My essential reads: Cultural value and place

by Dr Franco Bianchini

Background

My essential reads are thought-provoking writings which aim to raise a range of issues about the complexity of the role of cultural activities and cultural value in place-based development strategies. My selection aims to offer readers a more nuanced understanding of culture-led regeneration, including of how it impacts on the shaping of local identities, and of difficult questions in conceptualisation, evaluation, measurement and definitions of 'success'.

Three of the selected writings critically discuss City of Culture schemes, which aim to achieve multifarious impacts (in spheres ranging from cultural excellence to tourism, city marketing, education and well-being). Such schemes, because of their scale and ambition, feature many of the thorniest problems in culture-based place development. Their critical analysis by the authors included here will hopefully raise useful operational questions for policy makers and cultural practitioners. Lastly, two of the selected writings are based on European case studies, which hopefully can help sharpen critical perspectives on UK policies and practices.

My Essential Reads

1. Bailey, C, Miles, S, Stark, P (2004) Culture-led urban regeneration and the revitalisation of identities in Newcastle, Gateshead and the North East of England. International Journal of Cultural Policy 10(1): 47–65.

The authors study the long term social impact of culture-led regeneration. The research is based on the reconstruction of the cultural policy framework of the North East of England from the 1980s to the mid-2000s, and on a 10-year longitudinal study of the impacts of the Newcastle Gateshead Quayside (which includes the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art and the Sage Gateshead music centre). The paper argues that successful culture-led regeneration is not about a trickle-down effect but can counterbalance some of the negative effects of broader processes of cultural globalisation. An in-depth study of local geographical and historical specificities is required to understand how culture-led regeneration can potentially lead to strengthening existing sources of identity rather than manufacturing or imposing new ones.

2. Boland, P., Murtagh, B., & Shirlow, P. (2019) Fashioning a City of Culture: 'Life and place changing' or '12 month party'? International Journal of Cultural Policy, 25(2), 246–265.

The article provides a critical interpretation of the experience of Derry-Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 to assess whether it is possible for major cultural events to be 'life changing' for local communities. The authors discuss whether the City of Culture event was 'life and place changing' or a '12-month party' and problematize what constitutes 'success'. They argue that the Derry-Londonderry 2013 event worked more effectively as a peace resource (for overcoming divisions, appreciating cultural difference and reducing prejudices in a socially and culturally segregated city), than as part of a strategy to deal with "deep seated and entrenched socio-economic problems in a deprived and peripheral economy".

3. Campbell, C., Cox, T., & O'Brien, D. (2017) The social life of measurement: How methods have shaped the idea of culture in urban regeneration. Journal of Cultural Economy, 10(1), 49–62.

The article explores theoretical and methodological approaches applied to the study of culture-led urban regeneration and its impacts, emphasising recurrent issues and pitfalls. The authors argue that, despite the growing currency of the concept and practice of 'culture-led regeneration,' many difficult questions remain about how 'regenerative' outcomes could be demonstrated. The desire among policy makers and other cultural sector stakeholders for strong evidence has led to an increasing focus on evaluation, and on methods to identify and quantify impacts and outcomes. The paper asks what lessons, if any, have been learned in evaluative practice and seeks to summarise and discuss what has been learned, and what has not. The important issues under discussion in the article include the short-term nature of much available data, the clarity of research questions, the feasibility of measurement and the over-emphasis on economic impacts.

4. Garcia, B. and Cox, T. (2013) European Capitals of Culture: Success Strategies and Long-term Effects Brussels, European Parliament.

This report documents the different approaches and strategies adopted by European Capitals of Culture (ECoCs), highlights the strongest claims of long-term effects and analyses recurrent challenges that limit the ECoC scheme's ability to reach its full potential. Key recommendations are the establishment of a standardised evaluation framework, greater emphasis on comparative research and the creation of a formal knowledge transfer programme so that future ECoC hosts can benefit from the wealth of experience developed since the programme's inception in 1985. The report is essential reading for anybody wishing to gain a better understanding of European Cities and Capitals of Culture, including Glasgow in 1990 and Liverpool in 2008. The report examines topics including bidding, the delivery of the event, the evaluation of (cultural, image, social and economic) impacts and the main challenges and obstacles encountered by ECoCs.

5.   Ponzini, D., Bianchini, F., Georgi-Tzortzi, J.-N., & Sanetra–Szeliga, J. (eds) (2020) Mega-events and Heritage: The experience of five European cities. Krakow, International Cultural Centre.

Policy makers in many cities across the world have used cultural mega-events as part of urban regeneration strategies. The creation of new facilities and infrastructures for mega-events typically targeted areas of expansion outside of historic city fabric. Today, on the contrary, mega-event organizers are increasingly opting more for the reuse of existing facilities and areas. This shift represents both a potential opportunity and a threat for heritage-rich European cities. This book (funded under the European Joint Programming Initiative on Cultural Heritage and Global Change) explores the relationships between the planning and implementation of mega-events and cultural heritage through the in-depth study of five cases: Genoa 2004 European Capital of Culture, Milan Expo 2015, Wrocław 2016 European Capital of Culture, Hull 2017 UK City of Culture and Pafos 2017 European Capital of Culture. The book draws on these case studies to attempt to stimulate further research and policy debates regarding the emerging opportunities and threats for context-specific policies and projects, long-term urban development, capacity building, co-operation among different stakeholders, and to foster the multiple social and cultural identities that help both heritage and cities to flourish.

6.   Vickery, J. (2012) After the Creative City?

The paper examines the strengths, limitations and different interpretations of the 'creative city' concept in the context of its appropriation in urban planning and economic development around the world, with a particular focus on Europe. It questions the concept and related strategic approaches in urban regeneration. It concludes with recommendations for an informal strategy of creative urban development and argues that cultural policy should be the 'thinking space' where the idea of the creative city is re-imagined. Vickery reminds us that the creative city is "not just about stylistic architecture and new museums of modern art. It is about a radically democratic city culture of new public spaces, cultural citizenship, urban activism, local identity and a sense of future possibility. It is where art becomes a critical dimension of the public sphere".

Summary

I have a long-standing interest in the role of culture in urban regeneration (with a particular focus on port cities and on European Cities/Capitals of Culture). I am also interested in cultural diversity and interculturalism as resources for innovation in urban policy (see here and here). As part of my work on the development of policy concepts, frameworks and approaches to integrate culture into the mainstream of public policy, I have contributed to the debates on the 'creative city', on 'cultural planning', and on the collaboration between arts and sport policies. With regard to the latter, I initiated with Professor Jonathan Long (Leeds Beckett University) the AHRC-funded 'Fields of Vision – Bringing the Arts and Sport Together' research network which operated from 2016-2017 (see also this article by Jonathan Long and myself on arts-sport policy collaboration and potential integration).

Biography

Dr Franco Bianchini is one of the Associate Directors of the Centre for Cultural Value. Franco is also Visiting Professor at the Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts, Helsinki, and a member of the Council of Founders of the Fitzcarraldo Foundation, Turin.

He was Professor of Cultural Policy and Planning - and Director of the Culture, Place and Policy Institute (CPPI) - at the University of Hull from 2016-2020. CPPI was in charge of the evaluation of the processes, outcomes and impacts of Hull UK City of Culture 2017. Jointly with Professor Jonothan Neelands (University of Warwick, Franco initiated in 2019 the AHRC-funded Cities of Culture Research Network).

From 2007-2016 Franco was Professor of Cultural Policy and Planning at Leeds Beckett University, and from 1992-2007 he was Principal Lecturer/Reader in Cultural Planning and Policy at De Montfort University, Leicester.

From 2010-2014 Dr Bianchini was a member of the team preparing Matera's successful bid for the European Capital of Culture 2019 title. In 2003 he acted as adviser to Liverpool Culture Company on the preparation of their successful bid for the 2008 European Capital of Culture. He initiated, and was a member of the artistic team for, 'Cities on the Edge', a project of cultural co-operation between Liverpool, Bremen, Gdansk, Istanbul, Marseilles and Naples (2004-2009). The project formed part of the programme of Liverpool European Capital of Culture 2008.

Dr Bianchini's books include *Focus on Festivals* (co-edited with C. Newbold, C. Maughan and J. Jordan, Goodfellow, 2015), *Urban Mindscapes of Europe* (co-edited by G. Weiss-Sussex with F. Bianchini, Rodopi, 2006), *Planning for the Intercultural City* (with J. Bloomfield, Comedia, 2004), *The Creative City* (with Charles Landry, Demos, 1995) and *Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration: the West European Experience* (co-editor, with Michael Parkinson, Manchester University Press, 1993).

Call to action...

What's the most useful reading you've done in this topic area? What did you learn? If you'd like to share your reflections and learning with us get in touch at ccv@leeds.ac.uk and we'll feed this into a future resource. Or let us know if you'd like to submit a case study or contribute to a podcast or webinar on this theme.

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