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# MARSEILLE-PROVENCE 2013 AND THE "CREATIVE NEIGHBOURHOODS": UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACTS OF THE ECOC ON LOCAL CULTURES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

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*Introduction*

Cultural development and the promotion of regional folkways are critical components of the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) programme. These elements are echoed in the French Law of 1998 against Exclusion[1] and the UNESCO Convention for Cultural Diversity of 2005[2]. Furthermore, the selection criteria for a Capital City stipulates that "the programme shall: (a) foster the participation of the citizens living in the city and its surroundings and raise their interest as well as the interest of citizens from abroad and (b) be sustainable and be an integral part of the long-term cultural and social development of the city"[3].

The programming body of Marseille-Provence 2013 has responded to these requirements with a series of participative projects intended to add a democratic dimension to this yearlong event's cultural offerings. This suite of initiatives includes Creative Neighbourhoods ("Creative Urban Projects"), The Seafront Factory (Atelier du Large), Collections of Collections, and Living in the Midi (Chercheurs de Midi).

We focus our study on the "Creative Neighbourhoods" (Quartiers Créatifs), the most expansive and multi-modal of the participatory projects, and who get their support not only from Marseille-Provence 2013 but also from Marseille Urban Renovation, the National Urban Renovation Agency (ANRU), and the National Public Funds Trust (Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations).[4] The "Creative Neighbourhood" project entails installing nine localised culture and urban development projects to operate throughout 2013 in order to "integrate art into the process of

1 Law Number 98-657 of July 29, 1998, Policy relative to the fight against exclusion; « en priorité dans les zones défavorisées, des activités artistiques, culturelles et sportives, la promotion de la formation dans le secteur de l'animation et des activités périscolaires ainsi que des actions de sensibilisation des jeunes fréquentant les structures de vacances et de loisirs collectifs »

2 Ferdinand Richard (2012).

3 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, Part 2: *City and Citizens*. (http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:304:0001:01:EN:HTML)

4 Marseille-Provence 2013 Pre-programme (2012): 66-67

urban renewal and stimulate participatory approaches […] in so-called at-risk areas"[5]. Six of these Creative Neighbourhood localities lie within the city limits of Marseilles, the majority of which are based in peripheral arrondissements.

After first defining the world "creative" in this context, we shall look at the potential application of this type of project to implement city policies in contentious areas. We evaluate the possibilities for participation in such a project, including the possible co-opting of the "creative" and "cultural" labels. We subsequently inquire into how opportunities for engagement differ according to the time and space attributes of a cultural offering. Finally, we pose the larger question of sustainability and the potential after-effects of this operation, comparing with some observations from Lille post-2004 and looking into the claim that the ECOC operation (and by proxy, its neighbourhood programmes) can have the structuring effect of bringing about an environment of "culture-by-project".

## *1. Creative city and creative neighbourhoods*

At first glance, the designation of this operation as "creative neighbourhoods" works to obscure its analysis. This title is not neutral, as it refers to the vague notion of the "creative city", that is to say; a semantic and problematic field linking the role of culture and of creativity, linking issues of urban and economic development. However, this is not easily gleaned through a reading of the concept of the creative city.

### *The Creative City: a culture-led regeneration*

The theory of the creative city and the notions and assumptions grouped under such a heading can be used to described a city's conversion trajectory in a time of crisis, for instance when implementing initiatives to renew its urban fabric and economy after de-industrialisation. Given the competitive environment involving cities, this transformation can make their territory attractive for companies and their executives, or, more precisely, a group of professionals categorised as the "creative class" by writers such as Richard Florida[6].

In this theory of the creative city, an economy based on the production of information and knowledge ("creativity"), portends a comparative advantage for business as well for territories. The presence of the creative class should, therefore, attract high value-added companies. Conversely, to allow for the development of these companies, cities

[5] Marseille-Provence 2013, Dossier de presse: Signature des conventions « Quartiers créatifs » (2012).

[6] Cf. Richard Florida (2003).

should produce satisfactory operating condition for these enterprises and living conditions for creative workers.

Although we will not dwell on the critiques of this theory of the creative class, we have established that this title has predictive effects, to the extent that it guides the development plans of current cities. This raises a new issue concerning the relationship between urban planning, culture, creativity and economic development.

Therefore, applications for the title of European Capital of Culture can be understood from the perspective of infrastructure construction and cultural facilities, but also as motivated by the organisation of cultural events intended to produce a new visibility, a new image for the city. In the case of Marseilles, the application was linked with a long-term strategy of economic and urban development, and with the Euro-Mediterranean operation.

*Another problematic*

Among the events and projects planned for 2013, we are particularly interested in the "Creative Neighbourhoods," which, as we mentioned, does not seem to fit with the ideas and expectations of the "Creative City". Why is this?

The Creative Neighbourhood operation mostly relates to peripheral areas: nine territories, not only in Marseilles but also in Arles, Aubagne and La Ciotat. The official programme evokes "artistic interventions designed to question, to improve or change the course of people's lives (...). In 2013, the Creative Neighbourhoods will also host architectural projects and ephemeral installations, meetings, screenings, performances..."

Therefore its primary purpose is not to attract businesses and creatives in the sense of Creative City logic (framework, programmers, professions cultural industries, etc..), but rather to support urban renewal in so-called "at-risk areas", that is to say, areas neglected by urban public investment for many years.

We cannot exclude the effects of valorisation and gentrification related to these operations, but, let us assume for the moment that ECoC-related initiatives characteristic of the Creative City are centrally-sited, and that sensitive areas are not targeted for this "creative" development.

An idea which caught our attention is the intention to integrate people into the process of transforming their neighbourhood and in the dynamics of 2013.

## 2. *The issue of participation*

This is an ongoing investigation, and one which needs further analysis. We do yet not have sufficient information to judge if the artist's residence model and this type of peripheral urban area interventions are designed to support and promote urban transformation, or if they are intended to legitimise and co-opt them. Our interest is to understand the extent to which the participation of inhabitants is at stake in the transformation and activity of their environment.

Some keywords found in the official programme evoke the democratic perspective of citizen participation – that is to say, the dialogue, the exchange of views, the appropriation by inhabitants of the tools of creativity and the co-construction of problems. In short, new modes of relations emerge between inhabitants and developers in development projects.

### *Another distribution of the sensible?*

We cannot therefore rely on the analytic framework of the creative city. Instead, in the case of the Creative Neighbourhoods, the "creatives" become groups or individuals who are not considered as inherently creative themselves. These inhabitants of residential neighbourhoods (which represent a quarter of Marseille's population) are not members of the creative class: they lack the attributed property of being creative.

Here we identify the aesthetic politics of the creative neighbourhoods, in apposition more than in opposition to the aesthetics of urban development and the spectacular urbanism of the creative city.

The political dimension appears here in the sense of Jacques Rancière, for whom "art is not political, first and foremost, by the messages and the feelings it transmits about the world order." However, art becomes political "through the type of time and space that it establishes, by the way it cuts up that time, and by the way it fills up that space"[7].

In this perspective the "Creative Neighbourhoods" could take the place of another "distribution of the sensible", according to the concept of Rancière; that is to say, of "another division of space and capacity granted to everyone, contesting the a priori distribution of positions, abilities and disabilities attached to these positions"[8].

[7] Jacques Rancière (2004): 37.
[8] Jacques Rancière (2008): 18.

At this point of the investigation, this concept remains hypothetical, an analytical framework with which to conduct the investigation. One can detect an issue with aesthetic politics in this operation and its possibilities of intervention in the division of roles and spaces. However, we should also consider the operation in a more critical or cautious way.

The promotion of this participative form differs from the simple development of the cultural offer proposed to spectators, as in the classical sense of cultural democratisation. More precisely, the participative form would be considered if the initiative gave rise to a form of empowerment which beyond the duration of the operation.

One may wonder if this form of participation in artistic and urban projects is not actually a way of avoiding political issues concerning the prior political abandonment of these areas – or if it is a way to establish social ties through habitants' socialising and mutual experience of the ephemeral space the design in whose design they have had no part in creating. In other words, we can view this as a means to produce consensus to avoid conflict over issues on past urban policies, including those that will be put into place once the Capital of Culture event runs its due course.

### *3. Temporal dimension and impact of a cultural initiative*

The Creative Neighbourhood project is firmly rooted in territorial improvement and demonstrates the will to reclaim "abandoned" or "forgotten" spaces to the benefit of those that live around them. However, cultural anchorage and mediation are not necessarily limited to a long-term territorial implantation. As previously experienced in Lille 2004 and evident from the very definition of the ECoC as an event of definite duration, it is expected that the ad hoc event format will continue to drive many cultural offerings during 2013. The event format is preferred for its ability to underscore key points in the life of the project and book-end the public's perception of the project lifecycle.

We pose the question of space versus time: is the ability of a cultural space to effect long-lasting change more incumbent on the ad hoc physical space of meanings' negotiation or on the enduring temporal nature of the action?

In the case of Lille 2004, the tendency to prefer "events" to situated long-term programming attracted harsh criticism from cultural and associative structures claiming cultural instrumentalisation, the tacit insertion of city politics in the guise of a cultural project, impertinent programming, and the failure of one-off programming to consider the "specificity of a public far removed from artistic networks and prac-

tices"[9] by delivering a cultural happening without providing tools for its symbolic decryption. The decision to invest large sums in ephemeral programmes has further deepened the cleavage between temporal and enduring projects.

Other criticism of the format comes from the perception of the mega-event's inflexible and top-down monumentality as "supporting and reinforcing the image of established power", with its structuring repercussions for the long term.[10] However, Lille, which in 2004 invested heavily in event-driven programming, also found success with its hybrid event-site spaces called the "Maisons de Folie", successfully linking inhabitants and cultural initiatives. Can this hybrid event-space model overcome such perceived barriers in Marseille's complex cultural fabric?

Let us look at two examples of the Theatre of the Merlan and the Friche de la Belle de Mai (two areas inscribed in the Creative Neighbourhoods) as spaces whose work is situated both in ad hoc and enduring programming.

The Merlan Theatre is sited in the city's peripheral 15th arrondissement and dates back to a 1976 negotiation for the inclusion of "social" space in a new commercial development project. It reached its current proportions in 1992 when former Mayor Robert Vigouroux brokered a project with the Ministry of Culture and Communication to create a "national theatrical scene" in this working-class quarter. The site has found anchorage in the neighbourhood, offering both national touring spectacles and social functions/ workshops with the neighbouring housing projects (Cité de la Busserine). The theatre can be reached by train within five minutes, the main station serving a nearby station, and enjoys a broad range of communication which promotes its cultural and philosophical conferences attracting cultural and academic participants from the region and beyond. The Creative Quarter of the 15th arrondissment and its "Garden of Possibilities" is a part of the Merlan's action portfolio located between the theatre and local train stop.

Three kilometers south, below flyovers carrying trains into Marseille's main railway station, is the Friche de la Belle de Mai. This multi-centred art project in a repurpose-built industrial space which was the first of its kind in France, and is the outcome of collaboration between the former city culture chief Christian Poitevin and theatre directors Philippe Foulquié and Alain Fourneau. The space began in another location in the city's "Neighbourhoods of the North" and found its current location in the post-industrial 3rd arrondissement two years later in 1992. Thanks to its vast spaces, it is able to host large concerts with interna-

[9] Isabelle Estienne & Marie-Thérèse Gregori (2008).
[10] Laurent Dréano cited in Libération (2005): 33.

tional touring groups, theatrical performances, and it also houses an array of artists' studios and two independent radio stations. The site enjoys certain cultural renown and yet has a limited reach to those living in more remote neighbourhoods.

Both spaces, created in the midst of the dynamism of Marseille's mid-1990's cultural "movida", aim to develop an artistic practice, all while considering their role as cultural implantations in a host neighbourhood. Perhaps these two hybrid institutions have been able to outlive their peers from Marseille's cultural golden age because of their ability to engage both the alternative and legitimate cultural communities. However, these spaces are not immune from the challenge of broaching the perception of implantation and irrelevance; nor does their willingness to engage the neighbourhood guarantee the narrowing of the psychological difference between local and visiting publics.

### *4. Sustainability of the project*

Whether it takes the shape of a long-term implantation or of an ad hoc event, each format has a bounded set of opportunities for those implicated in its establishment, organisation, course of operation, and for those who must live with its after-effects. The field of possibilities in an ad-hoc event format gives more framing power to the organiser, whilst the long-term implantation allows for room to manoeuvre for the public/consumers. Might one consider, then, that the desire to emphasise short-term "event-based" cultural offerings, even when inscribed within a long-term territorial initiative, reflects a growing tendency towards the making of the city by way of the time-delimited project?

This phenomenon has been theorised by Boltanski & Chiapello[11] as the result of a process of the disengagement of traditional hierarchical systems in capitalistic theory/practice, and portends a movement towards the "general organisation of society by the project". In this model, the "project" has taken on the magnitude of organising principle above the specificities of organisations, and individuals in a network owe their very inclusion to their persistent actions taken within a succession of projects.

The idea of a Year of Culture and the implementation of cultural projects within this framework may imply the manifestation of this global trend and raises the question of sustainability.

In fact, the sustainability of the Creative Neighbourhoods implies the ability of these projects to thrive and to co-exist with associations and

[11] Luc Boltanski, Eve Chiapello (1999): 258.

organisations not included in the official programming of the year 2013. With the coming of the ECoC, new forms of criteria-making, funding, selection and evaluation may be put in place which abruptly change the playing field for a great number of actors not officially involved in this event. For this reason, it is important to consider how such an event can re-structure future pathways of action, or even modify existing paradigms.

There is a risk to sustainability of the cultural sphere, represented by the introduction of jury-framed funding request processes that require all cultural actors to fit their offering to the current theme in order to receive funding. In the example of Lille 2004, a post-ECOC perpetuity project entitled "Lille 3000" re-creates a series of events every 2-3 years according to a changing theme for each occasion (the most recent in 2012, "Lille Fantastique", emphasises exuberance, surrealistic fashion, and the spectacular). The centrality of such an event to cultural politics means that a great deal of funding will be allocated through application processes delineated by the given theme's requirements. Should all cultural actors be required to correspond to an externally imposed (and possibly arbitrary) theme in order to continue the funding of their diverse activities?

The relative ability (or its lack) of small organisations to compete—to adapt – is linked to their ability to "network" and to create relational ties with key actors, in a cultural world run "by project". This implies that the work of culture is becoming the work of organisational management and marketing, with the focus of the work becoming more and more diffuse. The mediation of relationships and ties has become foundational: "in the last third of the 20th century…the activity of the mediator…has become autonomous, detached from other forms of activity, and valued for its own sake"[12]. What does this mean for the work at hand—the difficult work of effecting culture despite the social forces of diffusion, differentiation, and exclusion?

*Conclusion*

We have attempted to create a general problematic for the type of operation that has begun to take place in Marseille, which is by no means fixed or determined. This is an operation that has already proved itself dynamic and changing according to risks inherent in such a complex scheme. Nevertheless, a conceptual model of action, of the "distribution of the sensible", of the place of "dissensus"; of the temporal/spatial aspect of the cultural offering, and of the sustainability of the

[12] Pierre-Michel Menger (2002): 166-167.

operation allows us a clearer objective lens through which to observe the much anticipated coming year.

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