evolve in different ways depending on local power-relations and the level of inclusion from the planning phase to the actual cultural events. Based on the two examples studied above, the initial hypothesis that European Capital of Culture projects evolve variably is supported. Understandably, the variability of the constellation of power relations between the local-regional-national levels is particularly important for a programme such as the ECOC, where the set of criteria for participation can

be the subject of multiple interpretations, and where the learning process is an important part of the whole initiative.

It can be concluded that some sort of co-existence of and co-operation between different spatial-administrative interests are inevitable for many reasons. Firstly, different spatial-political levels are driven by particular interests and they perceive different opportunities in the ECOC title. Secondly, the European Capital of Culture projects always need to draw on various, complementary resources not only to win the title, but more crucially to realise a large-scale event. Finally, but most importantly, the co-operation of these spatial-administrative interests is required to meet their common aims of sustaining a positive impact from the event. However, the relative influence of local, regional or central/national powers largely depends on the wider political cultures, which can vary between European countries.

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