



# European Capitals of Culture

## A 'Soft Power' Resource for the European Union?

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### Abstract

Using English-language newspaper articles retrieved from digital repositories, this article examines the cultural asymmetrical encounter between Western and Eastern Europe after 1989. It argues that due to the rise of the Iron Curtain after 1948 and the post-war progress of the Western European integration project after 1950, the idea of 'Europe' was confined to the West until 1989. After 1989, however, the Eastern European nations were free to 'return to Europe', and in order to do so they followed the 'reference model' of the West. Taking the institution of the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) as a case study, the article demonstrates how both Western and Eastern European cities used the ECOC title as a gateway to modernity, why it acquired an extra functionality in the East as a stage where they could showcase their 'European' credentials, and how it gradually developed into one of the EU's 'soft power' resources.

**Keywords:** East/West asymmetry, European Capital of Culture, European integration, reference cultures, soft power

## Introduction

'Asia stands on the Elbe', Konrad Adenauer 1946<sup>1</sup>

Much has been written about the idea of 'Europe' and its transformation from antiquity to modernity.<sup>2</sup> Over the years, 'Europe' has been

demarcated in many ways: geographically, religiously, politically, and economically. Whereas, however, geographically the Western frontier of Europe is clearly defined by the Atlantic, the Eastern frontier has always been an issue of contention and contestation because in the East there is no natural line of demarcation.<sup>3</sup>

This statement does not hold true for the period from 1945 until 1989, however, when 'Europe's' Eastern frontier was clearly defined. As the opening motto by Adenauer suggests, 'Europe' was confined to the western bank of the river Elbe, because after the rise of the Iron Curtain in 1948, 'Europe' shrank, and the term was used to describe only the European nations that came under the sphere of influence of the United States. These nations formed the 'West', while the states of Central and Eastern Europe that came under Soviet influence were no longer regarded as 'European'. This conception of 'Europe' was solidified even further after 1951, with the inauguration of the European Coal and Steel Community, and by the positive turn that the western European integration project took. Consequently, as sociologist Gerard Delanty points out:

Until the cessation of the Cold War in 1989, the EC integrated states of Western Europe held a monopoly on the idea of Europe; Europe was Western Europe and its symbol was the Cold War artefact of West Germany.<sup>4</sup>

As a result, after the disillusionment that followed the Hungarian and Czech revolts in 1956 and 1968 respectively, the citizens of Central and Eastern Europe hesitantly started to look at the states of the West for a reference model, or as it has been theoretically framed, as a 'reference culture'.<sup>5</sup> The concept of 'reference cultures'

addresses the fact that some cultures for decade after decade, if not century after century, have acted as models that other cultures imitated, adapted or resisted. Reference cultures are mental constructs or 'cognitive maps' that do not necessarily represent geopolitical realities with the internal hierarchies and recognizable borders that usually attend them. Mental reference cultures are typically established and negotiated in public discourse over many generations.<sup>6</sup>

There is no doubt that even before the collapse of the Soviet Union the states of Western Europe acted as a reference model for the states of

Central and Eastern Europe. The use of phrases such as ‘returning’, or ‘coming back to Europe’, and the attraction that the political and economic models of the West held over the East are indicative. An empirical study of the political attitudes of Warsaw youth conducted in 1986 revealed that over 50% of young Poles chose a Western European country as a place where they would like to live if given the choice, while 8% chose the United States and less than 4% chose a socialist country.<sup>7</sup> The fact that more than half of the respondents chose Western European states (Sweden, Switzerland, and West Germany were the most popular choices) as their preferred place to live is indicative not only of the attraction that Western Europe held for Easterners, but also of the higher status it held over the United States: the other available model for appropriation after 1989.

Reference cultures are models that can be imitated, adapted, or resisted. So we should be careful not to overestimate the attraction that the West held for the East, or the willingness of Eastern Europeans to follow the instructions of the West to the letter. After all, the survey also showed that 22% of young Poles preferred to just stay in Poland.<sup>8</sup>

Regardless of where Eastern Europeans preferred to continue their lives, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was no obstacle to and, more importantly, no justification for, delimiting the idea of Europe solely to Western Europe. The expansion and restoration of Europe to its pre-1945 borders freed the idea of ‘Europe’ from its Cold War confines and allowed it to spread rapidly to the East. In the early 1990s this process gained greater urgency due to the promises of the Western European states that they would extend a helping hand to their Eastern European brothers and sisters,<sup>9</sup> but also due to the desire of the latter to dissociate themselves from the Soviet Union and their communist past.

Nevertheless, no one expected this to be an easy transition and despite their heart-warming declarations, the inhibitions of the Western European states are well known. In 1992, Tony Judt explained that, ‘whatever they now say, the architects and advocates of a unified Europe à la Maastricht never wanted to include a whole group of have-not nations from the East; they had yet to fully digest and integrate an earlier Mediterranean assortment’.<sup>10</sup>

Judt’s observation points to an asymmetrical perception of Europe.<sup>11</sup> It demonstrates how, due to Europe’s Cold War division, the states of the West embarked on the prosperous road of economic and political

integration, while the states of the East were placed under the centralized supervision of Moscow. Due to their divergent post-war historical experiences, Western European states were associated with modernity and prosperity, while Eastern European states were associated with backwardness and dereliction. Thus, after 1989, it appeared as the natural outcome of this asymmetry that the West would be setting the terms of the direction of the European integration project, while the Eastern European states would have to adjust to the terms of the West.

Another concept, apart from ‘reference cultures’, that is relevant for this analysis is ‘soft power’, a term coined by Joseph S. Nye in 1990.<sup>12</sup> In his book *Bound to Lead*, Nye wished to challenge the then prevalent view that the power that the United States exerted over the world was waning. He argued that the United States was still the strongest nation not only in terms of military and economic power but also in a third field that he called soft power. According to Nye, soft power is ‘the ability to obtain preferred outcomes by attraction and persuasion rather than coercion and payment’,<sup>13</sup> and he adds:

You can affect [the] behaviour [of others] in three ways: threats of coercion (‘sticks’), inducements or payments (‘carrots’) and attraction that makes others want what you want. A country may obtain the outcomes it desires in world politics because other countries want to follow it – admiring its values, emulating its example, and aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness.<sup>14</sup>

The concepts of ‘reference culture’ and ‘soft power’ are related. Whereas the former allows us to better understand asymmetrical relations, i.e. which party has the higher ground and which party adjusts itself to that model, the latter helps us pinpoint the resources that each party has in its possession to make itself more (or less) attractive. In what follows, I intend to use these conceptual tools in order to demonstrate how the post-1989 asymmetrical encounter between Western and Eastern Europe transformed the West into a reference model for the East, and how the institution of the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) became an attractive ‘soft power’ resource for the European Union.

I have chosen the ECOC for two reasons. Firstly, because it incorporated cities from both regions even when the majority of Eastern European states were not yet members of the EU; and secondly, because

the cities that have pursued the title did so voluntarily. Even though the European Commission announces to which country/ies the ECOC title will be allocated each year, the cities are not forced to participate in the scheme, they choose to do so of their own accord, and on their own budget, due to the benefits they can subtract from it. Therefore, by taking a closer look at this institution, we can draw conclusions regarding the post-1989 East-West asymmetrical encounter and the challenge it poses to the European integration project, while at the same time we can better understand what makes the institution of the ECOC so attractive.

The aim of this article is to determine how, and to what extent, the states of Central and Eastern Europe used the ECOC title in order to overcome the post-1989 East-West asymmetry. By comparing what cities from the East and what cities from the West were trying to achieve when bidding for the ECOC title I will be able to demonstrate, first, why the ECOC title was perceived by both Eastern and Western European cities as a gateway to modernity, second, how in the East the title acquired an extra functionality as a method to ‘catch up’ with the West, and, third, how the ECOC title gradually became a valuable ‘soft power’ resource for the European Union. The goal is not to enter the extensive debate on whether mega-events like the ECOC can boost the culture-led urban regeneration of a city,<sup>15</sup> the focus is rather on the institution’s symbolic capacity to improve the image and reputation of European cities (and their respective nations), promoting at the same time an inclusive European identity.<sup>16</sup> When necessary, however, the economic aspects of the ECOC are taken into consideration and commented upon.

The arguments presented in this paper are based primarily on research performed on English-language newspaper articles retrieved from two digital repositories: LexisNexis and Gale Artemis.<sup>17</sup> There is therefore a bias in the sources. The majority of articles come from English newspapers, but, when available, sources from the respective cities written in English were taken into consideration. Apart from the newspaper articles, another important source of information were the ex-post evaluation reports prepared for the European Commission and, of course, secondary sources that deal with the topic of the ECOC.

The paper is divided into five sections. The first section offers a brief historical overview of the institution of the ECOC, i.e. when it was

conceived, with what purpose, and how the Eastern European states were finally included in the scheme. The following sections deal with each case study individually and analyze how the symbolic functionality of the ECOC title was influenced by their historical conditions. The cities discussed here are Weimar 1999, Prague and Krakow 2000, Sibiu 2007, and Liverpool 2008. The cities selected are predominantly Eastern European because the primary aim of this paper is to show how the ECOC title was used as a gateway to modernity and to 'Europe'. The only Western city that was selected, Liverpool, is regarded as representative of Western European cities as a whole because it demonstrates perfectly what most of them were trying to achieve when they applied for the ECOC title, i.e. economic regeneration, new investments, and an improved image as a cultural hub. Finally, the conclusion sums up the arguments and comments on the extent to which Europe has moved from the asymmetrical encounter of 1989 into a more symmetrical encounter today.

## **European Capitals of Culture: A Brief Historical Overview**

The institution of the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) was inaugurated in 1985 as an attempt to circumvent the EU's deficiency on cultural policy. The first city to carry the title was Athens and since then 54 cities have participated in the programme. The primary aim of the initiative has been to 'highlight the cultural wealth and diversity of the cities of Europe whilst emphasising their shared cultural heritage and the vitality of the arts'.<sup>18</sup> Until 1996, the event remained an intergovernmental activity. The responsibility for its implementation fell on the Ministers of Culture because the European Community did not possess any legislative power in the field of culture at the time.<sup>19</sup>

The first five cities to be awarded the title (Athens, Florence, Amsterdam, Berlin, and Paris) were already widely perceived to be the cultural centres of Europe.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the title did not have a great impact on the image of those cities, and did not do much to further increase their commercial touristic value. When it was the United Kingdom's turn to select a city for the 1990 ECOC title, however, the authorities responsible for cultural policies, instead of designating London, the

obvious choice, proclaimed a national competition for the title. The city that won the competition was Glasgow, an industrial city known more for its manufacturing capacity and high crime rates than for its success in the cultural sector. Winning the title helped Glasgow to attract investment from the private sector and a large number of tourists during its cultural year, but most importantly, it enhanced the city's reputation as a cultural destination. Recent studies have criticized the long-term social and economic benefits of Glasgow 1990,<sup>21</sup> but they have not refuted that Glasgow is widely acclaimed as a ECOC 'success story' or that it is used as a referent by other cities bidding for the title. Glasgow's marketing success breathed new life into the programme because it allowed the ECOC to function on a new *quid pro quo* basis. On the one hand, the European Union could promote a European identity via the ECOC while, on the other, the cities hoped to draw benefits of a more practical kind. Thus, after Glasgow's marketing success, the cultural authorities of the member states realized that the ECOC title offered an excellent opportunity to reinvigorate their lesser-known cities by advertising them, both domestically and abroad, as exciting cultural destinations.

Not surprisingly, Glasgow's public relations success also stirred the interest of non-member states that were striving to return to 'Europe' and perceived the title as a unique chance to imitate Glasgow's image-making example. Their demands were taken into consideration by the Council of Ministers, which issued conclusion 90/c 162/01 in 1990. According to the conclusion, it was agreed that when the 'first cycle' of nominations was completed in the year 1996, 'not only Member States of the Community, but also other European countries, *basing themselves on the principles of democracy, pluralism and the rule of law*, should be able to nominate cities for the event'.<sup>22</sup>

In the early stages, however, cities from the East participated in the EU's cultural exchange policies via a different event, specifically designed for the occasion. Due to the widespread interest of non-member states to participate in the ECOC, the 'European Cultural Month' was launched in 1992. It only lasted until 2003 because by 2004 most countries that would normally adhere to it became full members of the European Union.

On this occasion, the post-1989 asymmetrical encounter between Eastern and Western Europe becomes evident. The West had invented

an attractive cultural scheme that the East wanted to be a part of. In order to be accepted, however, the East had to adhere to the terms of the West; a Western European Council would certify whether or not the interested Eastern European country truly based itself on the principles of democracy, pluralism and the rule of law, and if it was worthy of the ECOC title. Until then, non-member states had to make do with the 'European Cultural Month' scheme. This shows that the member states of the West were indeed considering ways to guide the non-member states of the East back to 'Europe', but it also shows that they were the ones who held the keys, and that the door to 'Europe' was not wide open.

The first former Soviet-bloc city that was awarded the title was Weimar in 1999, but Weimar can be considered an exception because it entered 'Europe', as it were, through the back door after the reunification of Germany. So the first two cities from the former Soviet-bloc that actually became ECOC under the provision that allowed non-member states to hold the title were Krakow and Prague in the year 2000. It is interesting to note that both Poland and the Czech Republic were in the process of accessing the EU at the time, but the year 2000 was interesting for another reason as well. During that year it was decided that nine cities would be appointed as ECOC (Avignon, Bergen, Bologna, Brussels, Helsinki, Krakow, Prague, Reykjavik, and Santiago de Compostela). If we place Helsinki in the West for historical reasons, the representation of the West with seven cities in the millennium celebrations points again to the post-1989 asymmetry.

This decision was meant to celebrate the new millennium from various locations, and to take advantage of the symbolic significance of the year in order to intensify the promotion of the European vision into the new millennium. From a symbolic, 'European', point of view this designation made sense.<sup>23</sup> From the cities' point of view, however, the designation was more ambivalent because it disturbed the *quid pro quo* balance.

In the end, the 2000 experiment was deemed unsuccessful. Yet, even from unsuccessful experiments lessons can be drawn. The first lesson drawn was that the chances of preparing a successful cultural year are increased when cities share the title due to the given opportunity to exchange ideas on projects or learn from more efficient methods of administration. The exchange of artists and community groups might

also be easier during a shared year, especially when the cities sharing the title are on the same page and projects that took place in one city can be exported to the other.<sup>24</sup> Finally, through the export of projects, the European dimension can be highlighted.

Sharing the title, however, can as easily become disadvantageous. The cities might have a completely different vision for their cultural year, and the different aims, objectives, and priorities might not allow too much space for collaboration. Consequently, the cities might lose their interest in cooperating with each other, and instead of highlighting European unity the shared ECOC designation might end up highlighting European disassociation. To a certain extent this is what happened in 2000 because the nine cities had to compete for visibility, visitors and sponsorship.<sup>25</sup> Since all of them were *Capitals* of Europe, the title lost its salience. What is the point of being a capital for a year when during that specific year there are eight other capitals? The bigger, wealthier and widely acknowledged 'cultural' cities were able to monopolize the interest of the audience and draw in more tourists, while their smaller and more obscure counterparts struggled to get a glimpse of the spotlight.

Interestingly enough, however, the study prepared for the European Commission by 'Glasgow's 1990' cultural director, Robert Palmer, notes that when respondents were asked 'whether or not they believed the system of having more than one city designated as ECOC in the same year should be continued, [the] views were equally divided'.<sup>26</sup> Fifty percent of the respondents replied 'yes', while the other half replied 'no'. Matters became even more complicated because

[r]espondents in cities that felt more isolated or peripheral to European issues, or where for historical, geographical or cultural reasons there had been few opportunities to join with other European cities in joint cultural projects, tended to favour the idea of sharing the title more than in other cities.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, despite the fact that sharing the title with a 'central' and better-networked city entailed the risk of less visitors, less sponsorship and lesser visibility, at the same time it offered peripheral cities the opportunity to 'return to Europe' by having their names and projects linked to those cities that were considered to be the 'central' ones and usually belonged to the old Member States. Consequently, the question whether

the title should be shared or not remained unanswered. In the end, the issue was handled by opting for the solution of the middle ground, because it appears that even those who were in favour of sharing the title did not want to share it with more than one other city.<sup>28</sup> For that reason the millennium experiment was never repeated.

After the EU enlargement in 2004, the European Parliament and the European Council issued Joint Decision 649/2005/EC that officially incorporated the new member states into the European Capital of Culture Event and decided that each of the new members would share the title with one of the old ones from 2009 onwards.<sup>29</sup> The decision to simultaneously award the title to a city belonging to the old member states and a city belonging to the new member states offered a great opportunity to bridge the historical gap between East and West, and should be perceived as one of the first steps in overcoming the post-1989 asymmetrical encounter between the two regions of Europe.

## **Weimar 1999**

The year 1999 was significant for Weimar specifically, and for Germany as a whole, because it was a year filled with important anniversaries. That year the city simultaneously celebrated the 250th birthday of Goethe; the 80th jubilee of the establishment of the Bauhaus artistic movement and the proclamation of the Republic of Weimar, also commemorating the passage of fifty years since the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), and of ten years since the fall of the Berlin Wall.<sup>30</sup> The latter event had signalled the reunification of Germany and allowed Weimar to bid for the ECOC title earlier than other cities that belonged to the former Soviet bloc.

Thus, when applying for the ECOC title the anniversaries and the symbolic reasons behind the bid were particularly stressed. For the German authorities, however, winning the ECOC title was crucial primarily for practical reasons. The event was seen as an opportunity to boost the economy of a city belonging to the newly acquired Länder of the FRG by enhancing its cultural image and by investing in its infrastructure. It was believed that this way the gap between East and West Germany would decrease.

It is interesting to note that the idea to apply for the title was conceived by the last minister of culture of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) who saw it as a means to raise the necessary funds, and attract the essential attention of the German authorities, because the infrastructural problems that post-1989 Weimar was facing were evident to everyone.<sup>31</sup> According to Silke Roth and Susanne Frank,

Like other East German cities, Weimar was confronted with a loss of workplaces due to the closure of big factories which could not be compensated by the newly emerging commercial enterprises and malls. The goal to restructure Weimar as a culture, education and tourist city was confronted with the decay of the old city and historical sites and the lack of infrastructure. [...] In this precarious situation, the project to apply for the title Culture City of Europe appeared like a wonder weapon to cope with the demands of new urban politics.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, even though the idea to apply for the title was conceived in East Germany, the responsibility to prepare a successful bid, and to implement the required infrastructural changes, was taken over by representatives from West Germany. The then mayor of the city, Klaus Büttner, hailed from West Germany and was elected particularly because he could utilize his political connections within the FRG. Büttner, however, took complete control over the project and did not consult with local politicians or other local authorities. He pursued his goals in association with his western contacts and acted, most of the time, behind closed doors, without taking local demands into consideration.<sup>33</sup>

An exception to this rule was the Rollplatz square debate where plans for an artistic refurbishment of the square were eventually scrapped due to protests of the local population. The plans were deemed to be too modern, and the citizens feared that the square would lose its character.<sup>34</sup> Frank points out that the square basically has no character, as it is usually used as a parking lot, but precisely due to its obscurity the citizens felt that it should be left untouched. They claimed that this was *their* square, which only they knew how to appreciate. Therefore, they were not willing to offer it to the tourists as they had previously done with other squares. Consequently, even though Büttner's efforts had led to the success of Weimar's ECOC bid, the local population punished him via the ballot box for his alienation and top-down attitude.

The example of Weimar gives us the opportunity to assess the post-1989 asymmetrical encounter between Western and Eastern Europe within Germany itself. Weimar was conscious of its derelict state in comparison to cities from West Germany, and opted, in order to overcome its position, to receive the ECOC accolade. The city was also aware that in order to achieve that goal it depended on the resources of the West. The West responded to Weimar's invitation, but instead of listening to local voices and taking the local population on board, it decided to impose its own terms, justifying its hegemonic role exactly by (ab)using the post-1989 asymmetry. On the one hand, the citizens of Weimar were thankful for the effort and resources provided by the West and were willing, albeit reluctantly, to follow its lead. On the other hand, their willingness had its limits. As the Rollplatz debate made clear, when they were pushed to the extent that they feared losing their own identity, they reacted in order to protect what they felt was solely theirs and thus not available for western expropriation.

Finally, another interesting point that emerges from Roth's and Frank's research of local and national newspapers during that period is that, whereas delegates of the Federal government stressed Weimar's function as an international representative of Germany, and of the progress made to its post-1989 East-West integration, the local actors cared mostly about the feasibility of the ECOC project and about local participation in it.<sup>35</sup> This illustrates that, following Germany's reunification, the Federal government worried mostly about Germany's image abroad and wanted to use the ECOC title as a stage where it could showcase one of the hidden gems that lay in the East.<sup>36</sup> After all, Weimar was not randomly selected for that role. Weimar may have been lacking in terms of cultural events and infrastructure in comparison to its western counterparts, but in comparison to its eastern neighbours it held significant advantages.

The city of Weimar has been dubbed the 'Athens of Germany' because, as we saw earlier, it was inextricably linked with Germany's humanistic past. Moreover, according to a Deutsche Bank director it was 'eastern Germany's most "western" town'.<sup>37</sup> Gareth Huw Davies, a columnist for the *Mail on Sunday*, held a similar view. When he visited Weimar for its ECOC year he noted that, 'Weimar [was] a lucky town, the drabness that was East Germany passed it by'.<sup>38</sup> A number of other newspaper articles expressed analogous feelings regarding Weimar.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising that the Federal government gladly accepted Weimar's

ECOC invitation. It had so much to gain by raising the prestige of the country abroad and by regenerating East Germany domestically that it would be foolish to let a chance like that slip by, especially under those circumstances. Weimar was their best shot to demonstrate that a city from the East was capable of reaching the standards of the West, concealing at the same time the true extent of the asymmetry between the two parts of Germany. Unfortunately, the western utilitarian attitude did not allow the citizens of Weimar to have an active part in their own ECOC exactly because their opinion was deemed to be irrelevant and outdated. The westerners did not believe that the citizens of an East German city could possibly know anything about high culture. Anyhow, even if they did, no one was bold enough to take such a gamble when the country's international image was at stake.

## **Krakow and Prague 2000**

The year 2000 was not the first time that Krakow was invested with a 'European' mantle. The city had been selected to host the first European Cultural Month (ECM) in 1992. As we have already seen, the ECM scheme was invented as an Eastern European substitute to the ECOC because the demand to participate in the latter event was growing in the East but the title had already been allocated to western cities until the end of 1996. Consequently, the interested cities from the East would have to wait until the new round of nominations in order to appoint their own ECOC.

When asked about their motivation to bid for the ECM title, respondents from Krakow, as well as from other Eastern European cities, responded that

The motivation to host the Cultural Month focused on a desire to raise the European or international profile of the city and to be recognised as a cultural city. This often included a desire to present the city's cultural life to the rest of Europe or to highlight the contribution made by the city to European culture.<sup>40</sup>

The above excerpt indicates that the ECM event was perceived as a gateway to 'Europe' and as a method to overcome the post-1989

asymmetry by pointing that Poland and its culture never stopped being a part of Europe.<sup>41</sup> I would argue that it was also perceived as a route to modernity, because during that period, to Eastern European eyes, the idea of Europe was equated with modernity.<sup>42</sup> This claim is based on Delanty's distinction between first-order reference cultures and second-order reference cultures.<sup>43</sup> According to Delanty, modernity is a first order reference culture because most civilizations perceive modernity as a desirable outcome: they all want to be seen as modern in their own specific way. 'Europe' on the other hand is a second order reference culture because Europe functioned as a model only within a very specific historical period.

After 1989 the nations of Eastern Europe wanted to cast off their backward Soviet image and embrace modernity. Thus, reaching modernity was the primary goal. The modernity they wanted to embrace, however, was Europe's version of modernity. As we saw earlier, the American model of modernity was also available for appropriation, but it did not hold the same attraction as the western European one. That is why to Eastern European eyes 'Europe' and modernity were intertwined. It was believed that hosting the ECM event would aid the respective city, and the country it belonged to, in three ways. Firstly, by having a council of western ministers pin a 'European' tag on it, secondly, by stressing the continuity of its culture and reminding everyone that despite a forty-five-year gap the city's culture never stopped being 'European', and thirdly, by wearing a 'European' mantle, simultaneously shedding its backward Soviet image.

It seems, however, that in the case of Krakow, the ECM event did not bring about the anticipated results. If it did, the Polish authorities would not have vied for the ECOC title eight years later. This negative outcome was foreseen by a newspaper article written at the time, which stated that 'for a festival which purports to be about "the meeting of East and West", the East's contribution – from Polish, Russian, Ukrainian and Lithuanian artists – outweighs the West's by a large measure. [...] If the hope was to bring Krakow [...] to the attention of the West, the opportunity has been lost'.<sup>44</sup> This was not solely the fault of the Polish authorities to attract western artists, however, but also of the apparent asymmetry between the two events. How could a cultural *month* in an emerging post-Soviet city compete with a cultural *year* in a city with the status of Madrid, the city that held the ECOC title in 1992?

For that reason, when the new round of nominations was announced, the Polish authorities submitted Krakow's bid for the ECOC competition under the non-Member state clause. Unsurprisingly, the main motivation to bid for the title was, once again, 'to promote Krakow internationally, to attract investment from state and abroad, and to contribute to Poland's image in its aspiration to join the E.U.'.<sup>45</sup> Surprising, however, was the fact that the Polish authorities had decided that their candidate city for the ECOC title would, once again, be Krakow. Why did they not opt for the capital Warsaw, or for another Polish city this time? The answer is related to the perceived post-1989 East-West asymmetry, and the means to overcome it. The authorities believed that the ideal city to represent Poland's 'European' credentials was Krakow, because Krakow had emerged from the Second World War relatively unscathed and had thus maintained its pre-war 'European' character. Warsaw, on the other hand, had been flattened out during the war and, even though it was rebuilt based on its pre-war design, it was still affected by the post-war Soviet architecture, which reminded everyone of the 'non-European' years.<sup>46</sup>

If we take into account the positive comments that Krakow received in the international press, it seems that the authorities had made a wise decision. 'Krakow [...] is a jewel in the Polish Crown', asserted a columnist for the *Irish Times*;<sup>47</sup> while the title for an article in the *Toronto Star* stated that 'Krakow [was] the loveliest of the Polish cities'.<sup>48</sup> Finally, Steve Crawshaw of *The Independent* maintained that, 'Warsaw was the rich upstart, [while] Krakow [had] the insouciance of the faded aristocrat, short of cash but confident of its unmatched pedigree'.<sup>49</sup>

Based on the evidence presented above, it is easy to discern why the Polish authorities used Krakow and the ECOC title in a similar manner in which the German authorities had used Weimar in 1999. They also perceived the ECOC title as an excellent opportunity to shed their communist image and to illustrate that they were worthy to re-enter 'Europe' via participation in the institutions of the EU. As we shall see in the following paragraphs, the same stands true for Prague as well.

For Krakow the ECOC title, apart from the symbolic significance of 're-entering' Europe, also held more practical aspirations, i.e. to attract foreign investment and tourists. For Prague, however, even though new foreign investments would be more than welcome, attracting more tourists was not a priority. In fact, during Prague's ECOC bid this aim

was underplayed.<sup>50</sup> The reason for this tendency was that Prague was a popular city-break destination even before its ECOC year, and its touristic image had improved a lot since the ‘Velvet Revolution’. Already in 1996, the city had received the blessings of Queen Elizabeth II. During her visit to the Czech capital she had proclaimed that Prague, ‘a city of which any continent would be proud, [would] be a worthy European Capital of Culture in the year 2000’.<sup>51</sup> The *Toronto Star* had declared Prague, ‘the tourism sweetheart of Eastern Europe, [and] one of the prettiest cities on the planet’.<sup>52</sup> Ruth Lewis, a columnist for the *Mail on Sunday* found it

[h]ard to believe only eleven years [had passed] since Prague was released from Communist rule, the people were indistinguishable from those of any other trendy European city as they sit and chat on sunny terraces with a glass of wine or pitcher of beer, mobile phones just a fingertip away.<sup>53</sup>

Prague’s status was so elevated that Steve Keenan and Chloe Bryan-Brown of the London *Times* wondered why the city was in need of the ECOC nomination in the first place.<sup>54</sup> The answer given by Michal Prokop, the director of ‘Prague 2000’, was that the title had ‘major economic, political and cultural importance’ for the city and its population. The active participation of the population was seen as a necessity because, ‘without [their] active participation [...] the title would become nothing but a series of spectacles for tourists – and that was not the purpose of the title’.<sup>55</sup>

Judging from the above, two conclusions can be drawn. First, that the city did not pursue the ECOC title only to enhance its international reputation, and second, that its main objective was to improve the infrastructure of the city and the standard of living for the locals. Czech authorities thought it was prudent to wear the ECOC mantle because they were aware that the city was in a state of limbo.<sup>56</sup> Even though it was not clustered with cities from the East anymore, the city was not clustered with cities from the West either. The Czech standard of living was still lacking in comparison to its western neighbours; hence the need for foreign investment. Thus, the ECOC was perceived as a rite of passage. The Czech Republic, as well as Poland, was in the process of accessing the EU at the time so the ECOC title was perceived as a certificate of quality before entering the institutions of the West, and

becoming an official part of ‘Europe’. In the stated aims for Prague’s bid to gain the ECOC title, the main motivation was ‘to promote Prague and the Czech Republic before accession to the E.U.’.<sup>57</sup>

So, even though the image of the city was changing from the bottom up, the fact that the Czech Republic was not yet officially admitted into the higher echelons of the EU’s political and economic structure meant that the post-1989 asymmetry still persisted. For that reason, the ECOC title still had a purpose to serve. If we judge by the way newspapers clustered Prague after its ECOC year, and after its EU accession, it is obvious that both accolades were beneficial for the city. In a 2005 article in the *Daily Mail*, Prague found itself in the company of the likes of Paris, Amsterdam and Rome.<sup>58</sup> The author of the article claimed that ‘former Iron Curtain cities like Riga, Bratislava, Tallinn and Vilnius may not trip off the tongue in quite the same way as Paris, Prague, Amsterdam, and Rome. But they [were] proving [to be] a big draw for weekend travellers...’.<sup>59</sup> The fact that Prague, itself a former Iron Curtain city, but also a city that had accessed the EU in 2004, the same year as Riga, Bratislava, Tallinn and Vilnius, was clustered with cities from the ‘old’ member states, indicates two things. First, that the ECOC title can indeed reduce the asymmetry gap between East and West, at least on matters of cultural perception if not on economic standards, and second, that the furthest a country is from the ‘western source’, the larger the asymmetrical perception and its distance from ‘Europe’. Cities like Riga, Bratislava, Tallinn and Vilnius had reached the higher echelons of the EU’s political structure, i.e. they had achieved acceptance from a top-down perspective, but they still had not managed to change their image from a bottom-up perspective. As Prague had realized, in order to close the asymmetry gap you need to do battle on both fronts simultaneously, and to keep building the bridge from both sides of the gap.

## **Sibiu 2007**

Sibiu/Hermannstadt was founded in the twelfth century by German colonists who originated from the area between the rivers Mosel and Rhine, a geographical area corresponding approximately to today’s Luxembourg.<sup>60</sup> For that reason, Sibiu acquired a distinct cultural

character in comparison to other Romanian cities, and took advantage of its historical connection with Luxembourg in order to win the title in 2007.<sup>61</sup>

In 2007 it would be Luxembourg's turn to nominate one of its cities to take on the ECOC mantle as a member of the E.U., and the Romanian authorities approached the delegates from Luxembourg with the purpose of convincing the latter to share the title with them and to support Sibiu's ECOC bid.<sup>62</sup> The contact was successful and Sibiu's coordination team later reported that, 'a significant factor in Sibiu's success [...] was the advice provided by Luxembourg at each stage of the application process'.<sup>63</sup>

The Romanian authorities, following the example provided by their German and Polish predecessors, had decided to enter the ECOC competition not with their capital city, Bucharest, but with a city more obscure, yet, according to their estimation, better suited to demonstrate the country's 'European' credentials. The foreign press agreed with that estimation. Whereas Bucharest was described as 'grey, concrete-heavy, and dingy'<sup>64</sup> with slim chances of ever winning a beauty contest,<sup>65</sup> Sibiu, and its surrounding area in Transylvania, were praised as 'gothic treasures'<sup>66</sup> and were dubbed as the 'Beauty' in a 'Beauty and the Beast' relationship between Romania's North and South.<sup>67</sup> A French tourist, traversing the country from South to North, commented that, 'crossing Transylvania from the South I was amazed by how quickly the scenery, infrastructure and people's mood changed. [...] You feel the difference wherever you turn. It's obvious the region emerged from another historical and cultural source'.<sup>68</sup> Thus, it is not hard to discern that Bucharest, in a striking parallel to Warsaw, symbolized the decadence of Ceausescu's era, while Sibiu, in accordance with Krakow, reminded everyone of the country's European legacy.

In an Eastern European country in the process of shedding its communist image, the decision to opt for Sibiu instead of Bucharest was not a hard choice to make. Moreover, apart from the 'European' beauty that Sibiu possessed, it also offered 'western' connections, not only on a foreign (Luxembourg) but also on a domestic level. In parallel to what had taken place in Weimar, the mayor responsible for bidding and implementing Sibiu's ECOC year was elected based on his 'western' pedigree. Klaus Johannis hailed from a line of the Saxon colonists who had founded Sibiu in the twelfth century, and even though the numbers

of the community in Transylvania had dwindled from around 750,000 before the Second World War to 40,000 today,<sup>69</sup> that did not hinder Johannis's election campaign. On the contrary, regardless of the fact that the German minority in Sibiu only numbered 2,000 out of the city's 155,000 people, he won the 2000 election and was re-elected in 2004 and 2008 by claiming 87 and 83% of the votes respectively.<sup>70</sup> Rather than alienating the city's population, Johannis's 'western' lineage was perceived as an asset, because Romanians had correlated his ethnic roots with stereotypical views about Germans. Germans were seen as 'hard-working, precise, and uncompromising', while Romanians were characterised as 'a bit lazy'.<sup>71</sup> In contrast to Büttner in Weimar, however, Johannis did a good job on both fronts, i.e. convincing the responsible authorities in the EU to bestow the ECOC title to Sibiu, while at the same time making sure to please and keep the local population at hand. His success was rewarded, not only by his landslide re-election victories in 2004 and 2008, but also with a victory in the presidential elections of 2014. Apparently, his 'western' skills could be of use not only on a municipal, but on a national level as well.

Apart from the ECOC title, the year 2007 held an important significance for another reason. That year, the country celebrated its accession to the EU. Of course, when the authorities applied for the ECOC title they were unaware that their accession to the EU would coincide with Sibiu's ECOC year, but they nevertheless saw this as a positive outcome, because they hoped that the publicity surrounding the EU accession would draw more tourists to Sibiu. That was what they had aimed for since the beginning. One of the main motivations to apply for the title was 'to increase the city's visibility at a European level', while the 'external' objectives 'focused on the European dimension, i.e. using culture to make Sibiu more European and to promote Sibiu to the rest of Europe'.<sup>72</sup>

These aims correspond with the aims of all the other Eastern European cities that I have analyzed so far, and they point, once again, to the post-1989 asymmetrical encounter between East and West, with the West acting as the reference model that the East wished to emulate. In his welcoming speech addressed to Romanians and Bulgarians on December 31st 2006, French President Jacques Chirac stated that, 'Tomorrow, we will again share the same history and the same destiny. [...] It is only natural that you join our family, Europe.'

[...] Sofia and Bucharest are, again, European capitals'.<sup>73</sup> Based on Chirac's words, one could draw interesting conclusions regarding where 'Europe' ends, and who decides whether 'Europe' should be expanded or not. In order to be accepted 'back into Europe', Eastern European countries had to dance to the tune that the 'West' was playing. This explains why the city with the most 'western' credentials was usually chosen to defend the country's 'European' case via the ECOC scheme, and illustrates that there was an additional reason why the ECOC title was attractive to the Eastern European cities. As we shall see in the following section, apart from the infrastructural and economic possibilities that arise from the influx of tourists and investment opportunities, the countries of the East can also retrace 'Europe's' thread via the ECOC, and pick up from where they left off in 1945. Accordingly, with every new addition to the EU, the edge of 'Europe' is newly delineated.<sup>74</sup>

Yet, even so, the restrictions that were unilaterally imposed by Britain (and imitated by other old member states) on the free movement of labour from Romania<sup>75</sup> indicate that, sometimes, presenting inherent European credentials via the ECOC is not enough to be *completely* admitted into 'Europe'. Romanian citizens perceived these restrictions as unfair treatment because such restrictions were not imposed on the previous EU enlargement in 2004 when seven former Soviet bloc states accessed the European institutions simultaneously. What they did not understand, however, was that it was precisely the 2004 experience that gave birth to these unfair measures. Nevertheless, some argued that, as long as their country was in 'Europe', the restrictions did not make much difference to them, because they had no intention of moving out of Romania. They claimed that those who wanted to leave Romania had already left, while the EU membership meant that new opportunities would become available inside the country and maybe even those who had left might find new reasons to return.<sup>76</sup> This attitude, resembling the attitude of a significant minority of young Poles in 1986, reveals that Eastern Europeans have been willing to imitate the 'western' model up to a certain point. They were keen to adapt in order to be a part of 'Europe' and be seen as modern once again, but they did not want to become 'western'. Rather they wanted to reduce the unfair post-1989 asymmetrical perception in order to remind the West that what they had to offer was also a part of 'Europe'.

Closing this section, we can observe that Europe still has some way to go before it can close the gap that was created by forty-five years of East-West confrontation. Nevertheless, if we have to make an overall estimation of Sibiu's ECOC year, it appears that the city achieved its primary aims, i.e. to enhance the confidence of its citizens and to increase its visibility on a European level.<sup>77</sup> 'Sibiu has been around for 800 years, but it was only last year that it was really put onto the map,' said Rodica Ofelia Miclea, the rector for international affairs at Lucian Blaga University.<sup>78</sup> The ECOC title has put many lesser-known cities from Eastern and Western Europe on the map, but, as we shall see in the next section, it has also helped better-known ones to reclaim their glamour.

## **Liverpool 2008**

In order to understand what Liverpool was trying to achieve by winning the ECOC title, a brief historical overview of the city will help us discern the differences between bids from cities in the West and bids from cities in the East. Until the first half of the twentieth century, Liverpool was a thriving port city that acted as the main hub for the British Empire's Atlantic trade. The city experienced a rapid population growth during that period and drew economic immigrants from Ireland, Poland, and China, while it also benefited economically from its location as a transit station for people who tried to reach North America.<sup>79</sup> During the second half of the twentieth century, however, after the collapse of the British Empire, Liverpool's strategic significance waned and its docks and manufacturing capacity shrunk. As a result, by the 1980s the city recorded some of the highest unemployment rates in the United Kingdom.<sup>80</sup> Naturally, crime rates also rose, while riots between the population and the police dealt a massive blow to the city's image and reputation.<sup>81</sup>

Despite the government's regeneration efforts, the negative comments surrounding Liverpool's image persisted into the new millennium. That is why the city's authorities decided to enter the 2008 ECOC competition. That year it was the United Kingdom's turn to appoint a city for the title and in accordance with what had taken place in 1990, when Glasgow had won the accolade, an internal competition was

announced in order to determine which city was worthy of the title. Liverpool was shortlisted together with Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Newcastle-Gateshead, and Oxford. Surprisingly, despite being an underdog, the city won the title.<sup>82</sup> When the announcement was made, ‘fireworks and streamers erupted at the Empire theatre’ because everyone was aware of the possibilities offered by the title.<sup>83</sup> According to the judges, one of the crucial factors that gave Liverpool a winning edge was the support of the local population.<sup>84</sup> This fact was reaffirmed by ECOTEC’s ex-post evaluation of Liverpool’s cultural year. In the report it was stressed that

[b]efore submitting its application to become an ECOC, Liverpool undertook a wide programme of public consultation to raise the profile of the application and increase public buy-in. The decision was taken to consult the public on what they felt were the best things about Liverpool, and this was used as the basis for the ECOC bid. [...] The strong perception of a number of stakeholders was that a main driver in Liverpool winning the ECOC title was that residents had been directly involved in formulating the bid, and that it had the backing of so many of them.<sup>85</sup>

The bid received the backing of the residents, not only because the municipal authorities had acted in a smart manner by listening to their views and taking them on board, but also because they had grown tired of the negativity surrounding Liverpool.<sup>86</sup> Even though the city was faring better in terms of crime rate figures in comparison to Manchester and London at the start of the century, it was still ‘the classic setting for jokes about theft’.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, despite the fact that the city was catching up to the national average in terms of education, culture,<sup>88</sup> and population growth, it could not shake off the reputation of a city in decline.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, winning the ECOC title was perceived as a chance to invite everyone to Liverpool and show them that the image of the city had changed. According to the city’s application booklet, the main objective for 2008 was, ‘to confirm Liverpool’s position as a *premier* European city’.<sup>90</sup>

The use of the word *premier* defines precisely the main argument of this article. Whereas the aforementioned Eastern European cities were struggling to be perceived as ‘plain’ European because they were left outside of ‘Europe’ for forty-five years, the cities of the West, who

were fortunate enough to participate in the European integration project after 1945, were not feeling insecure about their ‘European’ credentials. On the contrary, by acquiring the title they wanted to boast that they belonged to an elite club of cities that represented European modernity and culture. For a city like Liverpool, where even some of its own citizens have declared that ‘we have no culture’,<sup>91</sup> to be adorned with the ECOC badge was a way of putting the recent past behind and for boosting its confidence for the future. Of course, the same is definitely true for the cities of Eastern Europe. Whereas, however, cities in the West were (and still are) pursuing modernity via the ECOC title,<sup>92</sup> the cities of the East were pursuing both modernity *and* ‘Europe’. As I have argued earlier, after 1989, for Eastern Europeans the idea of modernity was equated with the idea of Europe. Therefore, by using the ECOC title to come back to Europe, they were also taking a step towards the future and towards modernity. How else can we explain the vast amounts of money invested to refurbish cultural buildings, or to construct new ones, under the aegis of the ECOC?

This question offers the chance to explain why the ECOC has an inherent attraction and why it acts as a ‘soft power’ resource for the EU. As we saw earlier, soft power is the power to convince someone to do something without forcing or paying him/her to do it. In this case, the EU has convinced the European countries to ‘surrender’ voluntarily the ownership of their culture to ‘Europe’ because, via the ECOC, the culture of Weimar, instead of being solely German it also becomes ‘European’ and the same stands true for the culture of Krakow, Prague, Sibiu, Liverpool, and for every other city that has acquired the ECOC title so far. Apart from the symbolic gains, however, the European Commission does not offer the cities substantial incentives to make them ‘surrender’ their culture to ‘Europe’.

The Commission does offer a limited amount of funding via the Melina Mercouri prize, this is not enough, however, for a city to host a successful ECOC year. The study prepared by the Palmer/Rae associates indicated that from 1995 until 2004 the average EU contribution to the event was only 1.53%.<sup>93</sup> For Sibiu, EU financing amounted to 8.2% of the total budget, while for Liverpool it amounted to 10.5%.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, it is obvious that the cities do not bid for the ECOC title due to the inducements offered by the EU. They do so for the reasons we have explained above, and because they perceive the ECOC as a

magnet that draws commercial funding. In the end, however, the major financial contributors to a city's ECOC are the municipal and national authorities who see in the ECOC an opportunity to modernize and 'Europeanize' their cities.<sup>95</sup>

Even though the criticism that surrounded 'Glasgow 1990' regarding the long-term economic and social benefits of the ECOC title also emerged in 'Liverpool 2008', based on our criteria of whether it positively influenced the cultural reputation of a city, Liverpool's ECOC year can be considered a success.<sup>96</sup> It managed to enhance the confidence of the citizens<sup>97</sup> while at the same time it helped Liverpool shed its derelict post-industrial image and prompted visitors to view it under a cultural lens. In fact, after the marketing successes of Glasgow and Liverpool, the cultural authorities in the United Kingdom have inaugurated a domestic cultural competition called the 'U.K. City of Culture' following in the footsteps of the ECOC. The initiative of the United Kingdom, a nation which usually follows a distinct path when it comes to European policies, to imitate a European scheme on a domestic level, demonstrates the attraction of the ECOC and points to its 'soft power' capabilities.

## Conclusion

Since its inception in 1985, the institution of the ECOC has managed to acquire a new meaning of existence. Even though it started as another stagnant top-down initiative with little to offer to cultural centres such as Athens, Paris, Florence, or Amsterdam, the inspiration of the British authorities to appoint Glasgow as their ECOC revealed the true potential of the institution and breathed new life into it. Today, nations willingly 'surrender' their culture to 'Europe' and the event has gained great popularity. The events of 1989 and the Eastern 'return to Europe' have increased its clientele and have established it as a 'soft power' resource for the European Union.

The divergent ways in which the ECOC title has been put to use by Eastern and Western European cities reminds us that the two regions of Europe still have obstacles to overcome before they can act on equal terms. The asymmetry between West and East is not confined solely to economic matters, but to matters of perception as well which in turn encourage or discourage investment based on reputation. Due to the

West's success story after 1945, the East viewed the West as a 'reference model' of modernity after 1989. Still, even though the West set the terms of modernity and integration to 'Europe', the official return of the East after 2004 means that Europe today is much more diversified and symmetrical than it used to be.

The amendments made to the ECOC statute in 1990 and 2005 respectively demonstrate that there is an eagerness from both regions of Europe to overcome the post-1989 asymmetry on a cultural level. The inhibitions on a political and economic level, however, suggest that there is still a way to go until a better balance will be achieved in the asymmetrical encounter. Nevertheless, there is potential. If we consider that the first Eastern European city to enjoy the ECOC title under official terms was Vilnius in 2009, it becomes obvious that more time has to be awarded to clearly estimate the results of this process. Whereas the Western countries have already appointed two or three ECOCs, the Eastern Europeans are just appointing their first one. It is only natural that their aims remain more or less similar to their Eastern predecessors discussed in this paper. When time passes, and the Eastern European countries get to nominate a second ECOC, they will probably use it, not to certify their 'European' credentials as they have done so far, but more as a way to boost their lesser-known cities in accordance with the countries of the West. The responsibility of the EU is to maintain the attraction of the ECOC title and to place assessment mechanisms that ensure its benefits have a long-term effect. This is the most frequent and enduring criticism that analysts raise against the institution. Cities should be encouraged to see their ECOC year as a starting point towards cultural, economic and social regeneration and not as a one-off event where they wear a nice gown for a year and return to their ragged clothes the year after. That is one of the ways to overcome the asymmetry between East and West.

## Notes

- 1 Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent* (New York, 1993) 50.
- 2 A few notable examples include: Anthony Pagden (ed.), *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union* (Cambridge, 2002), Peter Rietbergen, *Europe: A Cultural History* (Oxon, 1998), Gerard Delanty, *Formations of European Modernity* (Hampshire, 2013).

- 3 Usually the natural geographical frontier used to define Europe's Eastern borders are the Ural Mountains, but politically and conceptually they have proven more permeable than the Atlantic.
- 4 Gerard Delanty, *Inventing Europe* (London, 1995) 129. This fact was also stressed by Rüdiger Myenberg when in 1992 he pointed out that, 'In the Federal Republic of Germany in particular and in other West European states as well it has become the custom to limit the concept of Europe to West Europe. This is wrong, as far as the facts are concerned, and moreover problematic, because it makes the population regard the non-EC states as extra-European and foreign countries.' See: Rüdiger Meyenberg and Hendrikus Dekker (eds), *Perceptions of Europe in East and West* (Oldenburg, 1992) 13.
- 5 The term 'reference culture' was coined by Espagne and Werner in their attempt to trace German cultural influences in France, see: Michel Espagne and Michael Werner, 'La construction d'une référence culturelle allemande en France: genèse et histoire (1750–1914)', *Annales: Histoire, Science Sociales* 42 (1987) 969–992.
- 6 Joris van Eijnatten, 'Beyond Diversity. The Steady State of Reference Cultures', *History, Culture and Modernity* 3:3 (2015) 1–8.
- 7 Barbara Fratzcack–Rudnicka, 'Poland–Back to Europe?' in Rüdiger Meyenberg et al. (eds), *Perceptions of Europe in East and West* (Oldenburg, 1992) 50.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 As Sassatelli notes, a more inclusive policy was developed by the Council of Europe even before the collapse of the USSR. This 'open arms' policy was later imitated by EU institutions. See: Council of Europe Resolution 85/6 adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 25th April 1985 <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016805365a3>, and Monica Sassatelli, *Becoming Europeans. Cultural Identity and Cultural Policies* (Hampshire, 2009) 43.
- 10 Tony Judt, 'The Past is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Post-War Europe', *Daedalus* 121:4 (1992) 110. Other scholars have also pointed to these inhibitions, see for example Delanty, *Inventing Europe*, 132–133.
- 11 The perception of asymmetry or of an asymmetrical encounter is of crucial importance to the concept of reference cultures because if the two interacting parties perceive themselves as equals or identical then there is no need for one party to act as a reference model for the other party. A distinguishing feature must exist that one party would like to emulate or avoid.

- 12 Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York, 1990)
- 13 Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power. The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York, 2004)
- 14 Joseph S. Nye Jr., 'The Information Revolution and Power', *Current History*, February (2014) 20.
- 15 To follow the debate see: Beatrice García, 'Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration in Western European Cities: Lessons from Experience, Prospects for the Future', *Local Economy* 19:4 (2004) 312–326; Beatrice García, 'Deconstructing the City of Culture: the Long-Term Cultural Legacies of Glasgow 1990', *Urban Studies* 42 (2005) 841–868; Gerry Mooney, 'Cultural policy as urban transformation? Critical reflections on Glasgow, European City of Culture 1990', *Local Economy* 19:4 (2004) 327–340; Peter Campbell, 'Creative industries in a European Capital of Culture', *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 17:5 (2011) 510–522; Mark Ingram, 'Promoting Europe through "Unity in Diversity": Avignon as European Capital of Culture in 2000', *Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Europe* 10:1 (2010) 14–25; Pier Luigi Sacco and Giorgio Tavano Blessi, 'European Culture Capitals and Local Development Strategies: Comparing the Genoa 2004 and Lille 2004 Cases', *Homo Oeconomicus* 24:1 (2007) 111–141; Nils Asle Bergsgard and Anders Vassenden, 'The legacy of Stavanger as Capital of Culture in Europe 2008: watershed or puff of wind?', *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 17:3 (2011) 301–320.
- 16 In this respect, the article is much closer to what Sassatelli in *Becoming Europeans*, 82, tries to achieve. See also: Greg Richards and Julie Wilson, 'The Impact of Cultural Events on City Image: Rotterdam, Cultural Capital of Europe 2001', *Urban Studies* 41:10 (2001) 1931–1951.
- 17 To visit LexisNexis follow: <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic/>, to visit Gale Artemis follow: <http://gale.cengage.co.uk/gale-artemis.aspx>, the articles were retrieved by using the search terms 'European Capital or City of Culture' and the name of the city/case study. There were times where, instead of the city's name, another key word, such as 'criticism', 'nationalism', etc., was used. Research was performed on articles retrieved from the following newspapers: *Cyprus Mail*, *The Sunday Times*, *Malta Today*, *Irish Examiner*, *European Union News*, *Liverpool Echo*, *Baltic News Service*, *Australian Financial Review*, *Spiegel Online International*, *The Guardian*, *The Herald*, *The International Herald Tribune*, *The Times*, *CTK International News*, *The Observer*,

*Deutsche Presse Agentur, Birmingham Evening Mail, Birmingham Post, London Evening Standard, Regeneration and Renewal, The Straits Times, Daily Post, The Western Mail, The Sunday Telegraph, The Daily Telegraph, Belfast Telegraph, Aberdeen Evening Express, Agence France Presse, The Associated Press, The Independent, The Scotsman, Scotland on Sunday, The Gazette, Nottingham Evening Post, The Bristol Post, Associated Press International, The Toronto Star, Travel Trade Gazette U.K. & Ireland, Sydney Morning Herald, Inter Press Service, Evening Gazette, New Statesman, The Compact Traveller, Independent Traveller, Romanian News Agency Agrepress and The New York Times.*

- 18 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:41985X0622>.
- 19 The Treaty of Maastricht (1992) offered legislative power on the field of culture, but the ECOC until 1996 had already been selected before the treaty was signed.
- 20 Ingram, 'Promoting Europe through "Unity in Diversity"', 16.
- 21 García, 'Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration', 319; Mooney, 'Cultural policy as urban transformation?', 330; García, 'Deconstructing the City of Culture', 845; Richards and Wilson, 'The Impact of Cultural Events on City Image', 1937.
- 22 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:1990:162:FULL&from=EN p.1>, emphasis added AS.
- 23 A more practical/diplomatic reasoning behind this decision has also been stressed. See for example: Monica Sassatelli, 'European Cultural Space in the European Cities of Culture: Europeanization and Cultural Policy', *European Societies* 10:2 (2008) 225–245.
- 24 Palmer-Rae Associates, *European Cities and Capitals of Culture: Study Prepared for the European Commission*. 2 volumes (2004).
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid., 92.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32005D0649>.
- 30 Weimar 1999 GmbH, *Application Booklet of Weimar 1999* (1996).
- 31 Silke Roth and Susanne Frank, 'Festivalization and the Media: Weimar, Cultural Capital of Europe 1999', *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 6:2 (2000) 219–241.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid.

- 34 Susanne Frank, 'Festivalization, Image Politics and Local Identity: The Rollplatz Debate in Weimar, European City of Culture 1999', in Peter M. Daly et al. (eds), *Why Weimar? Questioning the Legacy of Weimar from Goethe to 1999* (New York, 2003) 49–61.
- 35 Roth and Frank, 'Festivalization and the Media'.
- 36 Sassatelli, *Becoming Europeans*, 103.
- 37 David Gow, 'Goethe's old haunts become playground for rich foreigners', *The Guardian*, 23 October 1993.
- 38 Gareth Huw Davies, 'From Bard to Wurst...', *Mail on Sunday*, 25 April 1999.
- 39 See for example: Paul Geitner, 'Ghosts of mixed past haunt this year's European City of Culture', *The Associated Press*, 22 February 1999, and Peter Leney 'Weimar Resurrected: "Athens of Germany" enjoys a special year in the cultural sun', *The Gazette* (Montreal, Quebec), 4 September 1999.
- 40 Palmer-Rae Associates, *European Cities and Capitals of Culture*, 158.
- 41 The desire that Eastern Europeans had to be recognized as Europeans, or not to be perceived as second rate Europeans, is described in Bo Stråth (ed.), *Europe and the Other and Europe as the Other* (Brussels, 2010) 58.
- 42 The equation between 'Europe' and modernity is also stressed by Reinhard Johler in his discussion on how places become 'Europeanized', see: Reinhard Johler, 'Local Europe: The Production of Cultural Heritage and the Europeanization of Places', *Ethnologia Europea* 32 (2002) 7–18.
- 43 Gerard Delanty, 'Europe and the Emergence of Modernity. The Entanglement of Two Reference Cultures', *History, Culture and Modernity* 3:3 (2015) 9–34.
- 44 Jane Rogoyska, 'Poles Join the Party. Krakow will celebrate the first European Month of Culture', *The Guardian*, 18 June 1992.
- 45 Palmer-Rae Associates, *European Cities and Capitals of Culture*, 166.
- 46 For the importance of architecture in promoting 'Europeanness' see Tuuli Lähdesmäki, 'Rhetoric of unity and cultural diversity in the making of European cultural identity', *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 18:1 (2012) 71.
- 47 Jas Kaminski, 'What sets Poles apart', *The Irish Times*, 11 March 2000.
- 48 'Krakow: Loveliest of the Polish Cities', *The Toronto Star*, 22 April 2000.
- 49 Steve Crawshaw, 'Miracle on Clean Street; 14th Century Krakow was saved from the Barbarians by the neck of a Solitary Trumpeter. Now, Eleven Years on from Poland's Last Great Upheaval, The City is in no need of such Inadvertent Heroism', *The Independent* (London), 8 July 2000.

- 50 Palmer-Rae Associates, *European Cities and Capitals of Culture*, 109.
- 51 'British Queen Winds Up Czech Visit', *Associated Press International*, 29 March 1996.
- 52 'Prague: The Good, the Bad and the Beautiful', *The Toronto Star*, 25 March 2000.
- 53 Ruth Lewis, 'Trendy Prague embraces the Culture of Cool; a walking tour of the stylish Czech capital where baroque meets Gucci', *Mail on Sunday*, 26 November 2000.
- 54 Steve Keenan and Chloe Bryan-Brown, 'Reaching across the Continent', *The Times*, 4 December 1999.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 In the letter that was sent to the European Commission in support of Prague's bid, the Czech Minister of Culture made sure to mention that 'Prague had always been and continues to be an inseparable crossroads of European culture'. See: Sassatelli, *Becoming Europeans*, 117.
- 57 Palmer-Rae Associates, *European Cities and Capitals of Culture*, 203.
- 58 'Flying visits – anywhere!' *Daily Mail*, 20 April 2005.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Sibiu 2007 Association, *Sibiu/Hermannstadt European Capital of Culture 2007: Application Proposal (2004)* 1.
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- 62 Claudia Ciobanu, 'Romania: European City of Culture Draws Influx of Tourists', *Inter Press Service*, 7 August 2007.
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- 94 ECOTEC, *Ex-Post Evaluation*.
- 95 Sassatelli notes that during the 2000 nomination some countries threatened to use their veto if their candidate city was not selected. Unfortunately we do not know which countries used the threat, but it points once again to the attraction and ‘soft power’ capabilities of the title. See: Sassatelli, *Becoming Europeans*, 111.
- 96 Campbell, ‘Creative industries in a European Capital of Culture’, 510–522. Here Campbell argues that even though the impact on the cultural sector might not have been as substantial as expected, the ECOC still managed to generate a higher cultural profile for Liverpool while it still retains a reputation as a successful ECOC and a referent for other candidate cities. Here, it does not matter if Liverpool achieved all its goals or not, but how it was perceived by its citizens and potential visitors. On p. 518, Campbell argues that, ‘despite concerns, the narrative of an intimate relationship between the ECOC and beneficial growth within the creative industries persists and continues to strengthen.’
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