



(Re)Programming Europe: European Capitals of Culture: rethinking the role of culture

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Abstract

Celebrating the 25th anniversary of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) programme in 2010 as a success story for the cities and member states involved, the European Commission also registered a 'lack of Europe' in the programme. This is reflected in the scholarly literature, which has largely focused on the title's effects on individual cities rather than on its effects on Europe. The starting-point of this article is the demand of the European Commission for a stricter implementation of new guidelines developed since 2006 for enhancing the European dimension. After situating the history of the event and its idea of 'unity in diversity' within the wider context of thoughts on Europe as an 'imagined community', this article investigates how Europe is presented in earlier and more recent ECoC bidbooks and programmes. We argue that an observed slight shift in the programme's content, from a competition-based marketing of local identity towards a more universal value discourse, could be read as a first step towards (re)formulating the European dimension. We suggest that this emerging value paradigm also illustrates how such cultural programmes as a kind of laboratory could contribute to a conceptual reflection on (and beyond) Europe.

Keywords

city, cultural policy, Europe, European Capital of Culture, human rights, identity, interculturality

The title European Capital of Culture (ECoC) was first awarded in 1985. The European Commission used the 25th anniversary not only to document a success story but also to state some clear deficiencies, saying that there is too little Europe in the programme:

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A lot of past Capitals have ... struggled with the European dimension of the event and there was considerable discussion on whether it should be further defined ... It seemed to be agreed in the end that there were limits to how far the European dimension should be pre-defined as each city had its own European narrative depending on its geographical location and its history, its past and present populations, and that in some cases it might also extend beyond the borders of the current European Union. In some cases the cities did in fact have a good European dimension in their projects, but did not make it visible enough in their communication material. (European Commission, 2010: 6)

The report is clear: the European dimension was not emphasized explicitly enough and was often hardly noticeable during the first two and a half decades of the ECoC programme. Two years later the Commission concluded again that evaluations have shown that in some of the ECoCs the European dimension was 'not well understood and could have been more visible', for example in longer-term strategies or in the knowledge exchange between former and present ECoCs (European Commission, 2012a: 3, 8–9). This is also the result of other studies: although the original idea of this cultural programme was to stimulate European awareness in order to support political unification, the title of European Capital of Culture has been used in recent years not so much to communicate Europe than to position a certain city as a cultural capital, to promote its international image and to solve local problems (Mittag, 2008; Palonen, 2010: 104). The label has promised not only to generate large-scale media interest that could serve to attract increased tourism, stimulate greater interest in culture and boost economic activity, but also to foster social cohesion and cultural participation, strengthen local infrastructure and encourage the regeneration of deprived districts. The title of European Capital of Culture was in the first instance and remains a European 'quality label' for local culture(s) rather than a means of promoting, let alone developing, European ideals.

The original idea had been different: the idea of the 'European Capital of Culture' (initially called the 'European City of Culture') was conceived in the mid 1980s by the then Greek Minister of Culture Melina Mercouri, who was the first to stress the role culture could play in the development of Europe at a time when – apart from the art exhibitions held by the Council of Europe – the concept of Europe was largely embodied by the European Economic Community, a purely economic union. The idea was initially intended to support the process of European unification, and also to give Europe something akin to a 'soul', which is an idea still alive in the Berlin conference series 'A Soul for Europe',¹ but which since the 1990s has more commonly been referred to as an 'identity'.² For as Jacques Delors is often quoted to have said, 'Who can fall in love with an inner market?' (Mittag, 2008: 63). According to the resolution of the Ministers of Culture in 1985 the intention was to use the new concept to stimulate

the expression of a culture which ... is characterized by having both common elements and a richness born of diversity ... to help bring the peoples of the Member States closer together ... The event should open up to the European public particular aspects of the culture of the city, region or country concerned.³

This was an appeal to believe in a common ideal, despite the cultural differences across Europe; 'Unity in diversity' – the official motto of the EU since as recently as 2000⁴ – was

already key to the idea. With the Treaty of Maastricht (1992) culture became an explicit area of EU competence: 'The community shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore' (Article 151, quoted by Mokre, 2006). A similar sentiment was voiced again when in 2005 a new decision was passed which stated that cultural policies should be 'geared towards highlighting the wealth, diversity and shared characteristics of European cultures and towards contributing to improving European citizens' mutual knowledge'.⁵ Even though the image of Europe had changed radically since the 1980s – 'Europe' had a different meaning in the context of the Cold War and following the collapse of the Iron Curtain (Str  th, 2002: 388 et seq.) – the European Union's definition of cultural policy aims had hardly changed. European culture, without any more precise definition, became part of the EU political agenda: 'Culture is considered an important *glue* which binds the EU member states together' (Richards and Wilson, 2004: 1936).⁶ For the ECoC programme that meant getting each city to display its own local and national traditions alongside shared elements of European culture. Thus, according to Beatriz Garcia, the ECoC programme did not start life with clearly defined guidelines and selection criteria: 'Its history has been one of adapting to the needs and demands of those cities hosting it rather than imposing a prefigured model of urban cultural policy' (Garcia, 2005: 841 et seq.). According to Graeme Evans, it sparked a new atmosphere of competition between cities as well as a renaissance of European urban culture: 'The use of culture as conduit for the branding of the "European Project" has added fuel to culture city competition, whilst at the same time celebrating an official version of the European urban renaissance' (quoted in Garcia, 2005: 843). Others see the lack of a European centre of gravity as a weakness, and ask where the heart of Europe is really to be found. Therefore they regard the annual announcement of each new Capital of Culture rather as a sign of crisis: 'The structural weakness of a Europe based on diversity, unity and cohesion becomes glaringly obvious: Europe has neither a political centre of power nor a cultural metropolis' (Reichel et al., 2009: 409). Yet others see Europe as the embodiment of decentralization, localized in a multitude of centres rather than in a single capital.

We find a similar discussion in the decade-long debate on whether, where and how to establish a 'Museum of Europe' in order to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the European Community in the Rome Treaties (1957). After major difficulties in finding and creating a geographical and textual basis for a common European history had become apparent (Immler, 2004), the museum idea has been transformed into a touring exhibition: Instead of a 'Mus  e de l'Europe' being permanently displayed in a wing of the European Parliament in Brussels, an exhibition is now travelling through the growing European Union with changing themes, embodying the idea of the Museums of Europe Network. The network idea is inspired by the wish 'to put a European stamp on existing or future museological projects', nurturing international cultural cooperation between collections and following the principle that the 'Museums of Europe together form the great Museum of Europe'.⁷

This idea of decentralization is also embodied in the concept of the ECoC. The success of the ECoC is directly related to the openness of the idea, writes Emilia Palonen. It works as a concept because it provides enough room to serve the interests of the most diverse EU members at a national, regional and local level:

for the EU, the ECOC process is a cheap tool for marketing, creating a sense of shared space and a polycentric capital. For the nation states, the ECOC process offers a tool for renewal of urban centres through culture ... For the regions, the ECOC offers a tool to escape – to an extent – the national framework and get *their own moment of pride* through the regional city. Finally, for the localities, the ECOC presents the chance for urban regeneration and image building. (Palonen, 2010: 104)

Following Palonen the ECoC programmes reflect ‘how the thesis of the unity in diversity has gained strength and how the idea of a “multi-polar” Europe with a diverse heritage has been promoted and adopted’, strengthened by its multiple funding structure: ‘precisely this dependence of the investment from all those levels ... makes the ECOC a multilevel policy and an object of shared commitment’ (Palonen, 2010: 105).⁸

That the ECoCs are largely viewed as achievements for the cities and member states involved is also seen in the research literature, which has by and large focused on case studies of individual cities and the effects of the title in each case, or has discussed the influence of the programme on cultural and identity politics.⁹ Thus, when reflecting in 2010 on the future of the ECoC, the European Commission had good reasons for wanting the European dimension to be programmed more explicitly in the future. Thus, in its latest guidelines for candidacy, the European Commission has named various points of *best practice* (European Commission, 2009a) for how to improve the European dimension in an inspiring way: first and foremost, the exchange of artists and works of art through international cooperation, setting up events with or in reference to local artists who have become famous ‘Europeans’, and multilingual programmes. Subjects such as interculturality and immigrant culture are also high on the agenda. A role model is provided by the Istanbul project, *The Immigrants – Towards a Common Future*, a film which addresses the issue of migration and shows how it always affects people in the same way despite the great variation in the conditions of migration across European countries. Peace, human rights and conflict resolution are also highlighted as key challenges for Europe. A best-practice example in this area comes from Stavanger in Norway (2008), where the Worldview Rights organization and the Nobel Peace Prize Laureates Foundation made the peace conference a meeting place for Peace Prize laureates and others working in conflict resolution (European Commission, 2009a: 23).

These guidelines clarify potential themes the European Commission believes will redirect the next generation of ECoCs back towards the original objective of the programme – which was to stimulate European awareness among European citizens and to support the political unification process with a cultural policy. Another step was taken in June 2013, when the European Parliament accepted the proposal of the European Commission to establish a European panel of independent experts for the ECoC selection procedure for the years 2020 to 2033, in order to diminish national influence and to strengthen the European dimension (European Parliament, 2013). But how is the implementation of these new guidelines turning out in practice? What idea of ‘Europe’ is articulated and presented in the most recent ECoC programmes and bidbooks¹⁰ and what are the challenges to programming Europe as an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1991) between local and global concerns?

This article will explore those questions from a sociological and socio-cultural perspective, by doing a qualitative content analysis of some of the recent ECoC programmes (using textual and discourse analysis), based on personal experiences with some of the city programmes. Observing a new value paradigm emerging, causing a slight shift in the programmes' content, namely from a competition-based marketing of identity towards a value discourse, this article suggests that this expresses not only the first reformulations of a European dimension in the ECoC programmes, but indicates also how such cultural programmes could contribute to a conceptual reflection on Europe.

Generations of European Capitals of Culture (from 1985 to the present)

A look back over the past 29 years shows how the cities selected and the themes addressed have shifted: the first city to be awarded the title of European Capital of Culture was Athens (1985), followed by other cultural centres such as Florence (1986), Amsterdam (1987), Berlin (1988) and Paris (1989). The emphasis was then on traditional cultural exhibits, with relatively small budgets and unique events with minimal planning effort in the format of an exclusive art and culture festival. It was not necessary to stimulate long-lasting development, as these cities were already capitals of culture by their very nature (Griffiths, 2006: 417). The situation changed with the nomination of Glasgow (1990), a declining industrial city with serious social problems and without a major cultural reputation, which was nominated precisely with the aim of redefining it through its culture, stimulating urban redevelopment and thus promoting the city's image, and also putting the city on the European map and attracting investment (Richards and Wilson, 2004; Garcia, 2005). And this trend of investing in cultural regeneration and infrastructure continued: Glasgow was followed by other port cities with an image centred on industry and labour culture such as Dublin (1991), Antwerp (1993), Rotterdam (2001), Genoa (2004) and Liverpool (2008). Even when many of these cities claimed that cultural factors were decisive for their selection, increased tourism was taken as the primary sign of success. For example, Jürgen Mittag noted a certain move from cultural ideals to purely economic motives of 'image boosting and development with the help of cultural means'. He is sceptical about the European dimension: 'The idea continually put forward by the EU that Capitals of Culture should be capable of fuelling Europe's development played at most a subsidiary role' (Mittag, 2008: 13). Although the ECoC concept was originally planned as an instrument of European cultural policy, it came to be used as a means of addressing municipal and regional political agendas. While it is often claimed that the Capitals of Culture programme is one of the most important European projects,¹¹ these findings may lead us to doubt whether the success of the scheme lies in its tie-in with the idea of Europe.

After the turn of the millennium, not only cities but also wider urban areas such as Lille Metropole (2004), Greater Luxembourg (2007), Essen-Ruhr (2010) and Marseille-Provence (2013) were selected as Capitals of Culture; this was done to give these areas the opportunity to develop as coherent regions. In addition, more and more small towns on the fringes of Europe were awarded the title in a search for specific characteristics of the European Union, such as Cork (2005), Patras (2006), Sibiu (2007), Stavanger (2008),

Pécs (2010), Turku (2011), Guimarães (2012), Košice (2013), and Umeå (2014). This trend, underlining the diversity of Europe and celebrating folkloric characteristics, was in line with the enhanced development of local identity brought about in many new EU member states as part of their accession process. Although hitherto, except for some port cities, nowhere at the very border of the European Union had been chosen, the European Council gave a clear signal that Europe as a cultural entity extended beyond the borders of the European Union when they approved Istanbul as an ECoC in 2010 (alongside Essen and Peçs). Geographically speaking it is interesting that two ECoCs for 2017 and 2018, Pafos (Cyprus) and Valletta (Malta), are the first to articulate expressively the relationship between Europe and beyond from a 'real' border position.

Looking ahead to the expiry of the European regulations on Capitals of Culture in 2019 (when the old EU member states will have been represented three times each, and all the new member states once), when official procedure demands a re-evaluation of the programme and the drafting of new legislation, the European Commission is concerned to maintain the future relevance of the programme: as some member states have a much smaller pool of realistic candidates than others, 'selecting weak candidates for the title would without any doubt risk damaging the prestige and brand value of the ECoC in the long term' (European Commission, 2012b: 15). To what extent are such concerns justified?

The results of an opinion poll among the residents of Vienna, which were shown on digital displays in the city's underground system in the autumn of 2008, are illustrative in this respect. People were asked whether they knew that Linz would be a European Capital of Culture in 2009. The response of 90 per cent of those surveyed was 'No'. And would they visit Linz in 2009, now they knew it was to be a Capital of Culture? Once again, 90 per cent said 'No'. It may be asked whether this sceptical view reflects the traditional rivalry between the metropolis and smaller provincial centres, a certain discrepancy between the symbolic meaning of the title and the perceived status of the nominated city (i.e. that awarding the title alone cannot turn a provincial town into a Capital of Culture), or a widespread misunderstanding of the significance of the title among the public that makes it somewhat irrelevant. Further examples showed that while the nomination of cities may not lead to their repositioning at a national level, it does put them on the map of Europe. For example, Essen-Ruhr (2010) digitally manipulated satellite pictures to demonstrate that the *Ruhrgebiet* was just as lit-up at night as Paris and London, and more lit-up than Berlin, thus, at least briefly, enhancing the image of the region at a global level. But to be put on the map of Europe might not be enough in the future. Before exploring the new developments in strengthening the European dimension, what did the previous evaluations¹² of the ECoCs show in regard to the efforts made to programme Europe?

The European dimension in transition

The Palmer Report, prepared at the request of the European Commission, studied the intentions, priorities and performances of the Capitals of Culture over the period 1994 to 2004 and summarized its conclusions relating to the European dimension as follows:

All ECoCs reported that they experienced problems with regard to the planning and delivery of the European dimension of their programmes, including inadequate sources of finance for

European projects, often an absence of experience in the city to develop and manage European programmes, and the lack of sustainability of projects beyond the cultural year ... The issue of building partnerships over time was stressed, and it was noted that when the cultural year concluded hardly any public authorities maintained a budget to continue European and international work. Respondents regretted that the experience and knowledge about developing European projects is not passed from city to city, and that the existing data and information available on European cultural cooperation is fragmented. (Palmer, 2004, Part 1: 18)

Palmer stressed in his report that only certain aspects of the subject of Europe or European identity had been addressed – namely, in six main categories:

1. Presenting events (productions, performances, exhibitions) that focus on the talents of European artists ...
2. Collaborations, co-productions, exchanges ...
3. Developing European themes and issues (multiculturalism and multilingualism) ...
4. Identifying and celebrating aspects of European history, identity and heritage ...
5. Very specific partnerships between two or more cities ...
6. Promoting European tourism. (Palmer, 2004, Part 1: 85)

Summarizing these findings Palmer concludes at the same time that many ideas are more European on paper than they are in reality: ‘Preliminary findings indicate that although the concepts were of distinctly European character and quality, often the execution was not. Projects became more introverted and local as they developed.’ Therefore he advocates ‘that caution should be exercised when evaluating the European dimension of a cultural programme simply on the basis of intentions and names of projects and participants’ (Palmer, 2004, Part 1: 85 et seq.). This has, among other things, to do with its organizational structure: while NGOs are often involved in the preparation of a bid, at the moment of nomination ‘power takes over’ and management issues often become most relevant, which means that on the way from the bid to the programme critical contents and approaches often get lost.¹³ This can also explain the narrowing of the picture, or the fact that the articulation of the European dimension in past programmes was rather ‘blurred’. Through an analysis of the websites of nine ECoC cities in the year 2000 Monica Sassatelli has shown that ‘Europe is among the most frequent keywords’, that projects often have ‘Europe’ in their title or in their description – ‘often in place of words – such as international – that would do just as well’ (Sassatelli, 2002: 444 et seq.). She finds a ‘similarly blurred picture’ regarding Europe in the study of the first ten years of the programme by John Myerscough, who has emphasized that the ECoCs in those years were highlighting differences rather than bringing the European dimension to the fore (Myerscough, 1994: 20, quoted in Sassatelli, 2002: 445). Paradoxically, however, it is exactly this blurred or ambivalent picture of Europe that according to Sassatelli’s identification allows “‘Europe” ... [to become] more and more like an icon, if not a totem, whose ambiguous content seems to reinforce the possibilities of identification with it’ (Sassatelli, 2002: 436).¹⁴

Building upon these ECoC evaluation studies, a quantitative content analysis of the Palmer Report – searching for the frequency of certain keywords – will allow some further conclusions to be drawn in regard to the European dimension. As can be seen from Table 1, the main keywords in the Palmer Report from 2004 are *city*, *culture*, *Europe*, *capital*, *tourists*, *visitors*, *region*, *funding*, *infrastructure* and *success*, which

Table 1. Use of keywords in the Palmer Report (2004): in the analytical section (Part 1, 235 pages) and the case study section (Part 2, 387 pages).

	Palmer Report Part 1	Palmer Report Part 2		Palmer Report Part 1	Palmer Report Part 2
City	2038	2174	Diversity	15	28
Culture	809	1015	Community development	24	19
European ...	730	1102	Social cohesion	9	35
Capital	453	740	Social inclusion	7	19
Tourists and tourism	321	481	Immigrants	5	28
Visitors	180	244	Multicultural	2	15
Region	152	421	European culture	10	8
(Cultural) infrastructure	138	221	Neighbourhood	10	6
Long term	116	150	Failure	11	0
Europe	112	108	Creative industries	5	3
Funding	66	124	Peace	3	3
Success	103	55	Human rights	1	3
Participation	35	59	European identity	3	0
Opportunities	69	31	Multilingualism	1	1
Identity	24	37	Intercultural	1	0
European cooperation	13	26	Ethnicity	0	0

underlines Palmer's conclusion that visitor numbers were of foremost importance in the 1990s and that management questions were more important than discussions of content. Surprisingly, at that time, from 1994 to 2004, Europe was hardly associated with inter-culturality or diversity, words associated with EU cultural policy; only a few examples of either are to be found during this period: *multiculturalism* and *multilingualism* were programmed in Luxembourg, *interfaith dialogue* in Graz and *migration and exile* in Copenhagen. However concepts such as *migrants* and *diversity* figured rarely, and ideas of *ethnicity*, *multiculturalism* and *multilingualism* were almost never mentioned. Palmer is not the only impact study to show and to criticize the fact that ECoC programmes put the majority culture centre-stage, leaving little room for the participation of migrant groups. Instead of forms of participative cooperation, we hear a discourse about the 'others'.

In positioning themselves in relation to the 'European Dimension', cities must persuade judges of the presence of a 'richness of cultural diversity', both in terms of a range of cultural activities and social heterogeneity ... the stylisation of diversity potentially conceals specificity ... and uniformity (e.g. the repetition of visual content which in fact over-represents whiteness and

masculinity). With ethnic and other minorities noticeable by their absence, it is in this way that images also shore up the 'imaginative geography' (Said 1979) of insiders and outsiders of the city as a European capital of culture. (Aiello and Thurlow, 2006: 156)

These statements are linked to the observation that migrants and ethnic minorities are not a special priority in almost all ECoC programmes. While some cities have set up cultural projects supporting the integration of minorities – for example, Thessaloniki worked with the Jewish community and with Armenian and other immigrant groups in 1997 and Prague addressed the position of Roma groups in 2000 – little is known, according to Palmer, about the effectiveness of these measures:

Some cities established projects to engage with very difficult social issues, including: social inclusion, civil society and democratic participation, cultural diversity, migration, asylum and human trafficking. Although large ambitions are sometimes reported by cities, there is much less information about the resulting projects, or how they were intended to have an impact on such major social challenges. (Palmer, 2004, Part 1: 134)

Rotterdam is named as an exception, where migrant groups were at least recorded and the statistics revealed wider and more diverse citizen participation.¹⁵ But also in this case 'mainstream cultural events often had difficulty attracting ethnic minority audiences' (Palmer, 2004, Part 2: 284). Only since the year 2000 has Palmer registered a more serious commitment to the potential social impact of ECoC events, in that 'social objectives' have become increasingly important, particularly in northern European cities in Scandinavia, Netherlands or Belgium, and he listed a number of concrete results, such as: 'improved access to cultural activities and resources (both through city centre and new neighbourhood provision), various community development outcomes (such as strengthening voluntary organizations), and changes to the pattern of cultural inclusion by relatively marginalized or excluded groups'. It was further shown that the development of socially oriented programmes has a positive influence on cultural organizations 'in developing their practice in education and outreach work, and their connection with local people' (Palmer, 2004, Part 1: 137). As a result, more citizen participation and sustainability are considered to be a prerequisite for the new selection criteria (European Commission, 2010: 8). Moreover, the Palmer Report, as well as observations on the part of the European Commission, led to a proposal demanding a stronger programming of Europe for the new period after 2019, defining three aspects: activities should 'highlight the cultural diversity of Europe', relate to 'European themes, history and heritage', and foster 'cooperation between artist and cultural operators from different European countries' (European Commission 2012b: 13).

Here it is obvious that the articulation of the European dimension is still pretty vague, not identifying 'a clear-cut, content-driven agenda'. But, as scholars such as Kiran Patel have highlighted, this expresses precisely the idea of ECoC experts and organizers on the ground that flexibility is needed in order not 'to become involved in EU identity policies' (Patel, 2013: 549). Patel shows that the Commission has, however, developed a more subtle technique of governmentality for helping to put Europe more on the agenda:

More than previously the Commission uses experts to ensure that stakeholders in the programme live up to this call. This approach is much more sophisticated than earlier attempts at creating an EU cultural, symbolic or identity policy, some of which pushed for an essentialist approach and a specific meaning of Europeaness in a top-down manner. (Patel, 2013: 539)

When shifting our perspective from policy papers towards the ECoC programmes themselves, to what extent are these changed governance methods successful? And are themes like multilingualism, immigration, peace and human rights effectively implemented? Furthermore, how do the cities themselves describe the challenges they face in a European context? Is the trend towards social aspects, as noted above, continuing?

Scrutinizing 'Europe' in the latest generation of ECoCs (2008–18)

Looking at the most recent ECoC programmes and bidbooks, in the period between 2008 and 2018, we selected certain themes that are currently adopted in reference to Europe. Given the wide range of these programmes it cannot be claimed that the selected examples are representative or the most central ones, but lined up here they will give an impression of current emphasis and trends of how the European dimension is framed or narrated.

Liverpool, once one of the most prosperous trading centres of the British Empire alongside London and Bristol, struggled after the decline of English industry at the end of the 1970s to rebuild its image by transforming the former docks into key cultural attractions. In 2008, the city was largely seen in the light of this cultural redefinition, but it also looked back on its own past as a colonial power. Under the heading of 'Untold stories', a newly opened International Slavery Museum (an institutionalized version of the well-received Transatlantic Slavery Gallery in Liverpool's Maritime Museum founded in 1994) showed the dark side of European colonialism, the mechanisms of slavery and slave rebellions from historical and contemporary perspectives. The multi-faceted legacy of the slave trade could further be explored in a city tour that visited several buildings where memories of this historic injustice are still alive.¹⁶

Linz in Austria, which grew from a minor town to an industrial centre under Hitler, also felt obliged to commemorate its difficult past in 2009 under the motto 'The Fuehrer's Capital of Culture', focusing on the complacency towards the Nazi regime and the consequences of this for the city's history: for example, in the marketplace where the transport routes of Jewish families to concentration camps throughout Europe were chiselled into the stone of the facade of the monumental bridgehead building (erected by the Nazis in 1938) as a public spectacle. A project entitled 'Unter uns' ('Among us') highlighted the history of its construction, pinpointing the main actors, those who profited and the passive collaborators ('Who was involved, who initiated the scheme, who did the construction work?'), and commemorative plaques were embedded in the pavement.

Marseille 2013 stressed that, like Linz, it was a European Capital of Culture between 1940 and 1942 – not as a centre of collaboration but rather as 'a city of refuge and a city of migrants. Marseille took in the best that Europe had to offer in the world of art and thought between 1940 and 1942, sheltering those that were persecuted by barbarians at

that time' (Marseille-Provence 2013, 2008: 75). This political message was translated into architecture when for the Capital of Culture programme two new buildings were built, symbolizing the French desire to be the centre of the Mediterranean and to foster cultural exchange in the region: Le Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée (MuCEM) and Villa Méditerranée. While the museum reflects the Mediterranean as a confident identity, the Villa exhibits more disturbing images: in 'Beyond the Horizon' the Mediterranean is shown as a place of excessive trade, tourism and of countless tragedies among refugees.

Turku in Finland, which has always seen itself as the gateway to Russia and a pioneering centre of intercultural exchange with the Baltic states, also addressed the European dimension through the theme of remembrance in 2011. In *Lived Memories*, cross-border memories between Estonia, Russia and Finland were explored through art and storytelling, while *New Memories* searched for common features that could help the cultures to grow closer together and inspire cooperation between the countries involved (Turku 2011, 2007: 55).

Riga in Latvia, which until the financial crisis was one of the fastest-growing economies of the new EU member states, will stress the element of freedom above all else as their great achievement and the foundation of a culture of openness and innovation in their programme for 2014. Riga uses the ECoC title insistently as an expression of cosmopolitan awareness that could counter the nationalist tendencies that had been growing since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. It wants to 'promote dialogue and understanding between cultures and nations, promoting diversity of civil opinion and multiculturalism, thus enriching the European cultural space ... promoting rituals of regret and forgiveness in the form of culture' (Riga 2014, 2009: 17, 50).

Essen-Ruhr also showcased global connectedness. In 2010 it documented its transition from a dilapidated industrial landscape to a service economy and showed that labour migration was an everyday reality in the Ruhr area, and had been so long before the debate on interculturality began. Part of the cultural programme called 'Melez: the culture of living together' directly addressed migrants with themes such as fashion and street culture.

Germany is a country of immigrants ... Today's Ruhr metropolis corresponds in many ways to a miniature version of the world. A hundred and seventy nations, 2055 religious communities, all kinds of social environments – the best precondition to shape itself as a forward-looking immigrant community. The decisive discipline there is the 'art of cohabitation'. How can we show mutual appreciation for one another? ... Who is really the potential audience of this body of art and culture which is to be found in the Ruhr Metropolis? (Essen-Ruhr 2010, 2009: 168)

For *Istanbul's* application for 2010 Turkey's possible entry into the EU was a key element of the bid right from the start, as Istanbul presented itself as the bridge to Asia, but one that definitely belonged to Europe: 'As Turkey moves ahead with the process of its candidacy for the European Union, the projects that will be realized will demonstrate that Istanbul, the symbol of the country, has been interacting with European culture for hundreds of years.' A look at the symposium 'What is European culture?' shows a desire to be located between tradition, migration, cultural and religious diversity and civil society.

Umeå in Sweden has explicitly included the theme of human rights in its programme for 2014, addressing the issue of children's rights by asking children and young people to interpret them in the form of a picture or musical composition, and addressing the right to free speech in the form of an international song competition for minority languages (*Liet Lavlut*) – the first time such a competition will have been held in an ECoC context. These initiatives were linked to the Swedish Forum for Human Rights, and are expected 'to strengthen cultural networks that span across languages, cultures and national frontiers' (Umeå 2014, 2009: 14, 38).

San Sebastian in Spain also focuses explicitly on human rights, dedicating its 2016 programme to 'Culture of Coexistence' and to 'Overcome Violence': 'Unfortunately, today the violence ... of ETA ... casts a shadow over ... many people in our country. That's why San Sebastian has been fighting these barbarian acts for years, promoting a culture of peace and education of values' (San Sebastian 2016, 2010: 19). It uses the Basque Country's own history of violence as its starting point, representing human rights as a universal quality standard, discussing them with reference to local issues on local podiums but disseminating this discussion Europe-wide through the facilities of international city networks:¹⁷

We would like to promote new social codes for reconciliation, understood as civic harmony, and coexistence between opposites, who contribute to the progress and development of human rights in Europe and all over the world ... to make the city an international benchmark in the culture of human rights. (San Sebastian 2016, 2010: 91, 93)

Even though ECoC bidbooks have their own rhetoric, and in certain respects display political opportunism rather than reality, and though European discourse is often used to a greater extent than in the actual projects, these examples do throw light on the awareness and the aspirations of a society and its cities. The new generation of Capitals of Culture gives the European dimension more concrete form and content, when local challenges are also seen as European issues (interculturality, migration), local history is retold in a wider context by using cross-border narratives, and universal values (such as human rights and peace) are discussed for their implications both at a European and at a local level.

Since the 1990s, the critical controversy over the Nazi past, colonialism, communism and terrorism has not only been part of the self-conception of a European culture of remembrance, but also forms an increasingly important basis for reflection by Capitals of Culture. While some cities (such as Linz) address these as issues of the past, others (in particular Liverpool) display the consequences in the world today of historical events, or explicitly articulate lessons learnt from the past (such as San Sebastian).

Alongside the theme of remembrance, new debates on diversity have emerged at a European level, centred around questions of how the various minority groups can be better included in urban life (Essen-Ruhr), not only in the traditional strongholds of workers and migrants but also at the periphery of Europe. In Marseille, a symbol of 'Fortress Europe' due to its situation on the south coast of France, the question 'What defines Europe?' is very relevant in discussions about migrants coming from overseas. Another urgent issue is revealed in programmes dedicated to Roma and Gypsies, the largest

European minority, which show their heritage as a European heritage, and try to give them a voice, also articulating the presence of racism. However, the case of Marseille also demonstrates how European themes and challenges (such as the North–South dialectic) are often subordinated to regional interests (Marseille as a Mediterranean centre), instead of providing a true reflection on Europe. In this respect the plan, articulated in the bid, to use the title ‘North-South Gastronomy’ to demonstrate the gastronomic cultures under the given theme of ‘Migration and Remembrance’ was seen by the jury to be clearly inappropriate for the final application: ‘the title ... highlighted the importance of gastronomy at the expense of the other aspects (especially those of diversity or public health).’ The revised idea in the application was called the ‘Central Market’ – ‘four imaginary markets functioning around the clock over four long weekends ... a city market, a quayside market, a village market and an industrial market’ (Marseille 2013, 2008: 115) – where the metaphor of the ‘Centre’ has replaced the concept of the ‘North–South’ axis. In the programme itself there is now merely a ‘Cuisine en Friche festival’, mainly examining the relationship between art and food, and celebrating Mediterranean food culture.

Here we see not only how a possible European dimension became flattened during the development of a programme, but also how cities are keen to portray themselves in central positions, no matter where they are on the map. Being the centre of the Mediterranean feels more comfortable than addressing Marseille’s role as a border post of Europe and a crossing point between north and south. Even Turku managed to put itself centre-stage by using a special map of Europe that reached no further south than Berlin, thus locating it in the heart of the EU, if not of Europe. It is precisely these border regions of the European Union that are seen by scholars such as Gerard Delanty or Regina Römhild as centres of the negotiation about European identity, since it is here that migrants either follow EU guidelines or question them (Delanty, 2006), thus bringing issues of citizenship and human rights to public attention and showing how closely Europeanization and globalization are linked:

The debate about migration against the background of the old – national – and the new – transnational – borders of Europe has thus led to a highly cosmopolitan atmosphere, embodying a practice of citizenship that is becoming increasingly detached from essentialistic forms of identity. Paradoxically, however, this cosmopolitan response to migration is precisely a product of the borders it is trying to overcome. (Römhild, 2010: 58)¹⁸

As Gerard Delanty stresses, however, this debate is about multiple borders: not so much about a territorially defined ‘fixed line’ as ‘a networked and fluid process’ based on negotiation between social insiders and outsiders, in a way that is constantly being redefined by the changing global context (Delanty, 2006). These peripheral regions are thus not only at the edge of Europe, but at the same time centres of the negotiation about European identity. For this reason the Swedish author Henning Mankell called Lampedusa ‘the centre of Europe’ as ‘on this small island it is decided which kind of Europe we want to have’ (Höfler, 2011).

Here it is striking that Marseille, Riga, Turku and Tallinn, all cities at the ‘border’ of the EU, are largely programmed through shared histories, using metaphors such as *bridge*, *coexistence*, *centre*, *gateway*, *shared stories* or *memories*. But are these

metaphors appropriate to a discussion of Europe beyond unity and diversity, in an increasingly globalized frame of reference? In the past the phrase ‘culture as an encounter’ was quite often used, for example when Graz (2003) was called a bridge to southern Europe, and Salamanca (2002) was called a bridge to Latin America, but we could see no structural reflection on the position of European culture in relation to outside developments. Concentration on what is shared rather than on divisive factors (or what needs to be negotiated) is an obvious reaction to growing intercultural tensions and neo-nationalist tendencies, but does it miss a chance to deal with those challenges? Moreover, the list of ECoC candidates also shows that the long-time practice of not taking ‘real’ border cities on board meant that discussions of this nature were ignored (or even prevented from taking place).

This changed recently: the programme of *Pafos* in Cyprus (2017) is particularly inspired by its geographical position, using its proximity to the Middle East and North Africa to link ‘the East and the West’, ‘Linking Continents’ and ‘Bridging Cultures’ and thereby

adding value to our citizens’ lives, to those of the migrants who live in Pafos and Cyprus, to that of the children and young people who are the next generation to have a say in Europe of the future, to those of Turkish Cypriots refugees who had to leave a life behind in Pafos in the aftermath of the 1974 events. (Pafos 2017, 2012: 2)

The commission particularly welcomed this awareness for the issue of migration, integration and intercultural dialogue.¹⁹

Also *Leeuwarden* in the Netherlands has in this respect a noteworthy programme for 2018. Locating itself in the periphery, it articulates its own challenges as European challenges:

The Frisian culture is doubly peripheral: both in relation to the Netherlands, and in relation to the European mainland. At European level, the Frisian culture is less visible than other minorities of similar size, like for example Basque and Welsh. Its peripheral condition is shared with many cultures in diverse Europe. Many of them, like ours, are endangered by the neighbouring dominant cultures. That is why we think that this problem must be put onto the wider European agenda in order to protect them, and in this way help to secure and protect European diversity in general. One out of seven Europeans lives in a region where there is a minority culture. Part of their daily lives is to live in two or three cultures at the same time, something that trains their flexibility. We need to relearn this lesson ... of how to embrace diversity. (Leeuwarden 2018, 2012: 15 et seq.)

These examples show that the European dimension is most visible when the ECoC candidates reflect their own history as part of European history, particularly when hinting at their involvement with the major ideologies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries such as National Socialism, communism and colonialism. But does this evaluation of national historical narratives – often articulated in regard to values such as freedom, human rights, and peace – also help to stimulate dialogue about Europe? Does the focus on peace and reconciliation processes within Europe, celebrated when the European Union received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012, not ignore the conflicts in the colonies

and their afterlife in Europe? Did Liverpool's depiction of slavery encourage other ECOCs to address their colonial past and its legacies? When Linz throws a critical light on its Nazi past, does this stimulate an examination of other ambivalent continuities (such as the concept of the 'Kulturation') that have arisen since 1945? To what extent are commemorative practices no longer disturbing, but mainstream bourgeois style? Marseille highlights Mediterranean culture in terms of food, but was culinary diversity not already a favourite symbol of the multinational state at the time of the Habsburg Empire, and also the lowest common denominator? When Turkey reflects on its European traditions, to what extent is this the political rhetoric of only a few rather than expressing peoples' experiences in a region widely influenced by the Middle East? ECoC practice today shows an increasing focus on diversity, but are the migrant groups who are addressed also participants? When the ECoC programme is accessible mainly via an internet portal (Essen-Ruhr) structured by abstract concepts instead of providing a simple calendar of events, how accessible was the programme for the intended audience? To what extent does engagement in minority rights and minority languages not only favour individual groups but actually also highlight the majority culture and thereby reinforce existing power constellations? What does it mean to promote transnational awareness when every city wants to present itself as being at the heart of Europe? Does the metaphor *centre* (in the case of Marseille) not tend to mask the North–South divide? And to what extent can transnational perspectives circumvent the dichotomies of national historiography? Does the visionary concept of San Sebastian, based on 'the total respect of human rights and a constant revision of the values of enlightened European tradition' (San Sebastian 2016, 2010: 67), put the 'universal' nature of human rights to the test? Does it set values or negotiate them? Does the language of human rights not risk becoming the language of marketing, self-praise or political compromise, rather than of principle and accountability? The selection of San Sebastian was controversial in the context of the political change towards a party advocating separatism, but it did still win the title. It remains to be seen, however, whether the original programme will be changed to give greater emphasis to political aims such as regional autonomy instead of discussing human rights at a local and global level.

All the questions raised above could add to a rethinking of the European dimension of ECoC programmes, but at the same time there are challenges on the level of city politics. To strengthen the links between both perspectives, we will subsequently use theoretical perspectives circulating around a joint theme, interculturality.

Europe: city perspectives and challenges

In the last decade *interculturality* has been a popular term in EU booklets and a topic of increased interest in the ECoC programmes, and at the same time interculturalism has become one of the most important challenges facing cities. Therefore, when Eurocities, one of the main European city networks, commented on the future of the ECoCs, they highlighted that 'ECoC gives political value to culture' and mentioned particularly 'intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity' as an overarching goal, as well as 'wider participation in culture for citizens', aiming towards 'social inclusion through culture' (Eurocities, 2011: 1). This reflects concerns in urban policy, as many European cities

became increasingly multicultural, and tensions between groups grow in terms of class, culture, religion and ethnicity (Hall, 2000; Sassen, 2010: 33), which had led to an intense 'culturalized' debate on the position of minorities and migrants, European immigration policy and national integration policies. The Europe-wide rise of right-wing parties has put the idea of intercultural cities under pressure. This has made the question of how different groups can be integrated at a local level and participate actively in cultural activities a key issue for municipalities and local administrations.

The literature has been pointing towards a close connection between debates on interculturality and on human rights, and hence on the relationship between local practice and global standards. The work of Robert Putnam is informative on this point. He has studied communication and trust-building processes in (American) society, which he describes on the basis of two kinds of 'social capital' (as defined by Pierre Bourdieu): *bonding* occurs between people who share things in common, while *bridging* refers to relations with people who come from a different social and cultural background: 'bridging social capital can generate broader identities and reciprocity, whereas bonding social capital bolsters our narrow selves' (Putnam, 2000: 23). According to Putnam, each of these social skills reinforces the other, although a decline in *bonding* is accompanied by a decrease in *bridging* and leads to a rise in cultural and ethnic tensions:

Ethnic diversity is, on balance, an important social asset ... however, immigration and ethnic diversity challenge social solidarity and inhibit social capital ... on the other hand, successful immigrant societies create new forms of social solidarity and dampen the negative effects of diversity by constructing new, more encompassing identities. Thus, the central challenge for modern, diversifying societies is to create a new, broader sense of 'we'. (Putnam, 2007: 138)

Translated into city politics this says that in the realm of interculturalism successful urban policies must be based on strengthening local ties, since feeling at ease in one's immediate environment is a precondition for global curiosity and connects the city with the wider world. Here, the authors Ronald Holzacker and Peter Scholten made the link to the human rights discourse highlighting its relevance in an increasingly globalized context: from their perspective, reference to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights can act as an impulse for *bonding* – an awareness-creating, unifying factor at a local level²⁰ – and for global *bridging*, allowing local societies to be measured against an international yardstick.

Postnationalism represents a more cosmopolitan perspective that stresses globalisation, bridging between communities of all sorts, and in particular bonding on a global level in terms of universal personhood ... Rather, supranational structural factors, such as an evolving universal human rights regime, are stressed as elements that contribute to bonding and bridging on a global scale. (Holzacker and Scholten, 2009: 85)

Following Holzacker and Scholten, the human rights discourse could help to create a 'broader sense of we' (Putnam, 2007: 138). Also Michele Grigolo sees the strength of the concept of human rights precisely in its inclusive nature, which could make it a valuable concept for city politics:

At least at a purely discursive level, human rights are more inclusive than concepts of ‘urban citizenship’,²¹ which may raise concerns about the selective dynamics of ‘citizenship’. Overall, when they are not a mere political brand, the use of human rights by cities can be seen as an effort to frame urban diversity positively, to respond to its challenges and to re-think and reorganize new and traditional types of social policies and institutions in the perspective of connecting the local to the global. (Grigolo, 2010: 896)

Human rights are not only chosen as leading concepts in some of the recent ECoC bid-books, but play an increasing role in city politics. A number of cities have already begun to operationalize the human rights discourse (Grigolo, 2010: 896), visible in the movement of Human Rights Cities, and it has also become part of official EU policies. Various EU bodies (the Committee of the Regions, the Fundamental Rights Agency, the Congress and the Conference of Ministers responsible for Local and Regional Government of the Council of Europe) stress the importance of human rights at a local level and want explicitly to involve cities in these considerations.²² This rise of human rights in formulating urban policies is prompted among other things by the decentralization of national politics and the expansion of the human rights framework: namely, a shift from civil and political rights (such as the right to life or to vote) towards socio-economic rights (such as the right to education or to decent standards of work) – social issues, which are mainly the focus of city politics. This is also inspired by political discourses such as the linking of the interculturality debate with the global human rights discourse, the establishment of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights (as part of the Treaty of Lisbon 2009), and the increased scrutiny of human rights standards during the course of the global events that unfolded after 9/11 (Goodhart and Mihr, 2011). They call it the ‘home-coming’ of human rights – the translation of the globally led legal human rights discourse into local practice (Oomen, 2013). While in the first wave of this development the global human rights regimes were translated into national institutions, only recently – since there is some evidence that their position is threatened by certain national agendas (Brenninkmeijer, 2010) – have cities tried to take greater responsibility for local issues in the name of human rights while formulating a more active role for themselves in Europe.

However, from a bottom-up perspective one can say that human rights are considered to be a legal category that has little to do with the everyday lives of many European citizens. Surveys show that while the majority do consider human rights to be important, few can actually name them. A German study showed ‘clear deficiencies in the human rights education of the German population, particularly in the sphere of knowledge’ (Sommer et al., 2005: 60). Research in the Netherlands has also revealed an education and knowledge deficit in the field of human rights (Oomen and Vrolijk, 2010: 40). At the same time, however, although they are often not explicitly named, surveys in cities such as Utrecht show the extent to which human rights are recognized implicitly; they are felt to be important and are a consciously practised part of many people’s everyday life when doing some kind of social work or in the voluntary sector.²³ However, although there are countless initiatives aimed at protecting human rights at the city level, it is unusual to use the language of human rights in this context. Many cities collect data on issues such as poverty, discrimination, participation and violence, but these concerns are not framed in terms of human rights. Neither are the relationships between these factors investigated in

a regular, structured manner through monitoring. Instead, concepts such as *social inclusion*, *citizenship*, *community building*, *participation* or *wellbeing* are used because these words are more accessible in urban policymaking.

Another reason might be that human rights are usually associated with distant countries, with 'over there' rather than 'right here' (Mertus, 2009), with reference to international human rights charters or national migration policy rather than local issues: 'this is the paradox of making human rights in the vernacular: in order to be accepted, they have to be tailored to the local context and resonate with the local cultural framework' (Merry, 2006: 49). However, human rights are still more likely to be considered as something that others lack rather than something that has to be actively cultivated at home (Oomen, 2013). The conditions for raising awareness at local and regional level are thus not met. However, as long-term experience in cities such as Barcelona, with its Observatory on Human Rights,²⁴ shows, human rights need ongoing 'translation' in order to remain high-profile and retain concrete meaning.

From the point of view of the above-mentioned authors, the human rights concept has its promising sides in terms of good governance and transformative potential; however, it has also its faults, as it is not just an inclusive concept, but has excluding elements. Over its history, the human rights concept has often become instrumentalized, not least in the debate about Europe, when discussing it as an exclusive concept, and by addressing 'the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities' as unmistakably EU values, 'common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail'. According to the preamble of the Constitutional Treaty, these values all stem 'from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law'.²⁵ However, Jack Goody has countered that this is one of the 'most alarming myths of the West', as these ideas support the dichotomous self-perception of a sophisticated Europe and an unenlightened outside world, thus creating new exclusion mechanisms: 'Western Democracy has hijacked many of the values that certainly existed in other societies, humanism, and the triad individualism, equality, freedom as well as the notion of charity' (Goody, 2006: 240). The debate about shared European values was initiated in the context of the drafting of the EU Constitution and the discussion about the bill of rights, and was also stimulated by the discussions on Turkey's possible EU membership. With the prohibition of torture in the European Convention on Human Rights, human dignity and values became a new indicator of Europeaness (Sassatelli, 2008: 422). Or, in the words of Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida:

A heightened sensitivity to injuries to personal and bodily integrity reflects itself, among other ways, in the fact that both the Council of Europe and EU made the ban on capital punishment a condition for membership. (Habermas and Derrida, 2005: 11–12)

Sceptics, however, see in the discourse of a European canon of values (or a European 'Leitkultur') correlations with the nineteenth-century notion of the foundations of national identity, pinpointing Eurocentrism (Csáky and Feichtinger, 2007). But instead of defining

what is particularly European, one might also ask how this discourse on European identity²⁶ is related to cultures and developments outside of Europe. Are they included or anticipated? Are boundaries drawn? Aren't some traditions (such as Christianity) pushed too much into the foreground while others (such as Judaism and Islam) are ignored? To what extent is Europe even defined by the excluded? A good example of this is the 500th anniversary in 1992 of the discovery of the Americas by Columbus, which was celebrated in Spain (for example, at Expo '92 in Seville) as 'Encuentro de Dos Mundos – The Meeting of Two Worlds', while in Latin America many saw it as the 500th anniversary of genocide (Rössner, 2007: 157). This shows that the meeting of two cultures cannot be fully portrayed without also addressing the painful, conflictual dark side.

Another example is the official memory policy in Europe. The Holocaust has become part of the European founding myth and self-image (Jeismann, 2000; Rüsen, 2008), centred around the Stockholm Declaration (2000), in which today's 28 member states declared their intention to include Holocaust education in the formal education sector. In 2005, 26 January was chosen as the official Holocaust remembrance day to 'inform the values of European civil society; reminding us again and again to protect the rights of minorities' (Assmann, 2007). Some argue that declaring the Holocaust as paradigmatic of a new European identity (as various authors have done) or as a kind of European *lieu de memoire*, has contributed to the ignoring of many other experiences of historical injustice within Europe, as it 'actually hinders recognition of Europe's colonial heritage, a moral and political necessity when dealing with immigration especially from Africa and Asia' (Huyssen, 2009: 5). They see lacunae in the European memory landscape as responsible for shortcomings in the recent immigration policy of the European Union (Delanty, 2006), arguing that what happens on Europe's borders defines Europe more than any historical account, and highlighting the fact that the Maastricht Treaty (1992) favoured a common culture heritage rooted in Christian and classical traditions, which would function as a significant barrier to diversity in its exclusion of those cultures associated with Europe's new immigrant populations (Shore, 2001). Others, however, argue that the Holocaust, by becoming 'the paradigm or template through which other genocides and historical traumas are very often perceived and presented ... has thereby not replaced other traumatic memories around the globe but has provided a language for their articulation' (Assmann, 2007: 14). According to Michael Rothberg, the memory of the Holocaust has led to a kind of *multidirectional memory*, which has also spurred unexpected forms of solidarity by intertwining memories of different experiences of oppression (Rothberg, 2009: 5, 19).

While the motto 'Unity in diversity' does indeed address such different levels of identification in Europe, it does not reflect how Europe defines itself via 'the others'. In European cultural or educational policy *the other* is its own totalitarian past. But, as Bo Stråth stresses: 'Europe has been and is *both* an active element of national, and of other identifications *and*, at the same time, something different and separate from national and other identifications. Europe is both We and the Other' (Stråth, 2002: 390). Thus, Europe needs an 'other' to define itself against, and Stråth recognizes that 'the great challenge is how to make it the starting point for bridge-building, not for demarcation. Symbolic and geopolitical boundaries must be urgently reconsidered, and seen as historically and discursively shaped' (2002: 399).²⁷ Stråth cherishes the idea of a 'new active Europe' acting

as a global mediator and bridge-builder, by placing concepts of European self-reflection, as he calls them, such as ‘unity in diversity’ or ‘cultural diversity’ and a ‘common legacy’, on the global platform in order to translate an intercultural dialogue into a transcultural dialogue that negates existing borders instead of confirming them (2002: 397). Like others he is convinced that interculturality, as a key term in EU rhetoric, includes and excludes, often reducing complex realities instead of picturing them.

This problematic is easily reproduced in ECoC programmes, when, for example, in metropolises such as Essen-Ruhr (2010) and its partner city Istanbul (2010), the strong differentiation of the programmes tended to lead to cultural segregation, hindering instead of fostering intercultural encounter across groups (Ernst and Heimböckel, 2012: 15). But how should such transcultural dialogues or translational processes be organized? And how are those processes influenced by a more open or closed concept of Europe? In the frame of this article the appealing question is whether ECoC programmes specifically, and cities in general, have the potential to develop such transcultural approaches, and to reflect the motto ‘Unity in diversity’ also from its opposing ‘other’?

In this respect some thoughts of the urban planner and theorist Charles Landry might be meaningful. He articulates a link between the ‘ethical foundation’ of a city and its cultural programmes. Landry argues that creativity is one of the ethical pillars of a city, since creative processes integrate members of the most diverse groups and help cities as well as larger regions to maintain solidarity, moving the focus from the city itself outwards into the world:

a city should not seek to be the best and most imaginative in the world (or region or state) – it should strive to be the best and most imaginative city for the world. This one change of word – from ‘in’ to ‘for’ – has dramatic implications for a city’s operating dynamics. It gives city-making an ethical foundation. It helps the aim of cities becoming places of solidarity where the relations of the individual, the group and the outsider to the city ... are in better alignment. (Landry, 2006: 1)

What is needed, according to Landry, is to initiate a process in which cultural programmes do not only stimulate and mobilize creativity or innovation, but also develop new forms of solidarity by offering, to use the words of Putnam, more encompassing identities by reinforcing local trust-building (bonding) and fostering global curiosity (bridging), thus underlining the necessity for multiple bonds between individuals in multicultural societies. This would mean, for example, evaluating cultural programmes not only in regard to their artistic and economic value, but their social value. But how? How can we fruitfully link the observations from urban policymaking and critical literature on conceptualizing Europe with our observations on ECoC programmes?

European Capitals of Culture: laboratories for (re)programming Europe?

Taking the new ECoC guidelines of the European Commission (2009) as a starting point, in which examples of best practice are provided to ‘programme Europe’, this article has illustrated some themes in recent ECoC bidbooks and programmes referencing the

European dimension. While scholars such as Kiran Patel highlight the fact that the European dimension is still ‘primarily broken down into formal settings, routines and procedures ... but not much in substance as the Commission sees itself only as a “facilitator”, putting Europe and Europeanness on the agenda, but leaving it to others to fill this notion with precise meaning’ (Patel, 2013: 550), we do see the first glimpses of a bottom-up, content-related discussion on Europe, in which the role of culture moves towards discussing Europeanness.

Next to the trend identified in the Palmer Report (2004) towards an increased emphasis (in north-western Europe) on social aspects, we have identified in the latest programmes a tendency to emphasize interculturality and values. While before 2004 the focus was mainly on questions of access, neighbourhood development and citizen participation – thus on bonding aspects (‘at home’ feelings) – we now see an increasing interest in bridging experiences between different groups, local and global themes, and transnational shared stories. Although the examples we refer to in this article are not always the most prominent ones in the ECoC programmes, the latest bidbooks point more explicitly in this direction. By translating the discourse on social responsibility, peace, human rights and interculturality into cultural programmes, they show how ‘culture’ as a concept of city marketing and as an expression of a competitive, regional identity discourse is successively being complemented by a value paradigm linked to an interest in people, commonalities and differences between groups, addressing questions of inclusion and exclusion. This article argues that this emerging value paradigm signals a slight shift in the definition of ‘culture’: namely, considering and evaluating culture in regard to its potential to create new forms of solidarity, via strengthening ‘local bonding’ and linking it to global references at the same time. This indicates new approaches of cultural practice at the local level, but also for European cultural policy. This could be sceptically read as shifting the identity debate and its limitations from one field (culture) to another (value), but it could also be read as a critical reflection on Europe and its cultural policies. Our analysis of the ECoC programmes shows that thematizing the relation between local practices and global challenges indicates ways to re-think the format and the role of the ECoCs within European cultural policies. Although many of the thoughts summarized above are only implicit in the programmes rather than explicit, thus lacking a conceptual reflection, the latest ECoC bidbooks provide indications of how the concept of Capital of Culture could develop from a title *from* Europe to one *for* Europe.

However, this means addressing the challenges of Europe more bluntly: this was pointed out when Leeuwarden presented their ECoC-year as an laboratory experiment for Europe, describing their local phenomenon *Mienskip* as a metaphor for Europe:

Curiosity is part of *Mienskip*; it represents the willingness to find out about the other, to discover and to find openness towards each other and the outside world. At the same time *Mienskip* contains a longing ... for our own stable community, for the place where we feel at home. There is definitely another side to *Mienskip* though. As the Frisians built terps [mounds in which to shelter] to protect themselves against the water and winds, they protected their communities and culture. By building these artificial mounds, their horizon changed, as did the hearts and minds of the people. This protective side of *Mienskip* still has its consequences today ... deep-seated fear of diversity. (Leeuwarden, 2018, 2012: 13–14)

Notes

1. 'A Soul for Europe'. Available at: www.asoulforeurope.eu.
2. In this article, we consider European identity as a historical concept and a discourse, in line with Bo Stråth's succinct formulation:

The history of a European identity is the history of a concept and of a discourse. The concept, since its introduction on the political agenda in 1973 (the Copenhagen summit), has been highly ideologically loaded ... The meanings of Europe are a discourse on power on how to define and classify Europe, on the frontiers of Europe, and on similarities and differences. (Stråth, 2002: 388).

3. Resolution (85/C 153/02) of the Ministers of Culture assembled in the Council on 13 June 1985 for the annual designation of a 'European City of Culture', as they were called in the first phase.
4. According to the European Commission the motto 'United in diversity' (*In varietate concordia*) means that, 'via the EU, Europeans are united in working together for peace and prosperity, and that the many different cultures, traditions and languages in Europe are a positive asset for the continent'. See http://europa.eu/abc/symbols/motto/index_en.htm. Monika Mokre has pointed to the motto's ambivalence, articulating 'two conflicting objectives – diversity and common cultural heritage – that are tightly packed into one clause' (Mokre, 2006).
5. Decision No. 649/2005/EG of the European Parliament and the Council, dated 13 April 2005.
6. Instead scholars in the 1990s such as Gerard Delanty were already emphasizing that a European identity needs to be civic, based on a 'social contract', and not cultural, based on a shared tradition (see Sassatelli, 2002: 439).
7. See www.expo-europe.be, a network coordinated by the European Council of Museums of History. There is, however, another museum initiative for a House of European History in Brussels, which is scheduled to open in 2014, which may face similar conceptual difficulties (see Knigge 2011).
8. Nominated by the EU Council, ECoCs get some money from the Commission (1.5 million euros), but it is mainly funded by the city and partly by the region and the individual member state.
9. See the comprehensive bibliography given by Mittag (2008).
10. ECoC bidbooks can be found on the website www.ecoc-doc-athens.eu.
11. '2010 marks the 25th anniversary of the European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) and there is a large consensus that in these 25 years, the ECoCs have become one of the most ambitious cultural events in Europe, both in scope and scale. They have also become one of the most visible initiatives of the EU and probably one of the most appreciated by European citizens.' See http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-programmes-and-actions/doc2966_en.htm.
12. For the period 1985–94 see Myerscough (1994); for the period 1994–2004 see Palmer (2004). Palmer and Richards have also published the *European Cultural Capital Reports* (2007, 2009, 2011, 2012 and 2013) (the last three with Dodd).
13. See Fischer on <http://productivityofculture.org/introduction/european-capitals-of-culture/>.
14. For reviewing the literature on European cultural identity in relation to the ECoC concept, see Sassatelli (2002).
15. '19 per cent of Dutch visitors were either born abroad or had at least one parent born abroad. This is ... substantially lower than the proportion in the city of Rotterdam (55 per cent). In particular, people of the "ethnic minorities" (e.g. from Indonesia, Surinam, Turkey, Morocco) made up 8 per cent of the sample, and were therefore less well represented than their share in the Rotterdam population (35 per cent)' (Palmer, 2004, Part 2: 284).
16. See www.slaveryhistorytours.com.

17. The Committee on Social Inclusion and Participatory Democracy and Human Rights (CISDPHR) was set up by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) in order to raise awareness of such themes as the quality of democracy, social inclusion and human rights.

Today, San Sebastian is pledged to this Committee and its endeavour to create the Charter-Agenda of Human Rights in the City and contributes to a programmatic document on participatory democracy placing the subject on the agendas of local governments throughout the world. (San Sebastian 2016, 2010: 66)

18. All quotes were translated into English by the authors.
19. See Selection of the European Capital of Culture for 2017 in Cyprus: 8. Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-programmes-and-actions/doc/ecoc/cyprus-2017-selection-report.pdf>.
20. Eleanor Roosevelt had already pointed this out in her famous speech on the on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? ... the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. (10 December 1948, United Nations General Assembly)

21. Citizenship is often interpreted as a concept that discriminates (citizens from non-citizens), that includes and excludes, and is associated by some authors with the idea of 'Fortress Europe', a closed EU and a discourse in which immigrants are seen as 'the others' whose rights are largely disregarded (Van Gelderen, 2009). Consequently Van Gelderen argues that immigration should be regarded as a human right. See also Balibar (2004) and Benhabib (2007).
22. There have recently been further developments in this field: the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, part of the European Council, has published a report on local human rights indicators in which it stated:

The aim is to develop tools to improve its assessment of the actual situation with regard to the application of human rights at local and regional level, to identify policies which work and encourage the sharing of good practices between local and regional authorities in Europe.

See www.coe.int/t/congress/Sessions/20/human-rights_en.asp. CIVEX (Committee for the Regions) has also formulated its strategy for the inclusion of cities in the European Commission's 'Strategy for the implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights by the European Union' (COM 2010: 573). The Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) of the European Union has included 'Joined up governance' in its work and has initiated an 'Annual dialogue on multi-level protection and promotion of fundamental rights'. See http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/research/projects/proj_joinedupgov_en.htm.

23. This involvement is larger than expected (20 per cent of respondents). For the results of a survey in Utrecht, see <http://humanrightsutrecht.blogspot.com>.
24. See http://w3.bcn.cat/dretscivils/0,4022,259064949_760112595_3,00.html.
25. Treaty of Lisbon 2007, C 306/11 and 10.
26. See the increase in literature since 1989 by authors such as Jacques Le Goff, Remie Brague, Bassam Tibi, Jürgen Habermas, Jacques Derrida, Wolfgang Schmale, Etienne Balibar and Andreas Huyssen.
27. Habermas and Derrida pointed out that contemporary Europe has mainly been shaped by the experiences of differences and conflicts:

However, in reaction to the destructive power of this nationalism, values and habits have also developed which have given contemporary Europe, in its incomparably rich cultural diversity, its own face ... The acknowledgement of differences – the reciprocal acknowledgement of the Other in her otherness – can also become a feature of a common identity. (Habermas and Derrida, 2005: 8–9)

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