

DEEPENING EUROPEAN INTEGRATION THROUGH THE EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE ACTION

HORAȚIU DAN¹

ABSTRACT. This paper aims at analyzing the potential that the European Capital of Culture action has of fostering the complex European integration process via its identity function. For this purpose, we have examined a wide range of European Capital of Culture programs and, using a combination between the diverse and the typical case study selection methods, we have chosen for a deeper analysis three cases that could generate conclusions applicable to the entire action (Maribor 2012, Istanbul 2010 and Essen/Ruhr 2010). The main findings of the paper highlight some limited merits of the action in promoting European identity and supporting the European integration process, coupled with the indication of discrepancies in this regard between small and large hosts of the European Capital of Culture. Also, the study sets forward a set of measures that could improve the action's results along its European dimension.

Keywords: *European integration; European Capital of Culture; European identity; European culture.*

¹ PhD, Assistant Professor, Faculty of European Studies, Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca, 1 Emmanuel de Martonne Street, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, dan.horatiu@ubbcluj.ro

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the European Capital of Culture action from the perspective of a common European identity, focusing on the function that should, through the activities implemented along its cultural dimension, support a wide and multi-sectorial European integration process. Consequently, a series of representative European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) are to be examined to determine the potential and limitations of the action as a catalyst for cultural, political, economic or social integration and whether this function of the action could be enhanced to produce superior results.

As it has already been noticed, in the new European climate which began with the Maastricht Treaty, national identity, as perceived in the 19th century, has become obsolete, something that does not mean however that attachment towards a mutated version cannot be (or has not) developed². In this context, one way to perceive things is that deepening European integration would be antagonist to the further development of hard-core national identities and that an enhanced European identity, which should coexist with a difference-celebrating and non-exclusive national identities, would be needed to ensure the continuation of integration efforts.

The study was conducted bearing in mind that fostering European integration is not among the explicitly stated objectives of the action, which aims however at developing a "European dimension" through strengthening common cultural aspects³ and providing with the opportunity to "highlight the richness and diversity of European cultures and the features they share, as well as to promote greater

² Ciprian Păun and Adrian-Gabriel Corpădean, *European Regions and Multiculturalisms: Beyond the Nation?*, Transylvanian Review, Vol. XXIV, sup. 1, pp. 55-64, 2015.

³ European Parliament and Council of the EU, *Decision No 1622/2006/EC of The European Parliament and of The Council of 24 October 2006 establishing a Community action for the European Capital of Culture event for the years 2007 to 2019*, Official Journal of the European Union, 3.11.2006, L304/1, art. 4.

mutual understanding between European citizens”⁴. Nonetheless, the program’s focus on common cultural elements and on the chance “to experience the feeling of belonging to the same European community”⁵ constitute elements which are central to the wider European integration process.

Moreover, one of the issues that we feel are not sufficiently addressed at a policy level concerns the role of the media in promoting both the idea of a well-defined European cultural identity and the features of each ECoC program. In this context, we view successful communication by the European Commission and each of the ECoC hosts as crucial to the accomplishment of the objectives regarding European integration.

Methodology

From a methodological perspective, we have aimed at selecting case studies that have the potential to generate conclusions that are relevant for the European integration potential of the entire ECoC action. Having this in mind, we must note that the ECoC was subject to several changes in vision along the years and thus has changed dramatically since its first implementation in 1985. As a consequence, in order to ensure that the conclusions of the study are relevant for the current form of the action, we have narrowed the range of cases to be taken into consideration to those implemented in the 2010 – 2014 period, taking the year 2010 as a threshold because of the fact that beginning with 2010 new monitorization criteria have been applied⁶, contributing to a more efficient implementation, the facilitation of the evaluation process and improvement in its accuracy. The 2015 Capitals were discarded due to the insufficient time that has passed

⁴ *Ibidem*, art. 1.

⁵ Jose Manuel Barroso, *Foreword*, in *European Capitals of Culture: the road to success*, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2009, p. 1.

⁶ European Parliament and Council of the EU, *Op. cit.*, art. 14 (1).

from their program implementation, thus making evaluation conclusions potentially incomplete. In this context, we have taken into consideration the eleven cities or regions that have held the ECoC title in this period: Istanbul, Essen/Ruhr, and Pecs in 2010; Turku and Tallinn in 2011; Guimaraes and Maribor in 2012; Marseille/Provence and Kosice in 2013; Riga and Umea in 2014.

For the purpose of ensuring external validity, the selection of cases was done using a method adapted to the characteristics of the study and represents a combination between the diverse and typical case selection criteria, while the sources of the analysis consist mainly of official documents of EU institutions, external reports and other documentation regarding the implemented ECoC actions.

Recognizing the complexity of the examined phenomenon, in the first phase of the case selection process we have defined relevant categories of ECoCs. The main difference from the rigors of the diverse case selection method is that, due to the high degree of heterogeneity of the cases, it was impossible to define relevant categories that were perfectly homogenous, i.e. the random selection of any case within the category would generate the same results. Consequently, once categories are defined, the next step is to proceed in selecting a case from each category using the typical case selection method, thus analyzing the most representative case from each category in the attempt to draw conclusions that have a high generalization potential⁷.

Regarding the criteria that are to be used to define the categories, we have identified two possible approaches.

The first approach focuses on the size of the city, departing from the idea that the implementation dynamic differs because of the differences in capacity to coalize the community around the project (usually greater in small cities) and of the differences in touristic

⁷ For more details regarding the main methods of case study selection, consult John Gerring, *Case Selection for Case-study Analysis: Qualitative and Quantitative Techniques*, in Janet Box-Steffensmeier, Henry Brady and David Collier (eds.), "The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology", New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 645-684, 2010.

infrastructure and the capacity to attract external visitors (usually greater in big cities). Also, the usually better cultural infrastructure of bigger cities should not be neglected, even if creating infrastructure can be among the program's objectives.

The second approach has at its core the location of the ECoCs, with the degree of economic development at a national level being the main feature. This could be relevant due to differences that can appear in infrastructure levels (both touristic and cultural), the capacity to finance the project (which is crucial, since the European Commission contributes with only 1.5 Million Euros to the budget of each Capital) and, possibly, the difference in administrative capacity, as public institutions in more developed countries may be (on average) more efficient than those in poorer countries.

When it comes to the disadvantages of the two category building methods, on one hand we note that most ECoCs from the considered series are small, which would imply discrepancies in category content and implicitly a smaller selection range for large cities/regions. On the other hand, applying the criterion of national economic development seems to be in contradiction with the objectives of the action and the principle of improving organizational capacity, ensuring regional development and even the idea of European integration.

Taking all these into consideration, it emerges that defining the categories according to the size of the city hosting the ECoC represents the better approach. Moreover, we have established the 400,000 inhabitants level as a threshold between small and large cities. We are aware that, in a broader context, having more than 400,000 inhabitants is not sufficient for calling a city large. However, observing that the action, even if does not discourage the participation of large cities in the competition, seems however to favor smaller cities, as it emerges from the large proportion of smaller ECoCs. Consequently, by taking a closer look at the cities from the considered series, the 400,000 mark seems to be the optimal level for setting the threshold.

Additionally, since the action allows the title to be held by a region, a third category must be constructed to reflect the existence of

such ECoCs. The approach is validated by the fact that the cooperation and implementation dynamics is different when more local entities (with potentially varying interests) are involved.

Because of the above, the defined categories are the following: small cities (Pecs, Turku, Guimaraes, Maribor⁸, Kosice and Umea), large cities (Istanbul, Tallinn and Riga) and regions (Essen/Ruhr and Marseille/Provence).

The first criterion that we looked at when choosing a case from each category was project evaluation reports accuracy, as derived from the positions of the European Commission on each of the five annual reports. After analyzing these documents, one can notice some issues with the 2013 ECoC (Marseille/Provence and Kosice)⁹ and the 2014 ECoC (Umea and Riga)¹⁰ reports. Namely, the Commission, even though considers that there are sufficient arguments for the dissemination of the general conclusions of the evaluation, points out that the two reports lack hard data and independent evidence that would lead to solid conclusions regarding the efficiency and impact of the projects. Moreover, the Commission suggests the insufficiency in generating reliable conclusions of qualitative indicators resulted from online polls and interviews with participation limited to respondents

⁸ Even though the Maribor 2010 project has included partnerships with five other Slovenian cities (Murska Sobota, Ptuj, Slovenj Gradec, Novo Mesto and Velenje), thus conferring it a certain regional dimension, its characteristics remain those of a local project, reason why, correlated with the small size of its population, it was included in the small cities category.

⁹ European Commission, Report from The Commission to The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and The Committee of The Regions. Ex Post Evaluation of the 2013 European Capitals of Culture (Košice And Marseille-Provence), Bruxelles, 2nd of March 2015, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A52015DC0074>, [05.02.2016].

¹⁰ European Commission, Report from The Commission to The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and The Committee of The Regions. Ex Post Evaluation of the 2014 European Capitalso of Culture (Umeå and Riga), Bruxelles, 26th of November 2015, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52015DC0580&from=EN>, [25.02.2016].

who were directly involved in the projects or beneficiaries of thereof. Taking into consideration these issues, as expressed by the European Commission, we conclude that they affect, if not necessarily the representativeness of the cases, then at least the accuracy of the process determining said representativeness. Therefore, the 2013 and 2014 ECoCs were eliminated from the potential typical cases from each category.

The next step is to perform a preliminary analysis in each case in order to determine the relevance for their respective categories. Regarding the small cities category, the characteristics linked to the collaborative dimension represented strong arguments in choosing Maribor 2012 as the case to be analyzed. More precisely, the “Cultural Embassies” section of the project involved 80 cultural institutes and embassies from 16 Member States and 15 non-Member States, aiming at developing a content that would reflect the cultural identity of each partner country and would encourage cultural coproduction between local entities and foreign partners¹¹.

From the large cities category, Istanbul 2010 emerged as the ECoC to be subject to a deeper analysis due to the amplitude of its cultural program (during the entire year, almost 10,000 activities or events were implemented¹²) and its collaborative dimension at a European level, the “41°-29° Istanbul Network” section of the project facilitating interaction between fifteen European cities and setting up the foundations for cultural partnerships between young artists¹³. The third category, consisting of regions, is to be represented in the next part of the analysis by Essen/Ruhr 2010¹⁴, whose slogan

¹¹ Nick McAteer, Neringa Mozuraityte and Neil McDonald, *Ex-post Evaluation of 2012 European Capitals of Culture*, ECORYS, Final Report for the European Commission, 2013, p. 44.

¹² James Rampton et. al., *Ex-Post Evaluation of 2010 European Capitals of Culture*, ECORYS, Final report for the European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture, 2011, p. 77.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

¹⁴ The Ruhr region is an industrial urban area containing cities such as Essen, Dortmund, Bochum and Duisburg.

“transformation through culture, culture through transformation” successfully summarizes the structure of a program focusing on cultural, social and economic regeneration. Moreover, the project displayed an “inductive, collaborative and bottom-up approach”¹⁵, which, as the evaluation report pointed out, has generated a significant impact¹⁶.

In the following section, we will perform the in-depth analysis of the three case studies which were selected in order to evaluate the practice, potential and limitations of the ECoC action with regard to its capacity to provide impetus to the wider European integration process via cultural integration and European identity genesis.

Maribor 2012, Istanbul 2010 and Essen/Ruhr 2010 – Vectors of European Integration?

The results of the chosen ECoC programs were positively evaluated by official reports: Maribor, for implementing an “extensive and innovative cultural program”¹⁷; Istanbul, deemed as one of the biggest and most substantial cultural capitals up to that date¹⁸; and Essen/Ruhr, which was deemed as a coherent program with a significant impact, including regarding the social, spatial and administrative development of the Ruhr region¹⁹. Thus, even if not fully free of negative aspects, especially regarding

(1) the lack of a clear communication of the project’s metropolitan/regional identity (in the case of Essen/Ruhr)²⁰,

¹⁵ James Rampton et. al, p. 42.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ European Commission, *Report from The Commission to The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and The Committee of The Regions. Ex Post Evaluation of the 2012 European Capitals of Culture (Guimarães and Maribor)*, p. 6.

¹⁸ James Rampton et. al., *Op. cit.*, p. 83.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 43.

(2) a deficient governance structure, which had a negative impact on the artistic vision of the project, constituting an obstacle for the emergence of a singular and coherent character (in the case of Istanbul)²¹,

(3) the political dissensions, at a local level, regarding the institutional arrangements of the project and its public financing sources (in the case of Maribor)²², and

(4) the incapacity of Maribor 2012 to generate significant results regarding infrastructure development²³, which has negatively contributed to the sustainability and durability of the Slovenian project (in contrast with the implemented activities and the results of the Essen/Ruhr 2010 and Istanbul 2010 projects²⁴), the three Capitals have managed to achieve their proposed objectives.

Starting from this general context, the analysis will be focused on the European dimension of the three projects, identifying relevant elements for determining, from a European integration perspective, the merits of the ECoC action regarding integration deepening and the potential contribution brought to strengthening a common European identity among Member and Candidate States.

Ensuring a European dimension of the projects represents one of the action's priorities, being a criterion within the selection process and an element that is closely analyzed in the monitorization and evaluation phases. Thus, promoting Europe's cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, shared cultural elements, the participation of European artists to the program and the international cooperation between them are aspects that are present in the expression of the

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 77.

²² Nick McAteer, Neringa Mozuraityte and Neil McDonald, *Op. cit.*, p. 61.

²³ European Commission, *Report from The Commission to The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and The Committee of The Regions. Ex Post Evaluation of the 2012 European Capitals of Culture (Guimarães and Maribor)*, p. 5.

²⁴ European Commission, *Report from The Commission to The European Parliament, The Council and The Committee of The Regions. Ex Post Evaluation of the 2010 European Capitals of Culture (Essen for The Ruhr, Pécs, Istanbul)*, Bruxelles, 20th of December 2011, p. 7-8, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52011DC0921&from=EN>, [02.02.2016].

European dimension, as understood by the European Commission, a dimension that is positioned in the center of the ECoC action.²⁵ In this context, one of the predominant visions on the European dimensions is focused on the complementarity between European and local identity²⁶, a complementarity that is generated by the opportunity and the mutually explorative character of the interaction between the two. The fact that, according to the estimates of the organizers, both in the case of Maribor and Essen/Ruhr, more than half of the local population has participated to the program's activities (in the case of Istanbul, the lack of such a high percentage is understandable due to the dimensions of the Turkish metropolis, the approximately 950,000 residents that participated to activities representing a mere 7,2% of the city's population²⁷), correlated with the implementation of artistic programs that have shown the complexity of European culture both horizontally (internationality) and vertically (intersectoral and intercultural)²⁸ and with the positive results with respect to tourism²⁹, indicates the action's high impact potential for the European level of identity genesis.

²⁵ European Commission, *European Capitals of Culture 2020 – 2033. Guide for cities preparing to bid*, https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/library/capitals-culture-candidates-guide_en.pdf, [02.02.2016].

²⁶ Beatriz Garcia and Tamsin Cox, *European Capitals of Culture: Success Strategies and Long-Term Effects*, European Parliament, Directorate General for Internal Policies, 2013, p. 13, http://iccliverpool.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/IPOL-CULT_ET2013513985_EN.pdf, [02.02.2016].

²⁷ Bulent Ozan and Can Unver, *Exploring the impact for Istanbul of being a European Capital of Culture*, Performance, No. 4, Vol. 4, pp. 52-59, 2012, p. 58, http://performance.ey.com/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/11/Performance_Volume-4_Issue-4-November-2012.pdf, [03.02.2016].

²⁸ For more details, consult James Rampton et. al., *Op. cit.*, pp. 30-31 (for Essen/Ruhr), pp. 69,73, 77-79 (for Istanbul) and Nick McAteer, Neringa Mozuraityte and Neil McDonald, *Op. cit.*, pp. 51-52.

²⁹ For more information on the comparative situation of the total overnight stays in the years before each of the three projects, consult Beatriz Garcia and Tamsin Cox, *Op. cit.*, p. 140.

The European dimension has exhibited extra nuances in the case of Istanbul 2010, as the designation of the title to the Turkish city has represented an attempt of building a cultural bridge between Europeans and Turks³⁰, and, in the same time, an opportunity to bring arguments in favor of Turkey's EU membership bid.³¹ In this context, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan observed that "Istanbul, with its history, culture, civilization and people is a city that has its face turned toward Europe. As much as this city has internalized European culture, European culture has been shaped by Istanbul"³². Even more, as noticed by Brindisi, the Istanbul ECoC project has sought to demonstrate the capacity of a secular Muslim country to be integrated in an EU composed of countries with Christian majorities³³. The European stake of Istanbul 2010 was thus augmented by the political and historical context, the project containing "some exploration of the role of culture and civil society in the context of Turkey's application for EU Membership"³⁴. This has probably contributed to the fact that implemented activities were heavily focused on the European dimension³⁵.

Consequently, at the levels of expectations and impact pertaining to the European theme component, Istanbul 2010 has ensured among the participants to the project's activities a better level of knowledge of the European diversity and the shared cultural

³⁰ Jennifer Brindisi, *European Cultural Identity and Its Impact on Turkey's Bid for EU Membership*, in Mensur Akgun and Lenka Petkova (eds.), "Young Minds Rethinking the Mediterranean", Istanbul Kultur University Publication No. 159, Istanbul: Global Political Trends Center, pp. 48-68, 2011, p. 60.

³¹ Jennifer Brindisi, *Istanbul: How Turkey's Cultural Capital Has Shaped Its Foreign Policy*, Euxeinos, No. 10, pp. 30-36, 2013, p. 30.

³² Istanbul 2010 ECoC Agency, *Istanbul is a World Within the World*, 2010, p. 28, *apud*. Jennifer Brindisi, *European Cultural Identity and Its Impact on Turkey's Bid for EU Membership*, p. 61.

³³ Jennifer Brindisi, *Op. cit.*, p. 31.

³⁴ European Commission, *Report from The Commission to The European Parliament, The Council and The Committee of The Regions. Ex Post Evaluation of the 2010 European Capitals of Culture (Essen for The Ruhr, Pécs, Istanbul)*, p. 7.

³⁵ James Rampton et. al., *Op. cit.*, p. 72.

heritage, an important vector in this regard being the inclusion of a course in the academic programs of the city's universities³⁶. As a result, approximately 500,000 city residents have declared that their vision of European culture has improved, while more than 310,000 have stated that they developed their knowledge on different cultures due to foreign participants to the project's activities³⁷.

In this context, the independent evaluation report of Istanbul 2010 has concluded that the project has achieved a certain degree of success regarding the European cultural dimension objective, even if specific elements were not present in the entire cultural program or in the marketing campaigns³⁸.

Before proceeding to the analysis of other ECoC projects, it must be mentioned that, like in the case of Istanbul 2010, the program benefited from the involvement of the academic environment, which was facilitated by already existing international networks³⁹.

Let us now turn our attention to the results and impacts of the other two analyzed projects (Essen/Ruhr and Maribor), from the perspective of the European theme. In the case of Essen/Ruhr, the project has focused, beginning from the application phase, on a series of concepts which were relevant to the European dimension, constituting a sort of pilot meant to develop and test good practices linked to the reinvention through culture and creativity of European regions with an outdated industrial structure. The objective was to use the integrating force of culture as a main driver for achieving unity through a bottom-up process and for facilitating the transition from a heavy industry center towards a cultural metropolis⁴⁰ through the exploitation of synergies between culture and creative economy as a

³⁶ According to the annexes to James Rampton et. al., *Op. cit.*, p. A46, http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/more_info/evaluations/docs/culture/ecoc2010-annexes_en.pdf, [02.02.2016].

³⁷ Author's calculations based by data provided by Bulent Ozan and Can Unver, *Op. cit.*, p. 58.

³⁸ James Rampton et. al., *Op. cit.*, p. 79.

³⁹ Nick McAteer, Neringa Mozuraityte and Neil McDonald, *Op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁴⁰ James Rampton et. al., *Op. cit.*, p. 26.

means of ensuring economic development⁴¹. The activities of the project were focused on the exchange of ideas /creative practices and on the creation of networks through transnational projects, the visits of European artists in the region being sacrificed⁴². This approach was consistent with the objectives targeting the profound transformation of the region and managed to deliver a substantial contribution to a program that, compared to the other 2010 ECoC projects, has had perhaps the highest rate of European theme permeability⁴³.

When looking at the results corresponding to the operational objective linked to implementing activities with a European theme, one can observe the improvement of participant's knowledge on European diversity and common cultural heritage, leading to a more European perspective of the region's inhabitants and the founding of a European center for creative economy⁴⁴, whose later activities included cooperation with artists and professionals from the creative sector in projects focused on the idea of cultural and creative economy⁴⁵.

The case of Maribor is somewhat different. First, the organizers have not collected data referring to the citizens' perception on their own European identity and the degree of European culture awareness. Nonetheless, most survey respondents have agreed with the statement that Maribor can be proud of its ECoC title with an average intensity score of 4.5/5⁴⁶.

⁴¹ For more details, consult Wirtschaftsförderung metropol Ruhr and European Center for Creative Economy, *Creative Economy Ruhr. Driver for innovation in economy, culture and urban development*, 2013, http://business.metropolruhr.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumente/Publikationen/Kreativwirtschaft/Creative_Economy_Ruhr_02.pdf, [04.02.2016].

⁴² James Rampton et. al., *Op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ According to the annexes to James Rampton et. al., *Op. cit.*, p. A34, http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/more_info/evaluations/docs/culture/ecoc2010-annexes_en.pdf, [02.02.2016].

⁴⁵ European Centre for Creative Economy website, <http://www.e-c-c-e.de>, [02.02.2016].

⁴⁶ According to the annexes to Nick McAteer, Neringa Mozuraityte and Neil McDonald, *Op. cit.*, p. A64, http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/more_info/evaluations/docs/culture/ecoc2012-annexes_en.pdf, [03.02.2016].

Regarding the specific objective concerning the development of the European dimension through cultural supply and transnational partnerships, although Maribor 2012 contained relatively few projects involving European partners (128 out of a total of 405 projects), it constructed an instrument, namely the “Cultural Embassies” section, that involved 80 organizations out of 31 countries⁴⁷, including 16 Member States⁴⁸. The section was made up out of activities meant to promote the cultural heritage of each of the partners under the umbrella of a concept based on forming an “embassy” for each state that would function for a period varying from a month to a full year (the case of the activities of the Goethe Institute)⁴⁹. However, even though, as noticed also in the European Commission’s evaluation report, the Maribor 2012 project has included programs which were relevant for the EU level objectives of the action, including promoting the European cultural diversity and highlighting common cultural traits⁵⁰, it has been concluded that the lack of intensive promotion at an international level lead to missing an opportunity⁵¹ that could have generated extra positive effects. Consequently, a better use of media channels could have ensured much better results both for the Maribor 2012 project and the ECoC action in general.

Maribor 2012, Istanbul 2010 and Essen/Ruhr 2010 – Results from a European Integration Perspective

Considering the before mentioned aspects, it is our opinion that, despite the existence of activities which were relevant for the

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. A63.

⁴⁸ Nick McAteer, Neringa Mozuraityte and Neil McDonald, *Op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ European Commission, *Report from The Commission to The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and The Committee of The Regions. Ex Post Evaluation of the 2012 European Capitals of Culture (Guimarães and Maribor)*, pp. 4-5.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

European dimension, the Maribor 2012 project did not manage to considerably add value with regards to the development and promotion of European identity, values and culture.

Although our analysis of the three projects (Istanbul 2010, Essen/Ruhr 2010 and Maribor 2012) from a European identity perspective does not represent a complete exploration of the results generated by the ECoC action, they do show, due to a satisfactory degree of representativeness ensured by the selected cases, some aspects that transcend every given project and constitute a good barometer with regard to the action's capacity to develop a European dimension by strengthening common cultural elements, thus influencing the European integration process from a cultural direction.

As a result of the preformed analysis, a series of observations centered on several key features that could contribute to a more efficient and effective ECoC action can be formulated.

Firstly, the results of the conducted analysis confirm the validity of the Commissions statement which considers that the "ECoC remains of key importance and thus of significant relevance for the EU Treaty, particularly Article 167⁵², through contributing to the flowering of Member State cultures, highlighting common cultural heritage as well as cultural diversity and increasing cultural co-operation between Member States and internationally"⁵³. Thus, projects organized within the action promote a harmonious interaction between different expressions of national cultures which, in the presence of a strong collaborative element, contribute to the development of a common European cultural environment.

Secondly, the atmosphere created around the action and the prestige that is conferred by the title significantly contribute to increasing the visibility of the events and a better promotion of the European culture idea among the public. Taking this into

⁵² Article 167 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union refers to key aspects regarding the cultural dimension of the EU.

⁵³ European Commission, *Report from The Commission to The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and The Committee of The Regions. Ex Post Evaluation of the 2012 European Capitals of Culture (Guimarães and Maribor)*, p. 4.

consideration, we must highlight that the positive effects generated by the ECoC action regarding the creation/consolidation of European culture and identity have a cumulative character, which, correlated with the incremental and relatively small changes produced by each project within the action, mean that a long period is needed for the effects of the action to become truly significant.

Thirdly, we must mention the presence of some deficiencies regarding the promotion of the European identity, values and culture, especially in the case of small cities (besides Maribor 2010, which is more thoroughly analyzed in this study, the Commission's reports identify elements that suggest similar shortcomings in other small ECoCs like Guimarães 2012⁵⁴, Kosice 2013⁵⁵, and, in a lesser extent, Turku 2011⁵⁶). Although there are counterexamples, like Sibiu 2007, this phenomenon must be seriously approached in order to identify viable solutions, especially in the context in which most of the cities designated to be ECoC in the next years are of small sizes. On the other hand, there are clues which indicate that medium and large cities/regions which host the ECoC could constitute a more efficient channel for promoting elements which are specific to the formative aspects of the European dimension. Although some may fear that such locations could lead to a dilution of the message due to a much richer urban or regional cultural life, recent experiences like Istanbul 2010, Ruhr 2010, Liverpool 2008, or Luxembourg 2007⁵⁷ constitute examples against this vision.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 7-8.

⁵⁵ European Commission, *Report from The Commission to The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and The Committee of The Regions. Ex Post Evaluation of the 2013 European Capitals of Culture (Košice And Marseille-Provence)*, pp. 7-8.

⁵⁶ European Commission, *Report from The Commission to The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and The Committee of the Regions. Ex Post Evaluation of the 2011 European Capitals of Culture (Tallinn And Turku)*, Bruxelles, 23rd of January 2013, pp. 7-8, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52013DC0013&from=EN>, [05.02.2016].

⁵⁷ For more details regarding the Luxembourg 2007 and Liverpool 2008 projects, consult ECOTEC, *Ex-post Evaluation of 2007 & 2008 European Capitals of Culture. Final Report*, 2009,

Conclusion

The European Capital of Culture action represents a way in which European institutions seek to create and implement identity policies⁵⁸. This is one of the few such tools that they can employ, since the cultural field is among the EU's supporting competencies, with no requirements of harmonization between Member States, the capacity to legislate in such matters being located fully at a national level. In this context, the effectiveness and efficiency of the action bears an even greater importance. However, as concluded by Ooi, Hakanson and LaCava, there is a high degree of disagreement regarding the success of the already implemented ECoC projects, which also reflects the lack of agreement regarding the methods and criteria that should be employed in the evaluation procedure⁵⁹. Nonetheless, it is our opinion that the analysis performed within this study has generated a series of observations about the action's capacity to enhance European integration that can prove to be relevant in the optimization of future projects.

Let us begin with the positive aspects revealed, as the analysis has identified elements that indicate the action's capacity to facilitate a constructive interaction between the different expressions of national culture, to promote the diffusion of ideas and to develop a strong collaborative cultural climate at a pan-European level, thus contributing to the cultural and identity genesis process that the EU seems to have such a great need for. All these are enhanced by the effervescence created around the ECoC, as the prestige conferred by

http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/documents/ecoc/expost-2007-08_en.pdf, [05.02.2016].

⁵⁸ Tuuli Lähdesmäki, *Identity Politics in the European Capital of Culture Initiative*, Publications of the University of Eastern Finland Dissertations in Social Sciences and Business Studies, No. 84, p. 64, http://epublications.uef.fi/pub/urn_isbn_978-952-61-1486-6/urn_isbn_978-952-61-1486-6.pdf, [05.02.2016].

⁵⁹ Can-Seng Ooi, Lars Hakanson and Laura LaCava, *Poetics and Politics of the European Capital of Culture Project*, *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 148, pp. 424-427, 2014.

hosting the Capital substantially contributes to increasing the visibility of the organized events and improving the view of the public on European culture. The effects are indeed limited, but, on the other hand, they have a cumulative character, which means that a long period marked with successfully implemented projects could lead to significant results at a European level.

The study has found also some deficiencies in promoting the European identity, values and culture when the host cities were of smaller size, something which is not however true for all such ECoCs. The observation is important especially in the context in which so many of the cities that held the title in previous years and that are already designated to do so in the future are small. Although this preference which seems to emerge among selection commissions could be motivated by a greater potential for regional development, practice so far suggests, with some exceptions, more modest results regarding the European dimension of the action.

It must be underlined that none of the above constitute a plea for excluding or limiting in any way small cities from hosting the ECoC, but merely an invitation to identifying concrete ways to enhance the European dimension of the action. One of the possible such strategies lies in the instrumentalization of the action, by defining more functional objectives and strengthening the connection between the activities implemented and the specific objectives. Moreover, a better-defined framework and stricter rules for project design and implementation should be accompanied by more extensive financing provided by the Commission, a combination that could encourage organizers to have a better focus on the EU level objectives of the program, which would not be subordinated to the local or regional ones.

Finally, the European Commission and the organizing bodies of each ECoC should not underestimate the importance the efficient use of media channels for the communication of the projects' objectives, program, implementation details and results, as this could prove to be an important catalyst to the cultural features of the European integration process.

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