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Development, Art(s) and Culture

UNECC FORUM VOLUME 8

*Ninth Interdisciplinary Conference
of the
University Network of the
European Capitals of Culture*

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The Effects of European Policies on the Reorganization and Renewal of Immersive Cultural Institutions in Cities Elected European Capital of Culture

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Abstract: *This paper aims to analyse the cultural dynamics in different European regions with highly contrasting historical and cultural profiles. We will focalize on the influence of immersive cultural institutions (heritage industry) on regional and urban territories, and their capacity to participate in regional and European cohesion. The use of culture as an economic tool is becoming a central concern in contemporary European political thought, promoting the impact of “creative” new urban amenities to strengthen regional and municipal developments. This New Political Culture is primarily based on the creative potential of urban renewal to generate new cultural scenes fostering more “participative” and “multicultural” experiences for EU citizens through smart specialization. Although this New Political Culture is expected to favour and create a more democratic and better European cultural cohesion, however, it does not address the question of the perception of Europe by pre-existing historical cultural institutions (heritage industry), permanently anchored to a regional territory, such as theatres, operas houses, orchestras, conservatories, museums, universities, etc. How do these immersive institutions impact territorial cohesion, and mobility in Europe? How do these institutions react to the restructuring of the competitive field? Are they managing adaptive or hybrid strategies with new conceptions of culture? Or, conversely, do they gradually become an obsolete and difficult heritage to maintain, encouraging a positive identification with the European project?*

Key words: *Heritage industries, Urbanism, Cultural policies, Cultural Institutions, European Cultural Capitals*

Introduction

In order to present the current developments of our CURRICULA project¹, this paper will focus on: (1) a discussion of the broad lines of our project which is centered on cities elected “European Capitals of Culture” (ECC) and more specifically on cultural and relational productivity of immersive cultural institutions (theatres, museums, opera houses, etc.) and, (2) a comparative perspective between four European Capitals of Culture located in four different European countries that comprise cases of “central” and “borderline” cultural institutions that will be analyzed from the concept of “cultural heteronomy”. In the conclusive part of this paper, we will give an emphasis on the methodological basis of our research in order to show how our institutional cases are analysed. To complete our analysis, we don’t use the notion of “cultural institution” in a juridical or political sense, but

¹ The CURRICULA project: <http://www.curricula.eu.com>

ask the anthropological question of how cultural institutions are produced and reproduced?

1. The main orientations of our project

In our CURRICULA project, we aim to describe the cultural life of cities. However, to achieve this, we do not consider the constructivist point of view of cultural and urban policies that embrace institutions regardless of their actual impacts on economic and cultural life, but we prefer to take into account the cultural geography of the city in order to highlight the *emic* perspective of practitioners and ordinary amateurs who make and participate into cultural institutions' life.

We do not suggest that the “year of culture” is a revolutionary time, since it is particularly difficult to draw up the balance sheets of the “ECC years”. Instead, we choose these particular years to define situations corresponding to periods of “crises” or upheavals, following Emile Durkheim’s descriptions when he identifies the times when “ideal” stories are set in the collective consciousness (Durkheim, 1911). So, we try to focus our observation on crucial moments, when we are experiencing strong questioning of existing balances such as the “ECC years”.

To implement this program, we have chosen to describe how the cultural life grows and create anchors from “bottom up” processes, specific to cultural institutions. In this aim, we are interested in institutions that are thought of as anthropological entities and not just as juridical ones. So, the main question is: How are cultural institutions produced and reproduced? In this spirit, we must outline that the ephemeral forms of cultural events (the most numerous during ECC years) were not part of our survey.

The originality of this project is based on the collection of first-hand databases while a great part of research programs take into account only the abstract counting of second-hand agglomerated databases. However, by analysing the network of cultural offering described at first hand our approach is very different from a mere mechanical projection of institutional cultural resources on a decontextualized map. It is necessary to consider the active networking of local cultural offering at a time when cultural policies (European and national) are making projections on the digital comet.





Fig. 1. The two French case studies of the CURRICULA project: Theatre of Le Merlan - National Scene (North Side Marseille) and National Theatre of La Criée (Downtown Marseille)

In the spirit of Max Weber’s differentialism, our observations are built on what “culture” means for an urban and amateur of culture in order to identify the scope and purpose of his/her practices and his/her relations to cultural venues.

To complete this analysis, we aim to achieve the ethnography of cities elected ECC to show the distances and divisions that are at the origin of what can be called a geographical and institutional cultural heteronomy of the city. For instance: the scene of the National Theatre of La Criée located downtown Marseille in the most “gentry” part of the city vs. the “heteronomous” scene of the Theatre of Le Merlan located in the North side of Marseille in a very “popular” part of the city (see Figure 2).

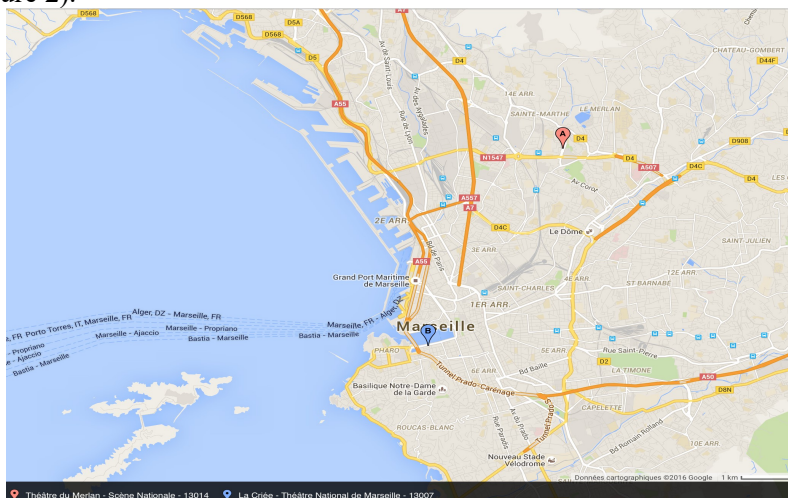


Fig. 2. The geographical and institutional cultural heteronomy of two theatres in Marseille

A - Theatre of Le Merlan: Peripheral location, the “hood”

B - National Theatre of La Criée: Central historical location, “Downtown”

The survey started in 2013 during the Marseille ECC year. The first empirical observations reveal a heteronomous regime between the two institutions surveyed in Marseille regarding cultural practices. The dynamic of cultural practices and the institutions associated to ordinary practices appears as a beam that pushes to the margin other heteronomous institutions of the city.

As we can see on the figure 3, that is particularly the case for the Theatre of Le Merlan that is almost the least included theatre in the cultural dynamic generated by the National Theatre of La Criée (see Figure 3). In other case studies that are part of the of our CURRICULA project, we replicate this kind of analysis such as for instance in Umeå in Sweden (ECC 2014) between the Västerbottens Museum and the Norrlandsoperan. By doing so, we intend to develop a comparative analysis between different European cultural and institutional landscapes and to identify the social causes of their cultural divisions.

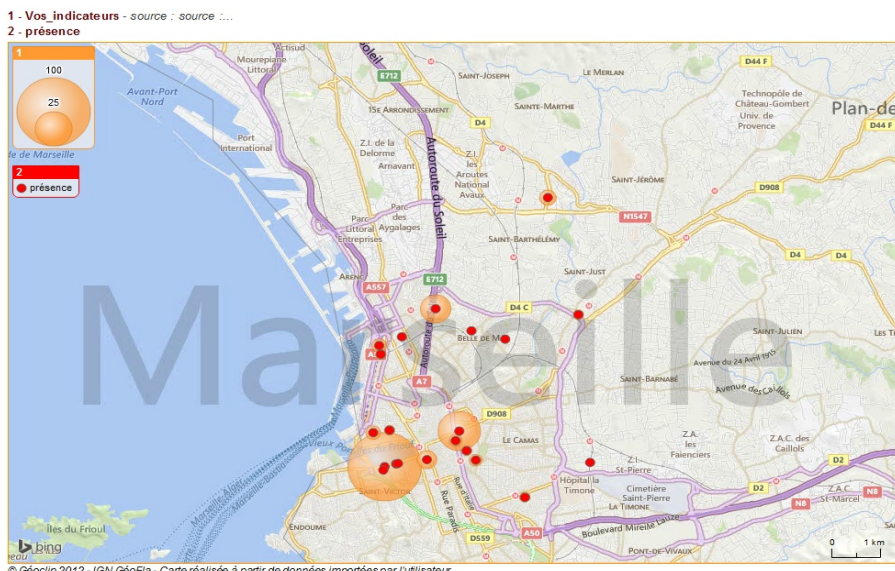


Fig. 3. The heteronomy of cultural practices and mobilities between different Theatres in Marseille

As we can see on the map above, the size of circles indicates the number of frequentations of different Theatres of the city of Marseille by the subscribers of the National Theatre of La Criée. The cultural dynamic is clearly centralized by the main Theatres of downtown, while the Theatre of Le Merlan located at the north side of the city is benefiting the least from the cultural input generated by the ECC year. This cultural dynamic creates a polarization in the cultural life of the city between the North and the South side of the city of Marseille.

So what can we draw from these first observations?

a) We are interested in comparing different cultural dynamics by considering the polarization of the cultural life of the city.

- b) We want to analyse institutional forms of cultural heteronomy, from the point of view of ordinary amateurs of culture, and not necessarily from the staff of political and cultural institutions.
- c) We want to find out how to “think” the cultural life of ordinary spectators, and how they “think” the cultural life of the city.

2. Comparative horizon (Northern Europe vs. Southern Europe): from the description of “borderline cases” to the notion of cultural heteronomy

We will limit ourselves to a narrow sense of the word “capital” by seeking to compare regional cities that are looking to strengthen their cultural attractiveness in two northern countries and two southern countries of Europe. We want to enrol regional capitals in a continuum that goes from small cases of European Capitals of Culture to more modest cultural urban centres (the international Cultural capitals are not concerned by our project).

The development of the European political device of ECC

	Current ECC	Former ECC
Northern Capitals	Umeå (2014) [Sweden - centralized country]	Krakow (2000) / Wroclaw (2016) [Poland - de-centralized country]
Southern Capitals	Marseille (2013) [France - centralized country]	Bologna (2000) / Genoa (2004) [Italy - de-centralized country]

Fig. 4. European Capitals of Culture of the CURRICULA project geographically balanced between North and South and with different national, historical and administrative frameworks

The attribution of the ECC’s label was launched in June 13, 1985 by the Council of Ministers of the European Union on the initiative of the Greek Minister of Culture Melina Mercouri and the French Minister of Culture Jack Lang, in order to bring citizens closer to the European Union and to create a transnational ideal European citizen type. If the dream of an intra-European mobility appears in the light of the practical reality as a utopia, the ECC’s label however, changed the rules of the game regarding smaller and regional cities, by enabling them the possibility to compete at a larger scale with cities with a more international status.

It is not useful to revisit the history of the ECC device, as it is well known nowadays. But to sum up briefly the evolution of the ECC device, two periods can be distinguished, the first one that is up to about 2006 when many international cultural capitals were elected ECC, and the second one (from 2006 until now), during which the title started to be more frequently attributed to regional capitals or smaller cities. It is then given to each of the EU member countries the opportunity to host the European Capital of Culture. At the same time, the Decision

1622/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of Europe amended the procedure for selecting cities while specifying the criteria for awarding.

In other words, from 2013 to 2019, the regional cities whose cultural life was not until then internationally recognized, are annually subject to attention that is likely to significantly boost their cultural operating system. Among 14 last elected cities, the biggest majority had never previously received such an impetus. This was particularly the case of Marseille in 2013, of Umeå in 2014 and of Pilsen in 2015. But this will also be the case for Wrocław in 2016, and for Plovdiv or Matera in 2019.

Thinking by case: the choice of “borderline cases” analysed from the concept of “cultural heteronomy”

In a very relevant book, edited by Jacques Revel, *Thinking by Case* (Revel, 2005), historians, anthropologists and sociologists stressed that the extensive and refined observation of the multiple components comprised into a case study, could unveil far more complex scaling games, and was such as to enable a description whose scope far exceeded its seemingly narrow perimeter.

But the main difficulty is the delimitation of what is meant by “cases”. We will come back later to the cases we are investigating in our CURRICULA project by discussing the notion of cultural institution in the third part of this paper. The point here is to know how to choose a regional capital that is an emblematic place of the ongoing cultural regimes in Europe. How to capture the cultural diversity of different cities profiles, knowing that we have set apart from the beginning, international capitals that are big cultural crossroads and the hub of most of the international cultural offer?

So far, we cannot answer this question. However, our project should be able to suggest some answers to this problem whose relevance will be evaluated as the survey progresses and reveals its results. For instance, the comparison of two case studies, taken respectively in Sweden and France, is likely to provide an overview of how the investigation gradually gives us some unexpected answers. The case of the Västerbottens Museum in Umeå (October 2014) shows us that unlike the brand-new French Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations (MUCEM Marseille, created in 2013) or the former Museum of Arts and Popular Traditions created in 1937, the Västerbottens Museum has managed for historical reasons, to give a new kind of museum experience to cultural practices rooted in a territory. Here we find a rare performance since most museums dedicated to “popular traditions” tend to freeze their exhibitions to provide them the sensation of an idealized past. Conversely, new museums of “civilizations” take also risks by highlighting cultural themes distant from ordinary concerns.

Another case study of our Curricula project such as the Theatre of Le Merlan (North side of Marseille) has given rise to new questions about the heteronomy of cultural institutions. Recently the Theatre of Le Merlan has elected a new management team, with Francesca Poloniato at the head of the institution, that has implemented a very singular orientation to the new program of the Theatre,

favouring the development of very directly anchored shows on the cultural realities of the Northern neighbourhoods of the city of Marseille where the Theatre has been created since the early 80's. So far the audiences' expectations were not quite in tune with the socialist program of the Theatre since it has been strictly dedicated to avant-garde performances since its creation. In other words, during the past decades, the cultural vision of what was specifically “artistic” for popular neighbourhoods seems to have fostered a cultural offer in a very elitist and classical sense of what a Theatre should be. However, if the hope of the new theatre management team should be willing to reconnect with popular (immigrants) and young audiences by competing with the market offer, it goes without saying that the entrance doors of the theatre will have to open new horizons and engage deep changes to gain the confidence of this new population.

Based on these observations, our ethnographic investigation has led us to emphasize the study of “non-publics”, of newcomers, but not of loyal and regular audiences of the theatre. The non-regular audiences who come to the theatre very occasionally are, in this spirit, the most interesting population to observe in order to understand how theatres are rooted into the cultural life of the city.

The survey methods we are practicing have a strong impact on the results we want to collect. Concerning our case studies, we focused on the analysis of theatres' ticket office and not on direct surveys based on self-administered questionnaires. In this specific case, only subscribers and regular audiences agreed to respond to our paper questionnaires. They declared in that sense, their full theatrical “citizenship” as well as their position as “right” to be spectator, or in other words, to be a legitimate spectator. From that observation, the only relevant method to take into account dynamics by which theatres are implemented and anchored in the different neighbourhoods of the city is to identify the new audiences and ask them about their cultural trajectory.

The notion of cultural heteronomy

During our ethnographic explorations of the cities included in our survey, we have had to consider two profiles of cultural institutions. The first one is perfectly tuned with a normative definition of what cultural venues are expected to be: *i.e.* places that are connected to major international cultural institutions both in terms of their program and their management teams. The second one, for historical reasons, is offset from the first profile and more especially from the centred European definition of cultural institutions. In other words, the notion of cultural heteronomy takes into account the opposition between centred European normativity and its reverse, *i.e.* its heteronomous counterpart.

The concept used to describe the various forms of “anti-institutions” can cover different types of cultural heteronomy. Some of them can be born from a political project such as in the case of the Theatre of Le Merlan in Marseille - created from the decision to build an institution rooted in popular neighbourhoods - and others being the result of a specific historical and institutional process such as in the case of the Västerbottens Museum in Umeå. Therefore, the survey must

describe how institutional projects in each Theatres, museums, etc. implement their own orientations by mobilizing different kinds of audiences, geographically enrolled in the social and cultural diversity of the city.

The impact of such a program can only be achieved through mapping technologies and statistical analysis. In this spirit, the ticket offices databases of different cultural institutions can be analysed from maps to identify the cultural heteronomy of the city, taking into account the socio-economic diversity of the urban population (controlling by incomes, age, rents and professions), and using National statistics databases such the French INSEE² to find any substantial correlations.

Conclusion: The institutions' narratives - how institutions are produced and reproduced

In the four different countries of our investigation (France, Sweden, Italy and Poland), we will explore roughly ten case studies involving different kinds of cultural institutions (Theatres, museums, art galleries, operas, etc.), by trying to analyse their cultural perimeter and to rewrite the micro-sociological stories that underlie them.

To complete our CURRICULA project, the survey is respectively conducted on different audiences and on the governance of cultural institutions. By confronting different stories co-written by the management team, the staff, the newspapers and politicians, we aim to understand how institutions are implemented in specific neighbourhoods, and how they shape their relationship with audiences and ordinary practices.

In this way, we seek to confront the active perimeter of cultural institutions to the idealized definition used by political authorities. In other words, we aim to demonstrate what “culture” really means when it comes to the experience of ordinary spectators and audiences of newcomers. What should they expect? Feeling cramped by a political and standardized definition of cultural institutions? Or feeling rooted in common cultural practices? In both cases a very different form of vision of culture can be expressed to challenge a definition that is not taking into account the existence of several cultural regimes as well as the heteronomy of cultural institutions. We cannot ignore that some cultural practices can be experienced in a way that can be both linked or rooted to other lived realities.

Such a way of telling the history of cultural practices must reject systemic structures and concepts (fields, art worlds, etc.) to try to understand the “real” actors involved in the cultural scenes and arenas, such as in the case of the European Capitals of Culture.

² See the INSEE website: <http://www.insee.fr/fr/bases-de-donnees/default.asp?page=infracommunal.htm>. The IRIS databases detail the composition of the city's neighborhoods at the infra-communal level and can be very useful for this kind of analysis.

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