

# Cultural Event and Urban Regeneration: Lessons from Liverpool as the 2008 European Capital of Culture

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For many European cities, a key motivation in developing event strategies is to use an event as a catalyst for urban regeneration. One type of event that is particularly used as a means of urban development is the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) initiative. Based on a case study of the 2008 ECOC Liverpool, this article aims at conceptualising the significance of this major event for a city's economic, cultural and social regenerations. In terms of economic regeneration, the role of the ECOC has been central in creating Liverpool's visitor economy and reshaping the city's image. Liverpool planned different themes for eight consecutive years as a way to ensure economic sustainability. As far as cultural regeneration is concerned, the ECOC contributed to the cultural regeneration of Liverpool by stimulating cultural participation and interest from the demand side, as well as improving cultural provision and collaboration in the cultural sector from the supply side. As for social regeneration, Liverpool treated access development as a policy guideline and considered the ECOC as an opportunity to enhance the sense of place. The most significant lesson learned from Liverpool is its long-term planning and the efforts made to integrate the ECOC into the overall urban development strategy. As a result, a more balanced and long-term effect on urban regeneration could be achieved.

## 1. Introduction

Events worldwide are coming to be seen as having significant economic and socio-cultural impacts on the cities designated as European capitals of Culture. As Richards and Wilson argue: 'cities have become stages for a continual stream of cultural events which lead eventually to the "festivalization" of the cities'.<sup>1</sup> It is commonly believed that major events can contribute to urban regeneration.<sup>2–6</sup> For instance, Richards and Palmer propose that 'events provide an incentive for physical regeneration of areas of a city and regeneration itself in turn provides an inspiration for events' (Ref. 5, p. 75).

Culture may be included in regeneration strategies in three different ways: (1) 'culture-led regeneration', in which culture provides an engine for development; (2) 'cultural regeneration', where culture is an integral part of regional strategy; and (3) 'culture and regeneration', which is the default model of non-integrated or incidental cultural development. For many post-industrial cities in Europe, what we see is a culture-led regeneration approach, where cultural activity was treated as a catalyst or engine of regeneration.<sup>7</sup> The cultural-led regeneration process usually forms part of broader urban regeneration strategies, and may even be central to these.<sup>8</sup>

In Europe, one type of culture event that is particularly used as a means for urban regeneration is the yearly arrangement of the European Capitals of Culture initiative (subsequently referred to as ECOC). The ECOC is an initiative launched by the European Union in 1985, with the title awarded every year and on a rotating basis to respective European Union member states. Since the programme's inception, more than 40 cities have been designated as ECOC. The ECOC programme is arguably one of the most successful cultural projects ever launched by the European Union.<sup>9</sup> The aims of the ECOC were basically to make the culture of the cities chosen accessible to a European audience, to create a picture of European culture as a whole, and to promote European integration.<sup>11</sup> The origins of the ECOC were purely cultural; however, as the event has developed, it has been used in different ways by the cities. In general, the main concern of the host cities has been to gain the economic benefits associated with a growth of tourism, image enhancement and urban revitalisation.<sup>12</sup>

Several researches (e.g. Refs. 1, 5 and 11) have stressed that the ECOC has been a key catalyst for urban development and has had a generally positive impact on the cities overall. For instance, *Impacts 08* states that 'an ECOC programme tends to operate on multiple levels, particularly in the context of broad urban regeneration aspirations from local and regional stakeholders who see the title as a potential catalyst for long-term economic and social change' (Ref. 12, p. 12). The possibilities offered by the ECOC to act as a catalyst for urban regeneration were established by Glasgow – the 1990 ECOC, where the city attempted to boost its cultural infrastructure, its tourism offer, and to rebrand itself with a new de-industrialised image.<sup>3</sup> Glasgow's experience and subsequent development became a keystone in arguments for culture-led urban regeneration. Since 1990, the ECOC event has become an extremely popular instrument for urban regeneration, particularly in the case of cities with an industrial past, such as Rotterdam, Porto, Genoa, Lille, Thessaloniki, and so on.<sup>13</sup>

Situated in the northwest of England, Liverpool has always functioned as England's, and Britain's, gateway to the rest of the world and is known globally as the hometown of the Beatles. However, the city had long suffered a poor reputation due to its economic and social decline by the late 1970s and early 1980s. Liverpool underwent the effects of national recession with high unemployment and a depleted business sector.<sup>14</sup> With the UK nominated as the ECOC host for 2008, a national competition was held. Liverpool, along with 12 other UK cities, bid for the title, and was selected as the ECOC in 2003. Similar to Glasgow, Liverpool's ECOC was seen as an opportunity for a culture-led regeneration approach, and as a crucial signpost for the city's physical and symbolic regeneration.<sup>15,16</sup> The ECOC award in 2003

became a catalyst for further public and private investments.<sup>17</sup> Later on, due to its rich architectural heritage, several areas of the city centre were granted World Heritage Site status by UNESCO in 2004. In light of the city's designation as the ECOC in 2008 and its World Heritage Site status, Liverpool saw the two titles as an opportunity to show itself off to the world.<sup>18</sup>

Based on a case study approach, the present article aims to explore some key factors of event-led strategies for urban regeneration. Data sources are based mainly on: 'Impacts 08' reports, European Cultural Capital reports, academic publications and official websites of Visit Britain, Liverpool Vision and Liverpool Arts Regeneration Consortium, and so on. Impacts 08, commissioned by the Liverpool City Council, is a joint research initiative of the University of Liverpool and Liverpool's John Moores University, seeking to identify the multiple impacts of Liverpool's year as the ECOC 2008. Impacts 08 uses the following six dimensions of assessment: (1) economy and tourism; (2) image and perception; (3) physical infrastructure and sustainability; (4) cultural vibrancy; (5) access and participation; and (6) governance and delivery. European Cultural Capital reports, published by the Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS), aim at providing updated data and comparative studies of the ECOC. The remainder of the present article investigates the ways in which the ECOC constituted a boost to the urban regeneration of Liverpool.

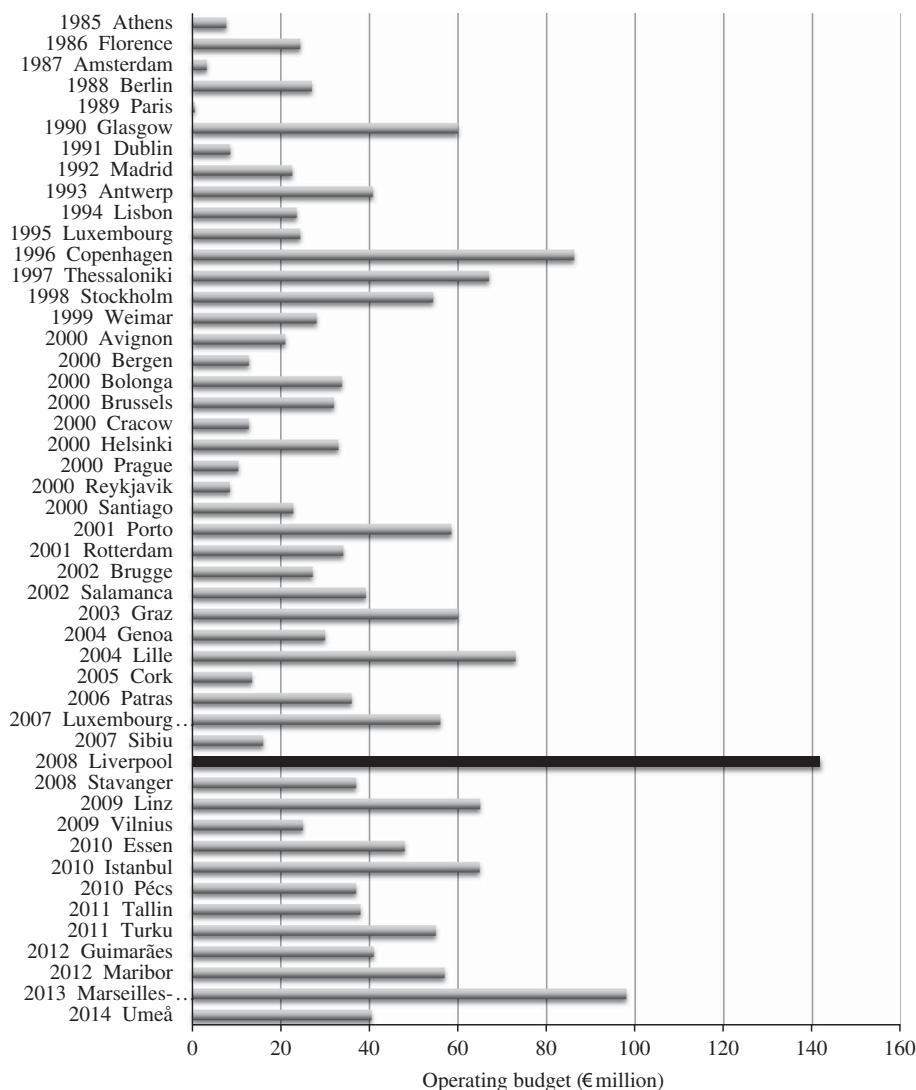
## 2. Economic Regeneration

Visitors coming to a city for a major event contribute to the city's visitor economy and cause a multiplier effect on incomes throughout related supply chains.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, it is widely argued (e.g. Refs 1, 5 and 11) that the construction of a positive and charming image is a fundamental tool to render a city more attractive to current and potential residents, local businesses, investors, media and tourists. Therefore, for many post-industrial cities across Europe, the role of culture events is central in boosting their visitor economy and reshaping their city image.

### 2.1. Visitor Economy

For Liverpool, attracting more visitors to the city was a key aim of the 2008 ECOC. The ambition was to use tourism as a driver for economic regeneration, both directly through visitor spending, and indirectly through changing the image of the city in order to attract inward investment and emphasise the qualities of the city's offer for potential residents.<sup>12</sup> To realise the concept of 'eventful city',<sup>5</sup> Liverpool established a dedicated organisation – the Liverpool Culture Company, which was in charge of coordinating a branded programme of events – 'Liverpool 08' – and related activity, over the following eight themed years:

- 2003: Year of Learning and official nomination
- 2004: Year of Faith
- 2005: Year of the Sea
- 2006: Year of Performance



**Figure 1.** Operating budgets of the ECOCs, 1985–2014.

Source: Ref. 5

- 2007: Year of Heritage, Liverpool's 800th Anniversary
- 2008: The ECOC Year
- 2009: Year of the Environment
- 2010: Year of Health, Well-Being and Innovation

According to the statistics of Ref. 12, the full Liverpool ECOC programme totalled over 7000 activities in 2008 and over 41,000 activities across four years (2005–2008). Liverpool realised an exceptionally high operating expenditure compared with other ECOCs. As shown in Figure 1, Liverpool spent almost twice as

**Table 1.** Total number of visits to the ECOCs, 1995–2008.

The ECOC	Visits (million)
Luxembourg (1995)	1.1
Copenhagen (1996)	1.5
Avignon (2000)	1.5
Bologna (2000)	2.2
Helsinki (2000)	5.4
Rotterdam (2001)	2.3
Porto (2001)	1.2
Salamanca (2002)	1.9
Bruges (2002)	1.6
Graz (2003)	2.8
Lille (2004)	9.0
Genoa (2004)	2.8
Cork (2005)	1.3
Luxembourg (2007)	3.3
Sibiu (2007)	1.0
Liverpool (2008)	10.0

Source: Ref. 20.

much on the cultural programmes as the city with the next highest expenditure – Lille. Liverpool's €142 million operating budget is almost four times as high as the average for all the ECOCs.<sup>5</sup> From a tourism volume perspective, the ECOC triggered a huge visitor economy growth, with nearly 10 million visitors in 2008 and over 18 million across the four years of the programme (2005–2008).<sup>12</sup>

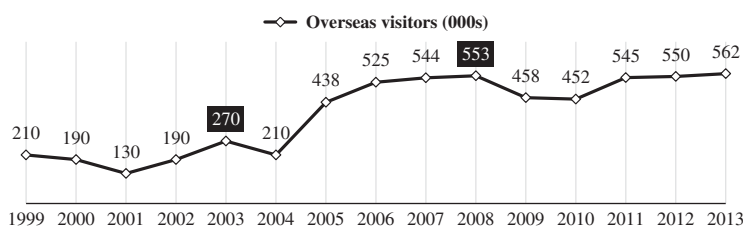
Table 1 indicates that in comparison with other ECOCs, 10 million visits generated in Liverpool surpassed all the ECOC cities for the period 1995–2008.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, Liverpool's ECOC attracted substantial event-motivated and first-time visits. According to Table 2, 35% of tourists visiting Liverpool were mainly motivated by the ECOC – relatively higher than some other recent ECOC cities – of which 97% were first-time visits.<sup>21</sup> According to Ref. 19, visitors of the ECOC tended to be a cultured audience – professional, middle class, highly educated and high-spending people, who could contribute significantly to the local economy and help the city to foster a higher cultural image.

Although a main concern of the host cities has been to gain the economic benefits associated with increased numbers of visitors, in reality many ECOC cities have found it is not easy to maintain such a high level of visitors beyond the title year.<sup>19</sup> Based on the statistics collected from Visit Britain – the tourist board of Great Britain – Figure 2 illustrates the trend of Liverpool's inbound visitor numbers. Visitor numbers started to rise once Liverpool was awarded the ECOC title in 2003, and reached the highest point in 2008, with 553,000 staying visits. However, as with other ECOC host cities, Liverpool experienced a significant decline in visitor numbers in 2009 and 2010. In 2012, however, the number of inbound visitors returned to the

**Table 2.** Proportion of visitors motivated to visit the city by the ECOCs.

The ECOC	Percentage motivated by the ECOC
Rotterdam (2001)	7.2%
Porto (2001)	16.4%
Salamanca (2002)	34.0%
Luxembourg (2007)	38.0%
Sibiu (2007)	32.0%
Liverpool (2008)	35.0%
Tallinn (2011)	30.0%

Source: Ref. 21.

**Figure 2.** Numbers of Liverpool's overseas visitors, 1999–2013.

Source: Visit Britain

2008 level. In 2013, visitor numbers even reached a new record level, with 562,000 staying visits. There is also a steady improvement in terms of Liverpool's ranking compared with other UK cities. In 2013, Liverpool was the fifth most popular destination in the UK for international visitors, right after London, Edinburgh, Manchester and Birmingham.

However, care needs to be exercised in the evaluation of these figures, since this continuous improvement in visitor economy cannot be attributed solely to the 2008 ECOC. As mentioned in Ref. 12, the 2008 ECOC added to, but did not drive the already ongoing physical regeneration projects. For instance, Liverpool's designation as a World Heritage site, a number of flagship projects (e.g. Liverpool ONE shopping centre, the Arena and Convention Centre Liverpool (ACCL), the Museum of Liverpool and the cruise terminal), major public events and blockbuster exhibitions (e.g. Klimt, Picasso and Magritte at Tate Liverpool) and continuing improvements of existing attractions (e.g. the Beatles Story and Liverpool Football Club) have all played a crucial role in making Liverpool more attractive to the visitors.

## 2.2. City Image

Major events are widely seen as an effective enhancer of a destination's image and an important motivator in tourism, commonly referred to in the literature as the

'halo effect', 'showcase effect' or 'feel good effect'.<sup>22–24</sup> The implicit assumption is that increased awareness and an enhanced image will, over the longer term, make for a stronger competitive position and increased tourism receipts.<sup>11</sup> In Europe, cultural events, with the ECOC as a prominent example, have emerged as a means of improving the images of cities.

The example of 1990 ECOC Glasgow has been widely cited (e.g. Refs. 1, 3, 5, 11 and 24) as a role model of image reconstruction, from a rarely visited, depressed post-industrial city into a lively and attractive city. The study of García revealed that the changes to image and local identity in Glasgow are the most important long-term legacy of the 1990 ECOC.<sup>25</sup> The ECOC is now a brand in its own right and has the ability to leverage the media coverage and to raise the international profile of the host city.<sup>11,14</sup>

After a period of industrial decline, Liverpool saw the opportunity of staging the 2008 ECOC as a crucial process of city re-imaging and rebranding. Responsible for Liverpool's ECOC 2008 campaign, the Mersey Partnership and The Liverpool Culture Company, along with other organisations, strived to reconstruct the image of Liverpool.<sup>26–28</sup> The Liverpool 08 brand was therefore created to give the city a new cultural image. In order to raise the profile of the city and leave a long-term legacy, Liverpool was promoted with a different theme each year in the run-up to 2008.<sup>12,14</sup> Marketing and communication are vital to promote a city's image and to stave off criticism from the media. As shown in Table 3, Liverpool set a new record in allocating about €27 million to marketing for 2008, more than the total budget of some previous ECOCs. This investment generated media coverage worth almost €90 million, including at least 7500 national and international articles in newspapers and magazines.<sup>20</sup>

As a result, one of the most positive impacts of the ECOC for Liverpool is the change of visitor's perception. Visitors' awareness that Liverpool was the ECOC in 2008 rose noticeably, both regionally and nationally, between 2005 and 2008, so that

**Table 3.** Marketing expenditures at the ECOCs, 1995–2008.

The ECOC	Marketing budget (€ million)
Luxembourg (1995)	2.2
Copenhagen (1996)	4.7
Thessaloniki (1997)	8.2
Helsinki (2000)	6.7
Bologna (2000)	8.2
Reykjavik (2000)	1.4
Porto (2001)	9.5
Salamanca (2002)	3.7
Bruges (2002)	5.9
Graz (2003)	14.2
Luxembourg (2007)	7.5
Liverpool (2008)	27.0

Source: Ref. 20.

by 2008 over 60% of UK citizens knew about the Liverpool ECOC and 77% of visitors felt the city was safer than expected.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, ever since the city was awarded the ECOC title in 2003, the impact on Liverpool's media representation has been positive. Press reporting in Liverpool became less negative overall, dropping from around 50% negative in the mid-1990s to 33% negative in 2008.<sup>29</sup> Events delivered under the Liverpool ECOC brand also received over 90% positive or neutral coverage throughout this period.

However, a city's image as created or reshaped by events can suffer from a 'waning effect'. Sustaining a particular image beyond a major event requires continued promotion and strategic marketing initiatives. Otherwise, the 'halo effect' can be easily eroded in a short time span.<sup>5,6,11,27</sup> In order to ensure the durability of positive image effects and the city's cultural and artistic legacies, a separate company – 'Liverpool Vision' has been established to carry forward Liverpool's continued sustainable development.<sup>30</sup>

### 3. Cultural Regeneration

Richards and Palmer<sup>5</sup> argue that a successful event city must nurture the cultural ecology of a host city. Cultural events should be an integral part of the host city's cultural life and have deep relationships with their local communities. Events can contribute to cultural regeneration by stimulating cultural participation and interest from the demand side, as well as improving cultural provision and collaboration within a cultural sector from supply side.

#### 3.1. Cultural Demand

To bring about cultural regeneration there should be a high level of community involvement and participation in events programmes. For many ECOC cities, raising the level of participation and interest in culture is an important target.<sup>11</sup> Matarasso highlights many different ways in which cultural participation can contribute to social development, such as enhancing confidence, self-esteem and skills.<sup>31</sup> In the UK, the mission statement of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) is 'to improve the quality of life for all through cultural and sporting activities, to support the pursuit of excellence and to champion the tourism, creative and leisure industries' (Ref. 32, p. 324). Because culture can help to improve the quality of life and of local wellbeing, it is integrated into community planning processes across the UK (Creative Cultures 2004).<sup>33</sup>

The major aim of the 2008 ECOC Liverpool was both to encourage more people to take part in cultural activities and to increase the cultural interests of residents, thus enhancing the sustainability of the ECOC. Liverpool also included a broad programme of events and activities aimed to stimulate participation across the population as a whole.<sup>12</sup> According to the neighbourhood survey, on average 66% of residents took part in at least one ECOC event during 2008, and 14% tried out some new cultural activities, such as visiting a cultural venue or attending a different type of event (as shown in Table 4).<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the ECOC played a role as a catalyst for



**Table 4.** Indicators of cultural regeneration.

Indicators	2007 survey		2009 survey	Percentage change
Participation in the Liverpool 08 event programmes	n.a.		66%	n.a.
Trying some new cultural activities	n.a.		14%	n.a.
More interested in cultural activities following the ECOC	n.a.		37%	n.a.
Attending galleries	60%	→	69%	+9%
Attending museums	42%	→	52%	+10%
Attending live events	35%	→	53%	+18%

Source: Ref. 34.

increasing cultural interest. The ECOC made 37% of respondents more interested in cultural activities. Apart from event attendance, the percentage of Liverpool residents who attended other cultural amenities rose between 2007 and 2009 from 60% to 69% for gallery and from 42% to 52% for museum attendances, respectively. In particular, participation in live events rose significantly, from 35% in 2007 to 53% in 2009 (see Table 4). Theatre-going also increased from 2007 to 2009. These results indicate that the ECOC did change residents' attitudes to culture, and they coincide with the findings of Ref. 5; that is, the ECOC has in most cases boosted cultural audiences quite significantly compared with previous years.

The respondents were also asked to rank the most popular events. It was found that those free of charge, mass audience, open air/street, and innovative events stood out. For instance, 'Go Superlambananas' and 'La Princesse' were the best examples of delivering unique cultural experiences to visitors. For the former activity, replicas of Liverpool's Superlambanana (a public art work made by Japanese-based artist Taro Chiezo) were decorated by artists and community groups and placed around the city for eight weeks in the summer of 2008. La Princesse was a 50-foot mechanical spider, which travelled around the city and allowed audiences to follow the spider's activity. These two examples illustrate a concept of 'sharing economy', by transforming ordinary space into event space and inviting a process of co-creation.<sup>35</sup>

Although there was good engagement in the ECOC across the city, a noticeable variation was found by the neighbourhood survey.<sup>34</sup> For the disadvantaged neighbourhoods, lower cultural impacts of the ECOC can be attributed to both cultural distance (lower cultural capital resulting from lower socio-economic status) and physical distance (travelling distance and cost). On the other hand, for the advantaged neighbourhoods, higher socio-economic status, geographical proximity and excellent transport links to central Liverpool are arguably the main facilitators of cultural participation. These findings also reflected the propositions of some previous studies,<sup>36,37</sup> which argued that participation in cultural events is associated with cultural capital, such as educational attainment and income standards.

### 3.2. *Cultural Supply*

For the supply side, cultural events can contribute to building or boosting a cultural sector, not only providing direct income, but also acting as a source of creativity, skills and opportunities. Events can also be a catalyst for creating a longer term and permanent coordinating body to run cultural events and to facilitate the 'festivalisation' of a city.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, events can both revitalise existing and develop new partnerships.<sup>35</sup> The degree of collaboration within the cultural sector can have significant implications, such as a growth in visitor numbers, increasing attention generated by an event, and being able to benefit economically.<sup>11</sup>

When Liverpool was awarded the ECOC title in 2003, it already had an established cultural sector with a range of outstanding assets. The Liverpool ECOC vision emphasised improving the sustainability of the sector as well as developing greater national and international recognition for the city's cultural offerings.<sup>12</sup> The Liverpool Culture Company (LCC) was set up by Liverpool City Council to coordinate the bid for the 2008 ECOC and subsequently to deliver the ECOC activities. The functions of the LCC include: artistic programming; events delivery; investment in the arts infrastructure; tourism development; marketing and sponsorship etc. According to Ref. 16, the role of the LCC can also be seen as promoting partnerships between statutory agencies and the cultural sector.

Furthermore, according to Ref. 12, the Liverpool City Council increased its funding of the local arts and cultural sector by 84% between 2002/3 and 2008/9, supporting not only the development and delivery of activities during the ECOC but also the ongoing sustainability of Liverpool's cultural sector. The group of organisations receiving funding ranges from larger organisations to smaller arts organisations. Over 50 organisations received such funding during the six-year period, with 27 receiving a three-year funding agreement. In addition, Liverpool City Council introduced an additional grants process in late 2008, for 2009/10 and 2010/11 financial years, which included significant infrastructural investment in a number of arts and cultural organisations.<sup>39</sup> Some arts organisations also received additional programme and project funding from the Arts Council England.

In terms of the collaboration within the cultural sector, the development and success of the Liverpool Arts Regeneration Consortium (LARC) during the lead up to the Liverpool ECOC is particularly prominent. LARC emerged from an early alliance of the 'Big Four/Five' cultural institutions, which occasionally met together in the late 1990s. Since 2006, LARC encompasses the eight largest arts organisations in Liverpool, including Bluecoat, the Foundation for Arts and Creative Technology (FACT), Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse, National Museums Liverpool, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Tate Liverpool, and Unity Theatre.<sup>12</sup>

The creation of LARC had a series of explicit aims, including attempting to provide part of the cultural programmes for 2008 and influencing the city's cultural policy agenda.<sup>16</sup> According to Ref. 39, LARC and the Liverpool Culture Company became effectively a very loose public-private partnership for the provisions of 2008 and then the subsequent shaping of cultural plans in Liverpool. Now the Big Eight

meet at the most senior level every two weeks, and have gained almost £6 million of investment collectively since 2005.<sup>12</sup> LARC has also forged strong links with the Trustee Body of National Museums and Galleries (NMGM), contributed to the repositioning of culture as more central to cross-sector agendas, and facilitated a new citywide cultural strategy for 2008 to 2013.<sup>39</sup>

#### 4. Social Regeneration

Richards and Palmer argue that ‘if events can ensure that all residents can have their cultural needs met in an equitable way while improving residents’ sense of belonging, then they should contribute to quality of life and be socially sustainable’ (Ref. 5, p. 401). The social benefits of the ECOC are twofold – one related to access development (e.g. growing and expanding the local audience for culture) and the other related to cultural instrumentalism (e.g. community involvement and the establishment of a sense of place).<sup>11</sup>

##### 4.1. Accessibility

Many ECOC cities facing social problems resulting from post-industrial restructuring have conceived of cultural programmes as vehicles to achieve wider social purposes. However, major events are often limited to specific groups. That is to say, inclusion of one group often implies exclusion of the others.<sup>40</sup> Richards and Palmer propose that a principal approach to achieve socio-cultural objectives of major events has been to improve accessibility to cultural projects and programmes for local population groups that will not otherwise participate.<sup>5</sup> Access development can be undertaken in different ways by the ECOC cities, but nearly all the ECOC cities included at least some projects aiming to enhance the accessibility of events. An essential aspect of improving the accessibility is through reaching out to local minority groups or connecting community initiatives with mainstream event programmes.<sup>11</sup>

In Liverpool, the 2008 ECOC programme was strong in its concept and implementation of social inclusion, based on a commitment to cultural democracy in a city of great diversity.<sup>12</sup> The neighbourhood survey<sup>34</sup> used the following indicators to measure the event’s accessibility. First, one question asked was whether people thought that the ECOC programmes were for ‘ordinary people’. As shown in Table 5, on average the percentage of respondents who agreed that ‘there won’t be things for ordinary people’ dropped from 37% in 2007 to 21% in 2009. The other indicator to gauge the inclusion effect of the ECOC was to ask ‘whether everyone in Liverpool will gain from the ECOC’. There was a small but steady increase: from 42% (2007) to 46% (2009). The response to another question, namely whether ‘only the city centre will benefit/has benefited from the ECOC’ showed a dramatic drop from 2007 (66%) to 2009 (56%).

Although there was an ongoing increase in the number of people who felt that there are benefits to the ECOC outside Liverpool city centre, the task of increasing event accessibility was not without difficulties. One of the most common criticisms was the focus upon, and the concentration of the events in the city centre and the lack of

**Table 5.** Indicators of social regeneration.

Indicators	Percentage of agreement			
	2007 Survey		2009 Survey	Percentage change
<i>Accessibility</i>				
There won't be things for ordinary people	37%	→	21%	(−16%)
Everyone in Liverpool will gain from the ECOC	42%	→	46%	(+4%)
Only the city centre will benefit from the ECOC	66%	→	56%	(−10%)
<i>Sense of place</i>				
Sense of community	58%	→	47%	(−11%)
The city is a much better place after the ECOC	56%	→	57%	(+1%)
People outside Liverpool had a negative view of the city	53%	→	38%	(−15%)

Source: Ref. 34.

activities taking place in the suburbs. The survey also revealed a strong sense that the ECOC programme focused too heavily on the city centre, and 56% of those interviewed felt that only the city centre would benefit from the ECOC. The vast majority of respondents were of the opinion that distance and the restraints upon the disposable leisure time of more remote communities limit some event's accessibility.<sup>34</sup>

Common means adopted to increase accessibility include: use of public space, initiatives designed to assist people in participating in main programme events, 'free' events, discounted tickets or dedicated transport, etc.<sup>11</sup> Richards and Palmer also emphasise the importance of community projects for the sustainability of the events because they can often root themselves well locally and are relatively inexpensive.<sup>5</sup> In Liverpool, the focus group sessions supplementing the above neighbourhood survey found that free of charge, mass audience and open-air events were the most popular with local people.<sup>34</sup> Also, to sustain the legacy of 2008, Liverpool continues to hold free and street events in order to include all the city's cultural and ethnic groups. For instance, in 2012 a street event – 'Giant Spectacular' – was organised to commemorate the city's Titanic legacy. It showed that with careful planning and programming it is still possible to increase accessibility and convince residents of the benefits of major events outside the city centre.

#### 4.2. *Sense of Place*

Apart from access development, it is widely believed that events can contribute to the enhancing a sense of place and local identity. One of the earliest relevant researches was carried out by Matarasso,<sup>31</sup> who showed that extensive involvement in cultural activities has a positive effect on social cohesion, community empowerment and local identity. Later studies argue that community involvement, including support for an

event, is an important factor in predicting the strength of a person's attachment to a community or place.<sup>41–44</sup> The concept of sense of place is used to describe the feelings of belonging to different kinds of communities and it can be considered as a catalyst for social involvement and participation in a community.<sup>45</sup> Richards and Palmer notice that a 'sense of place is one of the key elements of distinctiveness for cities, and cultural events can be an important means of underpinning a sense of belonging and local pride' (Ref. 5, p. 418). Ref. 41 also found that events could help to create communities of values by forging strong and distinct identities.

Throughout the programme, Liverpool placed a continued emphasis on the ECOC's potential role for social cohesion and inclusion. For instance, prior to 2008, the city launched a campaign to encourage the support of the local communities – 'Our Time, Our Place'.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, in 2005 and 2006, the Liverpool Culture Company ran two campaigns: '08 Welcome' and '08 Volunteering'. The 08 Welcome programme involved working with local residents and with staff in the visitor infrastructure sector in order to build a friendly welcoming image of Liverpool people, and to strengthen the quality of service.<sup>46</sup> The 08 Volunteer programme, a key element of the Liverpool's 08 Welcome programme, was also established in order to deliver better customer service for the year 2008.<sup>29</sup> As a result, a majority of residents attended and broadly supported the ECOC events, in particular, seeing positive outcomes for the city. The other initiative, known as 'Creative Communities', aimed at engaging the local community in the cultural life of the city and reversing the perceptions of those who see the ECOC as only relevant to visitors. This was achieved by encouraging disadvantaged communities to participate in projects that allowed them to represent the city and thus become active agents in the production of the city's image.<sup>27</sup>

As a result, the neighbourhood survey<sup>34</sup> revealed that, in general, there was a positive feel about the impact of Liverpool ECOC on the city as a whole, although larger scepticism exists with the direct impact of the ECOC when it comes to individual neighbourhoods. As shown in Table 5, Liverpool experienced a decrease in 'sense of community', with a significant drop of 12% from 58% in 2007 to 47% in 2009. However, a majority of respondents (56% in 2007 and 57% in 2009 respectively) agreed with the statement 'the city is a much better place after the ECOC', although the difference was not significant. There was also an increasing confidence in external perceptions. In 2007, a majority of respondents (53%) felt that people outside Liverpool generally tended to view the city negatively. By 2009, the percentage of respondents who felt that 'people outside Liverpool had a negative view of the city' had dropped to 38%, a drop of 15%. Explained by the focus group results following the neighbourhood survey, Liverpool's disadvantaged communities were less likely to agree with the impact of a sense of community than advantaged communities – an issue also related to the accessibility of events.

## 5. Conclusion

Cultural events have an important economic, cultural and social impact on a host city. For many European cities a key motivation in developing event strategies is to

recover from long-term economic decline, and to use cultural events as catalysts for urban regeneration. The focus is on stimulating physical redevelopment, adding animation to a city and generating economic, social and cultural benefits.<sup>47–49</sup> However, the ECOC lasts for only one year. Unless the opportunity is firmly grasped, there is no guarantee of long-term benefits.<sup>50</sup> Too often, host cities have focused primarily on funding of events and programmes, with too little investment given to the future.<sup>11</sup> In Liverpool, the aspiration to regenerate the city was at the heart of the ECOC vision.<sup>12</sup> Liverpool considered the ECOC as one part of the long process of regeneration and took it as an ideal opportunity to launch a series of regeneration initiatives. The study findings point to the following ways in which cultural events constitute a boost for urban regeneration.

In terms of economic regeneration, Liverpool planned different themes for eight consecutive years as a way to address the challenges of a one-off event and to ensure economic sustainability. Overall, Liverpool ECOC not only had considerable economic impact due to visitor spending, but also attracted a high percentage of first-time visits in 2008. Apart from tourism revenue created by major events, the image impact generated was found to be one of the most important long-term legacies. The ECOC had a significant influence on reversing visitors' and media negative perceptions of Liverpool as well as strengthening the cultural image of the city. In order to extend the impact of the ECOC, Liverpool set up a dedicated marketing and promotion agency to establish a unique city brand. The 2008 ECOC also accelerated the entire urban regeneration process. As a result, Liverpool maintained a high level of visitor numbers beyond 2008. In order to ensure long-term economic benefits and to sustain continuous revenues from tourism it is suggested that cities look beyond the commercial event offers to seek out innovative programmes and to provide authentic experiences.<sup>24</sup> Cities also need to stage events continuously in order to convince visitors that there is always something happening.<sup>5</sup>

As far as cultural regeneration is concerned, Liverpool devoted efforts to the realisation of a spirit of cultural democracy. The research indicates that residents' participation in the events, visits to the rest of the cultural facilities, and interest in cultural activities were influenced to a certain level. Meanwhile, the research also notes that the activities with co-creation characteristics were the most popular ones, with a significant impact on stimulating cultural demand. For the impact of events on the supply side, Liverpool committed itself to enhance the sustainability of the cultural sector. As argued by Richards and Palmer,<sup>5</sup> cultural impact can be maximised if a longer term coordinating body is set up. The Liverpool Culture Company greatly contributed to the bidding for and the planning of activities, and to establishing collaborative networks. In addition, for the arts and cultural organisations, major benefits lie in a dramatically increased amount of subsidy during the entire process. Moreover, the ECOC could be a catalyst for establishing partnerships within cultural sectors, and in turn ensuring a high level of social connectivity.<sup>11</sup> The most notable example in Liverpool is the alliance LARC, which was set up to strengthen the cultural sector across Liverpool, and to help the social and economic renewal of the city region.

As for social regeneration, Liverpool suffered from serious social problems brought on by the economic recession, and therefore it considered the ECOC as an opportunity to promote social integration and to enhance a sense of place. Like most other ECOC cities, Liverpool adopted access development as a policy guideline, and took measures to lower the barriers of participation. It was found that residents generally had a positive feel about the impact of the ECOC on the city as a whole. However, more than half of the residents still believed that only people in the city centre benefited from geographical location and centralised cultural facilities. In order to shape a sense of place, Liverpool encouraged local communities to integrate into urban cultural life via a series of initiatives such as '08 Welcome', '08 Volunteering' and 'Creative Communities'. It was found that residents generally developed a more positive feeling toward the city's future. There was also an increasing confidence in external perceptions. In order to maximise the social impact of events, community goals need to be built into planning of the events with the implementation of a community involvement strategy.<sup>5</sup>

For cultural events or any urban development policy driven by culture, the biggest challenge lies in balancing the benefits at all levels and the generation of more sustainable impacts. The present research aims to contribute to conceptualising the significance of cultural events for a city's regeneration policy, especially for post-industrial cities. The most significant lesson learned from Liverpool is the importance of long-term planning and of efforts made to integrate the ECOC into the overall urban development strategy. As a result, a more balanced and long-term effect on urban regeneration can be achieved. Following the relative success of Liverpool's ECOC in 2008, the UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) is now looking to replicate this accomplishment by launching a 'UK City of Culture' project to be awarded every four years. It attempts to deliver the same level of economic, social and cultural impact, and to promote the development or regeneration of different cities.<sup>51</sup> Although the 'Liverpool model' has done much to advance our understanding of the nature of an event-led strategy for urban regeneration, it is important to be aware of the limitations of this research.

First, insufficient time has passed and no continuous longitudinal study is currently in place in order to fully understand whether Liverpool ECOC 2008 actually was a 'success'. According to Evans,<sup>15</sup> one mega-event alone is seldom enough to elevate or sustain regeneration investment to achieve competitive city or cultural city status. The ECOC event should thus be viewed in a longitudinal frame, and there is a need to undertake continuous research to identify any long-term gains or losses. Second, this research indicates that while factors presented in the analytical framework are significant, people may question potential replicability by other cities. This case study makes no attempt to be universally applicable. Future studies may provide more empirical evidence about the interrelationships and possible mediating effects of these factors. Still, the present research may provide a base line for further comparison with other cities.

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