European Capital of Culture – Community or Commercially based?
The case of Istanbul 2010

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Abstract

Since the relative or perceived success of Glasgow, European Capital of Culture in 1990, other European cities have been very eager to win the ECoC title and reap the same benefits of the event themselves. Cities often expect a lot from the project. They believe that the event can trigger a wide range of positive effects such as increased numbers of tourists, economic growth and image improvement. Over the years, the event has come to be very much focused on economic and political goals. However, this approach often leads to frustration and conflicts within the organising team, and leaves out many groups that could potentially contribute a lot to the event. The case of Istanbul, European Capital of Culture in 2010, clearly illustrates this. It contains some important lessons for future Cultural Capitals and shows that all positive expectations of the event also have their own pitfalls. Being aware of these downsides may improve the quality of the European Capital of Culture event and its ultimate effects on the city.

Keywords

Istanbul, European Capital of Culture, cultural festivals, urban governance, urban economy

Cities around the world are fascinated by festivals. Music festivals, theatre festivals, literature festivals, film festivals and poetry festivals – most cities will host at least one large art event every year. Whereas festivals traditionally used to be celebrations of collective belonging to a group, place, cultural practice or history – thus being very locally based – today's festivals have come to pursue a much wider range of objectives including economic growth, image improvement and global recognition. Festivals have grown from humble local activities to mega-events with a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance. (Roche, 2000) They have increasingly become vehicles for political ambitions that may serve many different goals such as improving the urban environment, stimulating tourism and investment or creating pride and civic engagement. (Clark, 2008)

However, as festivals have started to concentrate on city-branding and cultural tourism strategies and thus focused on improving the international profile of a city, they have been criticised for creating an idealised, sanitised version of the city which reduces opportunities to really connect with the city and its cultural realities (Quinn, 2005) and for reducing multiple, diverse social realities and lived experiences into a readily consumable package. (Jones & Wilks-Heeg, 2004)

Also the well-known 'European Capital of Culture' (ECoC) initiative, which can be described as a one-year culture and arts festival, has been under similar attack by critics. Originally designed as a festival to generate knowledge and understanding of European cultures within the Member States of the European Union, the event quickly turned into a popular way for post-industrial 'secondary' or 'non-traditional' cultural cities to reposition themselves culturally, socially and economically. After the relative or perceived success of Glasgow, European Capital of Culture in 1990, the event came to be hosted by de-industrialising cities in need of new investment and structural socio-economic change, thus shifting the focus of the ECoC event from cultural to more economic and instrumental driving forces.

What does this focus of the European Capital of Culture event mean for cities? Or even more importantly, what does it mean for the local inhabitants – the original 'owners' of festivals – and local democracy?

In order to answer these questions, I will explore the European Capital of Culture event in Istanbul, which is currently being planned for the year 2010. It illustrates very well how more economic-based incentives (e.g. urban regeneration, job creation and tourism) interact with socially based motives (e.g. empowerment of the local population, social inclusion and promotion of access to arts and culture) and how these aims are aligned with political ideas and objectives.

Because of its diverse organising team – which can be considered a first in the city's history - Istanbul ECoC 2010 forms a good case study to explore the balance between 'economic' and 'social' dimensions of ECoC festivals and their political implications and drivers. We will come to see that the Istanbul ECoC organisation, consisting of governmental institutions, private companies and NGOs, has very diverse ideas about the kind of objectives the event should attempt to reach.

Recently there have been serious signs of the fact that the initially ambitious plan of the organisation to cooperate and join forces cross-sectorally, is now under serious threat. The organisation in Istanbul shows that for an ECoC year to succeed, it is extremely important to reach general consensus about the main direction of the project among members of the team, and involve all parties on an equal basis. Moreover, it illustrates that if economic and political goals are placed at a central position, this strongly reduces the overall potential of the event to empower communities and stimulate urban diversity.

Past European Capitals of Culture

In 2004, Palmer/Rae Associates evaluated the European Capital of Culture project for the European Commission. The report included a lot of interesting information about all the cities that had been awarded ECoC status since 1995. A crucial conclusion was that a successful ECoC year is greatly dependent on 'balance'; artistic vision and political interest, traditional and contemporary culture, high-profile events and local initiatives, city centre and suburban/regional locations, high art and popular art/culture, established cultural institutions and independent groups and artists, attractiveness to tourists and the local population, international names and local events, usual activities and new activities, professionals and amateur/community projects – these are all extreme ends that have to be incorporated in a sensible way.[1] Therefore, open discussion among different members of the organisation and between the organisation and 'the city', agreement on the general objectives and consensus in relation to policies and strategies are important.

In order to avoid conflict, integrated planning also turned out to be crucial, in the sense that the projects taking place during an ECoC year should both be integrated with existing cultural policy and other policy fields.
In the report it was stated that mainly the cultural professionals of a city tended to talk about culture, whether others seemed to concentrate on investment, physical transformation and marketing. Nonetheless, the report also declared

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[1] Palmer/Rae Associates. (2004). European Cities and Capitals of Culture.

that culture could only maintain its challenging role without becoming a tool for city marketing, when it became a real part of existing policy in different fields.

Istanbul European Capital of Culture 2010

Initially, the organisation of the European Capital of Culture year seemed to take a very progressive and optimistic approach towards the 'balance' that was needed for a successful ECoC year according to the Palmer/Rae report. Unlike in many other European Capitals of Culture, Istanbul's ECoC initiative was characterised by a bottom-up approach, led by NGOs. However, as it became clear that in order realise the project, wider support was needed from other sectors as well, the organisation was opened to private companies and foundations and governmental institutions too.

      This consortium of actors was able to put forward a successful bidding document. In April 2006, the Selection Panel for the European Capital of Culture 2010 selected Istanbul (instead of Kiev) as one of the three ECOCs for the year 2010, along with Essen (Germany) and Pécs (Hungary). Istanbul's bid was selected because of its innovative programme, building on the roots of the city. Its bottom-up process and strong involvement of civil society were applauded and its sustainable character and intention to reach out to all parts of the local population were viewed as positive endeavours.[2]

      However, we will see that despite the city's hopeful start, contradiction arose between the initial goals of the ECoC programme and the projects that have been or are actually going to be realised for it.

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[2] Report of the Selection Meeting for the European Capitals of Culture, 2006.

The Istanbul European Capital of Culture project clearly serves different goals for different parties. Looking at the official ECoC 2010 bidding document, a wide range of objectives comes to the fore, ranging from heritage management to the creation of jobs and from branding the city to the creation of pride among the Istanbullites. A concrete vision however seemed to be lacking.

Based on interviews I conducted with eighteen individuals directly and actively involved in the organisation of the ECOC event in the summer of 2007 (Pekelsma, 2007), seven main goals could nonetheless be defined. In the next paragraphs I will elaborate on the interviews, their outcomes and goals and show how the latter are strongly interlinked with social and economic ambitions based on political motivations.

- Turning Istanbul into a world city;
- European integration;
- Improving cultural management;
- Improving the cultural infrastructure;
- Urban transformation and restoration;
- Involving the Istanbul population;
- Stimulating tourism.

World City

Many people in the 2010 project were proud of the fact that Istanbul had become a European Capital of Culture because they believed that meant it was finally recognised as a world city. New economic investments were said to be needed in order to make Istanbul compatible to compete on the world market (of culture). The city went through its largest transformation in the eighties and nineties, but also in the last few years, Istanbul has been characterised by rapid change. Many investments have been made in order to make (tourist) neighbourhoods more attractive and Istanbul has become a very popular city among both regular tourists and more intellectual groups as a result. It has received a lot of attention because of cultural influences such as literature, cinema and music and big congresses, large exhibitions and international festivals have come to have a great influence on the city.

Istanbul has definitely joined the worldwide competition to become a lead city in the global network of capitalist cities. It is said that world-city status is a guarantee of enhanced levels of prosperity in the contemporary world economy, and therefore the status is something to be desired and protected.[3] However, in

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[3] Dieleman & Hamnett in: Short, J.R. & Kim, Y.H. (1999). *Globalisation and the City.* Harlow, Pearson Education Limited, pp. 54.

order to reach such status, not only economic elements are important, but also the quality of the socio-cultural infrastructure of a city. Events such as the European Capital of Culture can greatly contribute to this infrastructure, and therefore to the position of the city as a whole.

Nonetheless, large-scale cultural events may also have other side effects, such as the levelling down of the current, complex public space and Istanbul's urban structure, resulting in a privatisation of public space and a growing attention towards security in the city. (Tan, 2005) Social polarisation of course is a problem hunting all world cities. But as Istanbul already has to cope with great social divides, being established as a world city may only intensify these existing discrepancies. Recent urban regeneration activities seem to suggest that this is already occurring.

European Integration

In 2007, official (local) government institutions seemed to be most interested in the European dimension of the ECoC project, which might further the EU integration process that had been rather problematic for Turkey. In the newspapers, Egemen Bağış, former head of the advisory committee, stated "the candidacy of Istanbul for ECoC 2010 should be regarded as a sign of our commitment to the cultural convergence of Turkish civil society with the European Union."[4]

In his letter in the official Istanbul 2010 bidding document presented in Brussels, Prime Minister Erdoğan wrote that "given the fact that Turkey is a candidate State destined to join the European Union, Istanbul's designation as a European Capital of Culture will further the European political project, the European values, and the sense of European belonging. Contributions Turkey can make to this project will thus be more visible and better appreciated."

At the time of the bid, governmental institutions seemed to be very aware of the fact that the EU accession project of Turkey was not progressing as planned and they clearly expressed their hope the ECoC event could make positive contributions. "Istanbul's vision for the future is ambitious in that the city has to meet the challenges entailed, and use the opportunities presented by the European integration process," Kadir Topbaş, Mayor of Istanbul wrote in his letter in the bidding document.

Officials said that the European elements that exist and have long existed in Istanbul have to be shown to the European public. In the interviews, there was a continuous stress on the fact that Istanbul/Turkey is European, but that the Europeans simply still had to become to understand this. In an ECoC Working

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[4] Turkish Daily News, February 13th 2006

Group meeting, Nuri Çolakoğlu, the former chairman of the Istanbul 2010 Coordination Board who recently resigned from his position, explained that "ECOC 2010 is a major culture and arts activity to introduce European culture to Istanbul and Istanbul to European culture, and try to indicate the common roots of the city's culture and Europe. We want to use this event as a big PR instrument, a communications project not only for the people of Istanbul, but also for the European people. We should show them that Turkey is not too far away from, or maybe already part of them."

However, critics have been more sceptical towards this continuous stress on being European and the attempts to show that Istanbul and Turkey are part of Europe. They believe that Istanbul is not a one-sided concept. For 2010 the city could also open up to Asia, the Middle East and the Caucasus, because networking with these areas and bringing these cultures into the European cultural sphere might be more important and interesting. Instead of solely focusing on Europe, it might be fruitful for Istanbul to also cooperate with its Eastern neighbours and explore these relationships, as they are also based on a long and interesting history.

Improving cultural management

According to many NGO members of the 2010 organising team, one of the most important goals of Istanbul 2010 is the improvement of cultural management in Istanbul. The city already possesses a wide range of cultural and arts activities, but it is believed that because of a lack of trust among NGOs/civil society, the local/central government and cultural investors/operators, this offer cannot be further developed. In Istanbul there is no real tradition of working together on a project. Some even go as far as saying that there is a lack of communication and a sense of jealousy among cultural producers.[5] In the interviews with members of the ECoC organising team, mistrust among different parties involved in the ECoC 2010 project was often mentioned as one of the main challenges that needed to be tackled.

People hoped that Istanbul 2010 would be able to improve cultural institutions' management structures and stimulate cooperation between different parties. By putting public, private and third sector actors together in one organisation (Istanbul 2010), it was expected that a new management system could be developed. The different parties involved in the ECOC project should, according to many interviewees, mutually educate each other so that the individual members of the cultural sector can function better together.

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[5] Quoted by an artists interviewed for E.Bijloos (2009. *Halfbakken en heetgebakerd: hedendaagse kunst in Istanbul.* In: Roest (2009), Nr. 39, pp. 32-35

At the moment Turkey is still a relatively new player in the cultural game, which means that it is also a rather new field for municipalities and ministries. Official bodes often do not know how to apply for funds and work in partnerships. In addition, they are often criticised for their lack of differentiation between culture and commerce (cultural policy is part of the Ministry of Culture & Tourism) and their traditional view of arts and culture. However, others say the government bodies have realised that they are far behind in comparison to other European cities. The ECOC 2010 project might therefore form an opportunity for the state bodies to learn.

Interviewees expressed their hope that when a new type of governance in cultural management, or the cultural sector for that matter, is established a new type of local management may develop alongside in Istanbul (and the rest of Turkey). People believe that a new form of management in the cultural sector might transform the way Istanbul is governed, and might improve cooperation on all policy fields. Istanbul is an enormous city that has to deal with problems that in Europe only countries have to deal with. If a new method of governance can be created during Istanbul 2010, urban governance might also benefit from this new approach. However, two years after the interviews were conducted, it remains doubtful whether this ideal will be reached.

Improving the cultural infrastructure

Many actors involved in the Istanbul 2010 organisation emphasised that the cultural infrastructure of Istanbul should be improved. Especially museums seem to play an important role in this respect: the establishment of Santral Istanbul (opened in July 2007), the possible transformation of the shipyards on the Golden Horn into cultural centres/museums, the transformation of the Hasanpaşa gasworks in Karaköy, the possible establishment of an Istanbul Museum and the reorganisation of the Istanbul archaeology museum are just some examples. Also investments in heritage are promoted, maybe even more today, as UNESCO has released some very critical reports about the way Turkey was managing its plentiful heritage, especially in Istanbul.[6]

A very important question for Istanbul 2010 was what cultural infrastructure was going to be supported and who was going to make the investments. There is a lot of public cultural infrastructure in Istanbul, but it is thought that it is not sufficient for the city's estimated 16 million inhabitants. A representative from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism stated the ministry is trying its best to manage the public cultural institutions in Istanbul, but critics said that the Ministry only was only investing in the cultural infrastructure it was

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[6] UNESCO Decision Text, 30COM 7B.73 – State of Conservation

interested in. Some even claimed that the Ministry only supported those investments that easily bring large financial returns. (Klaic, 2005).

The private sector in turn has established some successful and high-quality museums such as Istanbul Modern (Turkey's first modern art museum), the Pera Museum and the Sabancı Museum. However, notwithstanding the quality of these museums, they were all projects in the private interest of the investors. Just like the public sector, private investments are also (possibly more naturally) primarily made from an economic point of view. The fact that the different parties – private and public – are sitting around the same ECOC 2010 table and are able to discuss these kinds of investments while being pushed by NGOs, might have a positive influence on the development of the cultural infrastructure in Istanbul in the end. There is a strong belief that the city cannot be marketed without developing its cultural infrastructure. For that reason, many individuals and organisations push for investments in that area. However, it is also believed that the 'content' of cultural institutions, although not really part of their physical infrastructure, should also be improved. "How can you produce a product with a package but without content?" one of the interviewees rightfully asked.

Today, not too much seems to have changed. Government bodies still show limited interest in funding art- or cultural initiatives, and when they do, they prefer to invest in 'safe culture', such as folklore and popular culture.[7] These are not bad investments per se, but they illustrate the limited scope of the government institutions, which still have a very traditional notion of arts and culture.

Urban transformation and restoration

The Istanbul 2010 bidding document relatively paid a lot of attention to urban regeneration. The ECoC project is not only supposed to renovate and restore historical relics, but also "turn them into instruments for understanding the past, shedding light on the modern day and developing the as learning tools for urban education."[8] As part of this objective, several projects were set up such as the Sultanahmet rehabilitation project, the Beyoğlu rehabilitation project, the Fener-Balat Assessment/Sampling project, the revival of the historic bazaar of Kadıköy project, the Zeyrek historical houses restoration, the Zeytinburnu culture isle and the Kamondo Mausoleum and the non-Muslim cemetery restoration project.

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[7] Quoted by an artists interviewed for E.Bijloos (2009. *Halfbakken en heetgebakerd: hedendaagse kunst in Istanbul.* In: Roest (2009), Nr. 39, pp. 32-35
[8] Istanbul ECoC 2010 Bidding Document

Through the transformation and restoration of the urban fabric of Istanbul, it is hoped that the city can be reclaimed urbanistically. However, some of the projects planned have been strongly condemned, such as the demolition of Sulukule, a centuries-old Roma neighbourhood, and the large-scale restructuring of Tarlabaşı, a downtown area characterised by a diverse but socially disadvantaged population.

The different actors involved in the 2010 project have very different views on the restoration of the different parts of the city. Not everyone supports the same image of the city, which in case of the restoration of the city walls and the plans for Suleymaniye, already resulted in clashes between the municipality and NGOs. Some municipal plans have moreover been disapproved by UNESCO, which threatened to take the historical peninsula off the heritage list if the city continued its plans. NGOs fear that urban regeneration projects set up by the municipality and the governorship will mainly serve populist propaganda aims and in that way not consider the social structures underlying the areas to be regenerated. It is said that there is a great danger that the new policies can lead to further polarisation in the city, which is already a big issue.

Interviewees expressed that new creative ideas about urban transformation are needed in order to stimulate a change in mentality. The bidding document stated that "the physical transformation and the parallel mental reinvigoration will ensure that here, in this European Capital of Culture, new goals and perspectives for the knowledge, security and peace that are needed to underpin globalisation will arise, on scientific and intellectual foundations." The projects of the ECoC event were to be widespread in order to radically redefine the city.

So far, such developments have not been witnessed yet. Alternatives to the regeneration of Sulukule for example were rejected by the local government, and Istanbul seems to be quickly developing into a sanitised city, unconnected to its multi-layered history and social reality. The multifaceted diversity that characterises the city might in this way quickly crumble into a monotonous open-air museum or shopping mall.

Involving the Istanbul population

In their interviews, many of the actors involved in the ECoC project, whether public, private or NGO, stressed that the 2010 cultural year should be organised for Istanbul and the people who live there. It should be an event that does not only focus on the centre of the city, which is usually the heart of cultural activities, but also spread out its activities to more distant parts of the city. "Istanbul 2010 should help millions of people living away from the centre, particularly the sixty percent of its residents who were not born in the city, to

feel more integrated. Getting the community involved is a main priority,"
Çakaloz, former financial and administrative director of the Istanbul Initiative
stated in the newspaper Today's Zaman. "We want to take ECoC to the
periphery, to underprivileged areas. We may be involving schools. It could help
the democratisation o the city: intercultural dialogue through the arts."[9]

Arts and culture were mentioned as powerful instruments of social
cohesion, which the organisers hoped to achieve with the 2010 event. The
creation of a collective citizenship for Istanbul was declared to be an important
goal, as a very large portion of the Istanbul population has migrated to the city
from elsewhere in Turkey. About ninety percent of Istanbul was built in the last
forty years. The city is characterised by a large diversity of people from different
cultural and religious backgrounds.

However, in the programme of the Istanbul 2010 event, the 'real'
diversity of Istanbul and Turkey, which entails difficult questions such as the
Kurdish and the Armenian issue were not mentioned at all. The fact that today's
Istanbul might be far less of an international city than it used to be during the
Ottoman Empire was never addressed and also the reasons for this relative
decrease in diversity were rarely touched upon.

Istanbul, just like many other cities, has to deal with great problems
concerning diversity and many of these issues are rather taboo. This in turn
mainly has to do with the history of the city that state institutions wish to
promote. The view of diversity promoted in the Istanbul 2010 project is very
one-dimensional and does not reflect the reality of today's Istanbul.

Then again, irrespective of the problematic issue of diversity, many
people involved in the ECoC project felt that it was a problem that many people
living in Istanbul were not really familiar with their city. It was therefore often
stressed that local people must be involved in projects towards cultural policies,
because only then people would come to understand urban and artistic
transformation and not feel excluded from the ECoC project.

The cultural year was supposed to have many local projects that involved
the local people of all 33 municipalities of Istanbul even before the 2010 year
actually takes place. With the help of these projects, knowledge about the city
had to be created. In order to involve local Istanbul people directly, a lot of trust
was also put in voluntary work, along with young people, who are also an
important target. Istanbul has a large young population, which is dealing with
many problems, such as unemployment. Incorporating these youngsters and
making it possible for them to join cultural activities was therefore viewed as an
important goals of the 2010 project.

Not everyone was as optimistic about this goal of involving and
empowering the Istanbul population though. Some saw it as a noble attempt to

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[9] Today's Zaman, 8 March 2007

include everyone in Istanbul, but many had doubts about the realisation of this objective, believing that in the end most projects would target the well off and well educated. Judging upon the content of the Istanbul 2010 website, the inclusion of volunteers and distant neighbourhoods still seems to be rather vague. The real empowerment of Istanbul's many citizens still appears to be miles away.

Stimulating tourism

Even though some critics fear that the ECoC year in Istanbul might become more of a large-scale tourism fest, rather than a year that celebrates culture from a wider perspective, the tourism motive was not often mentioned by the people interviewed. If it was, it was placed in the context of cultural tourism which main function was said to be the education of people and the creation of awareness. Nonetheless, the realisation that cultural tourists are an attractive type of tourist to have in your city as 'educated, cultured tourists spent three times as much as normal tourists'[10] was strongly present.

Rather than attracting a large number of visitors, a more important goal of tourism seemed to be the improvement and the promotion of the image of Turkey, already touched upon earlier in the paragraph on European integration. A representative from the Ministry of Culture stated that "there will be benefits from the tourism side in the form of an increased number of visitors. However, it is not the volume that is important, but rather an increasing awareness of European people of Istanbul. We must provide an introduction to Turkish heritage and culture for them, in order to be known better in Europe and thereby gaining more interest."

Heritage was mentioned as an essential part of the cultural tourism goals. Basically Istanbul is dealing with two 'types' of heritage at the moment; heritage in the classical sense, mainly meaning historical buildings from the Ottoman and Byzantine Empires, and industrial heritage, such as Santral, the Golden Horn shipyards and the Karaköy depots. 2010 was viewed as an opportunity to make new investments in heritage. But whereas the public bodies seemed to show a particular interest in the 'classical' heritage, cultural actors were mainly interested in the industrial heritage, which could potentially be turned into new cultural venues. Disputes also arose between public, private and third sector actors about how heritage should be treated and how it could and should be restored. Of course heritage issues are never straightforward. Key questions always include why a particular interpretation of heritage is promoted, whose

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[10] Old Istanbul 2010 website

interests are advanced or retarded, and in what milieu was it conceived and communicated? (Graham, 2000)

But the biggest problem in Istanbul is that heritage is generally used by governmental bodies to promote the nationalist/modernist ideology, thereby leaving out alternative meanings of heritage. NGOs expressed their hope that in the case of 2010 a different approach might be taken and that it would provide an opportunity to recreate history and create new realities by the reconstruction of heritage. There is a large debate in Turkey on how to live with difference and diversity. These kinds of heritage issues are directly related to this question, and might thus also contribute to the discussion.

Even though the stress on tourism in the interviews with the ECoC 2010 organisation was moderate, the Istanbul population however mainly thinks of the event as being about tourism. This attitude is strengthened by the fact that politicians have publicly announced that for them the cultural year is particularly about real estate improvement in order to stimulate investments, jobs and of course tourism. (Klaic, 2009)

Lack of overall vision

Looking back at the main objectives mentioned above, we may conclude that the main differences among the various actors involved in Istanbul ECoC 2010, lie in the attainment of 'soft' and/or 'hard' objectives. Whereas NGOs are mainly interested in strengthening the cultural sector, empowering local residents and vitalising the urban environment for the Istanbul population, private parties are particularly interested in the ´world city´ idea, supporting innovative cultural ideas and attracting investment. The governmental actors in turn are very much focused on the European integration process, tourism and urban regeneration. According to the Palmer/Rae report this diversity of ideas was present in many former Capitals of Culture as well, often leading to frustration, especially of those who felt that their views were ignored or left out.

An overall vision for the Istanbul ECoC 2010 project and where it should take the city is, even though the event is less than a year away, still lacking. Today, in the execution of the plans, especially the governmental goals appear to be dominant. Economic and political goals have gained a central position within the project. The differences in opinion within the 2010 agency have resulted in great instabilities, with six executive board members resigning and projects being cancelled or delayed.[11]

A columnist of the Turkish daily Today´s Zaman stated "the executive committee are resigning en masse because they do not want to be a smokescreen

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[11] Today's Zaman, April 12th 2009

for the corrupt practices o the government appointees. Far from becoming a vehicle for Istanbul to embrace the future, 2010 has become yet another example of jobs for the boys and an invitation for society to bury its head in the sand."[12] The Association of the Contemporary Performing Arts Initiative recently released a declaration titled 'Nine Month Left for 2010: We are on this stage as well', reminding the agency of the fact that Istanbul 2010 was to be a civil, democratic and transparent project mainly aimed at cultural production.

Discontent is very apparent. However, even though the governmental institutions may play an important role in respect to this dissatisfaction, the private parties and NGOs also have a role to play. The Istanbul cultural sector has some very strong and influential actors in charge of the more 'high-end' forms of culture. The cultural elite is still very much connected to the Kemalist ideals of modernisation, while at the same time it is dependent on private money. It is for this reason that cultural activities are frequently forced into a rather safe approach that excludes divergent or marginal positions. Culture must be as attractive and prestigious as possible, so that private sponsors become interested in supporting it. (Yardımcı, 2004)

When we consider the traditional roles of the actors involved, doubts about the attainability of all the ambitious goals set for Istanbul 2010 almost naturally arise. Today's Turkish government might be less focused on the Kemalist issue of modernisation, as it is ruled by an Islamic party. However, even when the traditional influence of the Kemalist discourse might decrease, another problem could arise as certain cultural activities may not be considered fit for an 'Islamic city'. In that sense Istanbul 2010 may come to be dominated by appropriate and decent events and be restricted in its scope and activity. The government has also shown a great interest in European integration, which might mean that they would like to push the event into an international direction, stressing its European dimension. The ECoC might in that way come to be dominated by activities stimulating cultural tourism and the image of Istanbul as a modern European city worthy of EU membership.

The private sphere could exert the same kind of influence as the state, promoting forms of culture that are economically viable. Even if they do not intervene ideologically, the cultural agenda of Istanbul 2010 might still be influenced strongly by corporate capital. Grassroots activities targeting the outskirts of Istanbul are then not very likely to be supported as they would not be very likely to produce large economic returns.

A grand responsibility therefore lies in the hands of the NGOs. However, their influence has always been, and in the case of Istanbul 2010 also seems to be limited. Civil society in Turkey is still gaining strength and probably will not be strong enough to face the private and governmental forces successfully (yet).

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[12] Today's Zaman, March 3rd 2009

They are rather dependent on these spheres for their existence, so countering them might be difficult.

Equal cooperation in which all three voices have a say would be most beneficial for the Istanbul ECoC 2010 project. However, only a few months left until Istanbul officially becomes European Capital of Cultures, many people seem to have lost faith in both the Istanbul ECoC agency and the goals the event was striving for.

Conclusion

We might see the Istanbul ECoC 2010 project as an isolated case. However, Istanbul 2010 is not unique when it comes to its organisational situation. In most previous Cultural Capitals it was difficult to set the objectives of the event because there were so many different views and opinions involved. Cities therefore often had problems relating to the well functioning of their organising teams. Reaching a balanced cooperation in a team in which many different interests are represented is not easy. Keeping the balance between economic and socio-cultural goals and gains always turns out to provide great dilemmas and the integrated planning of the event within existing policies in the city is important but complex.

Despite all these difficulties, cities can and should learn from this crucial aspect. Becoming a European Capital of Culture is an excellent opportunity to attain many different goals. However, every goal has its downside. In the case of Istanbul 2010 we saw that the idea of reaching ´world city´ status might lead to a reduction of the city's complexity and diversity, intensifying social polarisation. The strong focus on European integration and 'being European' in turn may result in missing the opportunities that relations with Asia, the Middle East and the Caucasus could offer. Concentrating on Europe too much also makes Istanbul very one-dimensional, and ignores other very important cultural and historical influences. Urban transformation could improve the lives of the local Istanbul people, but is frequently directed at making the city more attractive for tourists, investments and the well-off.

For the strongest parties involved in the organisation of the project – often being governmental institutions - it might be very easy (and logical) to put forward their ideas as the leading thoughts behind a large-scale event such as the European Capital of Culture. This is very dangerous though. Not only for the success of the event, but also for the future of a city. When organising a European Capital of Culture year, everyone should feel involved, especially the inhabitants, the artists and the grassroots movements. In the end they 'make' the city. They form the heart of it. Of course organising an ECoC year can be a way to attract tourists, investments or international attention, but these should not be

the most important goals. Residents are not expecting to hear about increasing percentages, impressive graphs and superlatives. Most are not even expecting a lot, or do not even know the event is going to take place. However, would it not be great if a European Capital of Culture could be the trigger for a real positive change in local inhabitants' lives?

A successful European Capital of Culture celebrates the city, its people and its culture. It supports and listens to its communities and encourages innovative cultural and artistic ideas. It is an open and democratic project, not run for the sake of the municipality or private capital, but for the people. All parties should be involved, and they should listen to each other, even when they might not agree. Then all expected or desired positive side effects will come naturally as well…

Recommendations for future ECoC cities

- Involve the entire city, especially the local population, artists and local grassroots movements;

- Do not let great expectations blind you from the possible pitfalls (e.g. urban regeneration leading to increased social polarisation);

- Make sure that all voices are heard and given a chance to speak and contribute to the event;

- Create an atmosphere and platform for equal and transparent cooperation. Be open about (internal) procedures and decisions;

- Aim for sustainable results for the city;

- Do not expect too much.

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