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Event and Sustainable Culture-Led Regeneration: Lessons from the 2008 European Capital of Culture, Liverpool

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Abstract: Culture-led regeneration has been widely accepted by European cities as an important component of urban renewal and sustainable development. However, the instrumental role of culture in urban regeneration has revealed several controversies. The study aims at contributing to the debate on urban cultural policy and management by answering two research questions: What are the key success factors for sustainable culture-led regeneration? How can cities strike a balance between the dilemmas of culture-led regeneration? Based on a case study of Liverpool as the 2008 European Capital of Culture, this research draws on long-term and multi-faceted data. The study period is from 2007 to 2018, with a view to tracking the long-term impact of event. Liverpool's strategies for sustainable culture-led regeneration are investigated from three aspects: cultural funding dilemma, economic dilemma and spatial dilemma. The findings reveal that incorporating events in a city's long-term regeneration trajectory, continued support and enhancement of local cultural processes and structures, and highlighting community involvement and development are major factors to ensure the cultural sustainability of event.

Keywords: event; sustainability; culture-led regeneration; European Capital of Culture; Liverpool

1. Introduction

In recent years, cities are gradually integrating culture into one of the cores of sustainable planning and policy discussions. Culture is also becoming a part of the emerging sustainable development model [1]. Cultural regeneration refers to “the continued support and strengthening of local cultural processes and structures” [2] (p. 396). At the same time, culture is seen as an important means of improving urban competitive advantage and solving political, social and economic problems in urban areas, thus creating an unprecedented importance [3,4]. As Evans [5] (p. 968) states, culture can be used as a “catalyst and engine for regeneration”. Culture-led urban regeneration, including investments in large-scale cultural events and facilities, has been widely accepted by European cities as an important component of urban renewal and local economic development. When policy makers, city marketers, and cultural institutions all praise the contribution of culture to regeneration, scholars show a more cautious and even critical attitude towards its effectiveness. Over the years, in addition to developing various theoretical frameworks about culture-led urban regeneration, the academic community has also proposed a series of dilemmas and challenges that this approach may encounter [6]. Bianchini and Parkinson [7] first launch this debate to explore the dilemmas that cultural applications may face in urban regeneration. They point out that, in order to maintain sustainable development, cities need to strike a balance in investing on ‘ephemeral’ activity (e.g., events or festivals) and ‘permanent’ activity (e.g., facilities or infrastructures); between cultural production and consumption; as well as between the development of city centre and its periphery. They call these “cultural funding dilemma”, “economic

dilemma”, and “spatial dilemma.” Some studies have mentioned these dilemmas, such as [6,8–13]. However, empirical research seldom attempts to explore how cities could address and overcome these problems.

Event-led strategy is regarded as an important contributor to the cultural economy because of its significant economic, social and cultural impacts and its potential in the positioning of urban competition [14,15]. Launched by the European Union in 1985, the European Capital of Culture (hereinafter referred to as ECOC) is a cultural initiative, which designates each year different European cities with this title on a rotation basis, with more than 40 cities awarded so far. The origin of ECOC is purely cultural; however, as the program develops, the city uses it in different ways. In general, hosting the ECOC events gives a city an opportunity for social, cultural and economic regeneration, and has a generally positive impact on the city as a whole [16]. According to García [17], in addition to environmental, economic and social influences, scholars have begun to study the fourth impact of ECOC, namely the cultural impact. The case of this study—Liverpool, has been the gateway of UK to the rest of the world. However, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the city suffered from a national recession, resulting in economic and social decline. Consequently, Liverpool saw the 2008 ECOC as a good chance to trigger renaissance of the city [18,19]. The 2008 ECOC is considered to represent a culture-led approach to regeneration [20,21] and is a key symbol of tangible and intangible revitalisation of Liverpool [22].

Despite the link between cultural event and urban regeneration increasing in policy rhetoric, a detailed examination of the relationship between culture, events, and sustainability is rare in the academic field. Although there is an increasing literature exploring why cities pursue culture-led strategies in urban regeneration and how culture can trigger different aspects of urban regeneration, few studies focus on key issues related to the dilemmas and challenges that cities may face. In addition, few people focus on long-term assessment and monitoring of regeneration programmes. Therefore, this article aims to contribute to these critical issues. The author attempts to fill the research gaps by adopting Liverpool—the 2008 ECOC—as a case study, which is widely regarded as a successful case of culture-led regeneration. Conducting such a study ten years after the end of the event helps to answer more objectively the following two research questions: What are the key success factors for sustainable culture-led regeneration? To what extent does Liverpool strike a balance between the three dilemmas noticed by Bianchini? The author will first examine the relevant literature extensively, including culture and sustainable development, culture-led regeneration and its dilemma. Then, the case studied and data sources will be explained. Finally, Liverpool’s strategy and its long-term impact on urban regeneration will be investigated from three aspects: cultural funding dilemma, economic dilemma and spatial dilemma, followed by demonstrating the theoretical and empirical contributions of this study.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Culture and Sustainability

“Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (as cited in [2] (p. 384)) is one of the most commonly accepted definitions of sustainability, derived from the report of World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987. Policy and decision makers are widely adopting this concept to plan the future of our society [1]. Initially, this concept referred mainly to environmental issues; however, other areas have also been included in the scope of sustainable development over the years [23]. Until recently, the discussion of sustainable development still tended to focus on the three major issues, namely environment, economy and society, thus forming the so-called three-pillar model of sustainability, but cultural sustainability has not received much attention [2]. In recent years, as a culture’s contribution to broader sustainable development has become clearer, there has been a new discussion and reflection on sustainable development. Culture can be seen as a key element of the

concept of sustainability and can link different policy areas [24]. The role of culture in sustainability or sustainable development has become a hot topic in some disciplines [1]. Hawkes [25] argues that: “culture is emerging as the ‘fourth pillar’ of sustainable development and plays a vital role in achieving sustainability” (as cited in [2] (p. 385)). These arguments have also gradually infiltrated into public policy discussions [26]. For instance, in the UK, the Department of Culture, Media and Sports [27] (p. 1) states: “enjoyment of and participation in the arts is fundamental to the core of successful sustainable development . . . Arts have always been used to engage and inform as well as entertain, and using imagination and creativity encourages attitudinal change, as well as social and environmental transformation, all of which are necessary to make truly sustainable development possible.” In Europe, “*In The Margins*”, issued by European Commission, also contributed significantly to the articulation between culture and sustainable development [28].

Many researchers have recognised the impact of culture on sustainable development—for example, [24,25,29–32]. In recent years, an increasing number of documents have contributed to the dimensions of cultural sustainability. For example, Throsby [33] discusses the role of culture in sustainability and provides three frameworks about culture and sustainability, including: cultural capital as a sustainable resource, interaction between culture and the environment, and sustainability of urban cultural heritage. United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) [34] proposes that the relationship between culture and sustainable development can be approached in two ways: through the development of the cultural sector itself (e.g., art, cultural and creative industries) and ensuring that culture has a place in other public policies (e.g., education, economics and urban planning). Both ways help to conceptualise the role that culture plays in sustainable development. Soini and Dessein [35] provide a framework for cultural sustainability: (1) culture is the fourth pillar of sustainable development; (2) culture plays a mediating role in achieving economic, social and ecological sustainability; and (3) culture is the necessary foundation for achieving the overall goal of sustainable development. Duxbury et al. [1] carry out a comprehensive summary of the relevant literature and provide four main axes to understand the role of culture in sustainable development, including: (1) culture as capital, both tangible and intangible; (2) culture as a process and way of life; (3) culture as a central element for providing the value of sustainable action; and (4) culture as a creative expression offering insights into sustainability issues.

2.2. Culture-Led Regeneration

Son [6] provides a review of the historical evolution of the link between culture and urban regeneration. Before the 1960s, the meaning of culture was closely related to “high culture” and did not involve economic meanings. However, between the 1960s and the 1970s, authorities started to recognise the need of combining culture with economy and turned to a more effective way to increase the influence of culture [36]. Since the 1970s, in response to the trend of deindustrialisation and post-industrialisation, many European cities have begun to realise that culture can be a stimulating factor of improving their competitiveness, attracting inward investment, and serving as an incentive to improve the overall economy [7,37]. Since the 1990s, culture has been widely noticed and used as a way of developing creative cities. The interest in “creative” economy has also grown. In this regard, it is recognised that cultural policies cannot exist in isolation, but should be closely integrated with other fields to enhance the effectiveness of urban regeneration. In the academic field, scholars investigate the issue of culture-led regeneration through various standpoints, such as culture and urban planning, cultural and economic development, cultural consumption, and sustainable regeneration, etc. [38].

The strategy of culture-led regeneration is rapidly expanding globally (see [5,7,10,37], etc.). This phenomenon is mainly based on the economic and social benefits brought to the policy makers. In addition, the potential of revitalising post-industrial cities has been well proven by several successful stories, such as Glasgow, Barcelona and Bilbao [5,10,39]. From an economic perspective, Evans and Shaw [40] argue that culture can contribute directly or indirectly to inward investment, job creation, new industry development, and public-private partnerships. In terms of socio-culture domain, culture-led urban regeneration not only helps to reposition cities, attract tourists and retain

talents, but also serve as a way to improve the quality of life of local people, such as providing better culture facilities and leisure activities [14].

However, culture-led regeneration is not a cure-all. According to Dinardi [41], in the academic community, the judgments towards this issue always oscillate between blame and praise. On the one hand, policy-oriented research is dedicated to measuring and demonstrating the magic of culture in renewing and regenerating cities and providing best practice guidance, e.g., [10,42–44]. Another type of research focuses on questioning or critically evaluating the rhetoric about culture. For example, Evans [5] (p. 960) criticises: “the attention to the high-cost and high-profile culture-led regeneration projects is in inverse proportion to the strength and quality of evidence of their regenerative effects”. García [10] (p. 314) critically points out that “culture today is an economic asset, a commodity with a market value and a valuable producer of marketable city space”. According to Gunay and Dokmeci [45], culture-led strategies continue to create a platform where culture is produced and consumed. This phenomenon is called a “carnival mask” or “selling places for pleasure”, since it is believed that culture-led approach may have the risk of aggravating cultural commodification. Zukin’s [4] criticism: “Whose culture? Whose city?” clearly highlights the role of culture in this conflict.

Vickery [46] emphasises that integrating cultural elements into urban strategies is a unique character of a culture-led approach for regeneration, where the term culture encompasses various categories, such as architecture, design, art, cultural activities, and creativity. Basset et al. [47] define three functions of culture in urban regeneration: (1) developing cultural resources in urban marketing strategies; (2) contributing to the urban economy by creative industries or quarters; and (3) enhancing social cohesion and local identity. García [10] argues that culture-led regeneration strategies include investing in major cultural events (such as ECOC), building iconic cultural facilities (such as the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao), and developing creative and cultural quarters (such as Temple Bar in Dublin). Similarly, while considering regeneration issues, Throsby [33] divides urban cultural policies into two interrelated categories: providing cultural infrastructure and encouraging creative industries and cultural activities.

Given the historical evolution, cultural potential and diversity of cities, there are different potential ways to achieve culture-led regeneration. Many of the theories and practices of culture-led regeneration have evolved from models provided by European cities [7]. Evans and Shaw [40] point out the following three relationships between culture and urban regeneration. According to Ferilli et al. [48], culture plays different roles in each of these three pathways, and the results are quite different. Among them, the impact of “culture-led regeneration” is the most sustainable, followed by “cultural regeneration” and finally the “culture and regeneration” model. Evans [20] believes that the case of the 2008 ECOC Liverpool should be classified as a “culture-led regeneration”.

(1) *Culture-led regeneration*. Culture is seen as a catalyst or engine of regeneration in this model. With its high profile, culture is often seen as a symbol of regeneration. It could be a new or reused building for public or commercial use (such as Tate Modern in London or Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao), the development of unused spaces (such as garden events or Expo venues) or cultural events (such as ECOC) used to reshape city image.

(2) *Cultural regeneration*. Here, culture is more fully integrated into other regional development strategies, with a closer connection with environmental, social or economic issues. This approach is also closely related to cultural planning approach of regeneration, with culture being prioritised in the urban planning process [49].

(3) *Culture and regeneration*. In this model, culture has a specific but limited role and is not fully integrated into urban plans or strategies. It is often because culture and regeneration projects belong to different sectors, or culture is undervalued. Policy interventions are usually small-scale, such as hiding a historical museum in the corner of industrial site or setting up public art projects after the design of a building. Sometimes, local residents, businesses, or cultural organisations may make their own intervention to this vacuum.

2.3. Dilemmas of Culture-Led Regeneration

(1) *Cultural funding dilemma.* Physical development of facility and holding events are two major strategies for urban regeneration. Infrastructure legacy is an important part of event's cultural sustainability, but investing in an event programme can also be sustainable when it matches with a holistic strategy of cultural planning [2,10]. The complexity lies in how to achieve the right balance of investment between event-led and facility-led regeneration as to ensure sustainability [10]. Due to its permanent and highly visible character, the iconic cultural facility can serve as a pioneer in reshaping city brand and attracting tourists, such as the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao [49]. Richards and Palmer [2] also point out that cultural facilities built for hosting events may also bring important impetus to the cultural life of the city, and are often regarded as a core element of the event's succession planning. However, there are many examples of unsustainable facility development. For example, Bianchini [50] argues that investing in landmark cultural facilities may create expensive, underutilised construction (also known as "white elephants") and lead to gentrification in surrounding areas. Evans [49] criticises these facilities for often ignoring the social or cultural needs of the locals and having limited impact on economic recovery and employment in the long run. In addition, flagship projects can be difficult to use, require significant investment and subsequent operating costs, and hinder the development of local culture or participatory community activities [10]. Conversely, investing in "soft", event-led regeneration can immediately enhance the city's image, attract tourists, contact people and place, and also bring sustainable benefits to the local community [14]. However, the impact of hosting events may be short-lived. Even with well-planned cultural activities, the community participation rate may be low due to lack of information or promotion, resulting in a low visibility and collective memory of the event [6]. Richards and Palmer [2] add that the achievement of event might be not sustainable due to budget cuts, change of administration or shift of policy priority.

(2) *Economic dilemma.* The second—economic dilemma—referring to the balance between stimulating cultural consumption and supporting cultural products, is closely related to the first dilemma. Funding either flagship projects or major events aims to promote urban tourism, encourage community participation and meet local residents, which may have a potentially significant impact on the development of cultural and creative industries [10]. According to research by Binns [51], various cultural consumption-oriented policies have been developed, including the investment of hallmark cultural facilities such as museums or art galleries, or large events such as ECOC. After decades of industrial recession and the booming of experience economy, it can be understood that cities may prefer to develop consumption-oriented policies and construct an urban image that appeals to tourists, investors and "creative class" [52]. This approach may also have "knock-on" effects on other economies. However, investing in iconic facilities or events is either expensive or momentary [10]. It is believed that, in the long run, cultural consumption strategies are likely to be less sustainable, as most jobs created by the cultural or tourism sector are low-paid and often temporary. The other side of the coin is to promote a production-based strategy involving the development of a range of sectors that produce cultural goods (cultural industries) and non-cultural products (creative industries) [53]. According to Sepe and Di Trapani [54], creative resources are often more durable than physical resources. For example, the attraction of monuments and museums often fades, but creative resources can be constantly updated. In addition, the creative industry doesn't need to rely on the concentration of cultural resources, so it is more mobile and the production can be anywhere [55]. In addition, the development of the cultural industry can also stimulate cultural consumption [8]. However, some researchers have revealed the negative aspects of cultural production approach. For example, Hajer [56] emphasises that existing blue-collar classes often have no access to emerging employment in new cultural or creative sectors. Therefore, a culture-based, production-led regeneration strategy may bring limited benefits to the disadvantaged groups.

(3) *Spatial dilemma.* The last dilemma discovered by Bianchini [50] is called "spatial dilemma", which refers to the balance between the development of the city centre and the periphery. Culture-led regeneration usually does not benefit everyone in the city and can have a negative impact on some

people. The biggest problem associated with urban renewal projects is the displacement of existing communities, with the aim of building flagship buildings or hosting major events [57]. Spatial dilemma is often associated with the topic of “urban image”, as it is only possible to build flagship venues or hold large events in the city centre to improve the image of the city and attract large investments, media coverage and tourists [38]. Therefore, it may lead to the problem of “gentrification”, that is, the resettlement of high-income groups, while pushing the low-income group to the edge, even if the latter is not forced to leave. Since the regeneration project aims to improve the local, it often leads to rising house prices or living costs. It is argued that culture-led projects should benefit existing communities rather than new ones [57]. However, the most marginalised community displaced may be an unanticipated outcome of regeneration programmes. Another common challenge is the inability to use iconic cultural investments (infrastructure or events) to reduce the poverty of local communities [10]. Compared with residents, local elites tend to have a greater influence on cultural policies, so cultural regeneration in urban centres often overlooks marginalised or suburban low-income groups [6]. As a result, local communities may feel that they are unable to benefit from an improved city centre and this can lead to tensions between specific social groups. Compared with the above-mentioned regeneration strategies that focus on the city centre, recent research, e.g., [58–60], emphasises the impact of culture on individuals and communities at the social level [38]. Ensuring that local community has an “ownership” is a key factor in ensuring the sustainability of events [16].

3. Research Methods

The case studied—Liverpool—has historically been an important harbour city with a strong industrial base. With the support of the industrial revolution and overseas trade during the British Empire, the city grew substantially in the 19th and early 20th centuries. However, since the early 1970s, Liverpool suffered a severe economic downturn due to the decline in the importance of docks and its manufacturing, leading to high unemployment and social poverty [61]. Over the past 40 years, Liverpool has experimented with various experiments and innovations in urban regeneration, possibly more than any other city in the UK or Europe. However, due to the continued weak demand and investors’ lack of confidence in the local economic recovery, the process of urban regeneration in Liverpool has been limited or delayed. In addition, some reconstructions lacked clear objectives and did not appear within the overall regeneration framework of the city [62]. Evans [20] criticises Liverpool’s regeneration strategy of lacking cultural aspects in city centre redevelopment. Culture has hardly integrated into the mainstream urban design, planning or economic development agenda. Liverpool saw therefore the 2008 ECOC as an unprecedented chance to achieve the city’s regenerative goals and accelerate city’s physical development. In addition to providing impetus for physical regeneration and economic development, culture was seen as an effective way to engage people in the urban renewal process. Another important goal was to reshape Liverpool as a tourist destination, improve city image in the eyes of media and general public, and support social development through culture [61]. According to Evans [10], Liverpool’s ECOC is considered to be a culture-led regeneration strategy. Today, Liverpool has made significant achievements of applying the ECOC title as a trigger for broader regeneration of the city. For example, Liverpool Vision became the first urban regeneration company in the UK, bringing together some of the city’s master plans, including the Paradise Street regeneration project, branded as part of the shopping complex—Liverpool One. Liverpool Vision was a key partner of the ECOC’s parallel regeneration project—the Kings Waterfront, with Arena and Convention Centre Liverpool (ACCL) as the most notable initiative. So as to the research sources, research questions are answered by long-term and multi-faceted data. The study period is from 2007 to 2018, with a view to tracking the long-term impact of the 2008 ECOC. More precisely, the research data consists of the following two strands.

(1) *Quantitative data.* Five types quantitative data were derived from the databases of Impacts 08 and Impacts 18 research projects, provided by the Institute of Cultural Capital in Liverpool. First, repeat surveys were conducted in different communities in Liverpool to investigate the perceptions

of residents about the 2008 ECOC. The research sample is based on four neighbourhoods (Aigburth, City Centre, Kirkdale and Knotty Ash) with various socio-economic and geographical backgrounds. Although these four communities cannot represent all the existing communities in Liverpool, they allow giving a comparison of how ECOC influenced a broader cross-section of population. The repeat household survey was carried out in 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2018 in each neighbourhood. A total of 3052 residents were surveyed over the four points of time. Second, to provide a picture of volunteers' motivations and benefits gained during the 2008 ECOC, two postal surveys were collected in 2007 and 2009, with valid sample of 312 in total. The third strand of data is based on content analysis of media, including coverage of Liverpool in general and mentioning the Liverpool ECOC specifically. The first issue covers a sample of 5783 articles published between 1996 and 2017, and the second issue amounts to 1739 between 2000 and 2017. The purpose is to examine the legacy of the ECOC on city image and reputation. Fourth, to identify the legacy that the Liverpool ECOC might leave for Liverpool's creative industries, two online surveys were undertaken in 2007 and 2009, with a total of 123 responses from local creative professionals. Finally, surveys of grassroots cultural organisations were done in 2007 and 2018, with the aim of exploring the vitality and sustainability of cultural system and creative industries in Liverpool. It provides a snapshot of change in cultural vibrancy over the last ten years.

(2) *Qualitative data*, including ECOC impact assessment reports and academic papers. These data are qualitative in nature, derived from either narratives of interviewees or discourses of scholars. In order to add to the completeness of analysis, the study refers to three evaluation reports on the 2008 ECOC and the ECOC programme as a whole. The first report, issued by Palmer/RAE Associate and commissioned by the European Commission, aimed to assess the ECOC's impacts on different European cities or regions between 1995 and 2004. The second report was conducted by the other consultant called Ecorys, also commissioned by the European Commission. Since 2007, Ecorys took charge of yielding individual impact study for each ECOC host city. The third report, entitled as *"European Capital of Culture: Success strategies and long-term effects"*, was commissioned by the European Parliament and published by García and Cox [63]. As a comprehensive assessment, this report examines the long-term impacts of the ECOC program over the past 30 years and explores successful strategies and "best practices". In addition, over the past decade, a number of academic journals and book chapters have been devoted to exploring Liverpool's experience as the 2008 ECOC Liverpool. These academic publications help to validate and supplement the above assessment reports. For instance, Campbell [64] and Campbell et al. [65] provide insightful and critical perspectives about the 2008 ECOC and the development of Liverpool's creative industries. The studies of Connolly [66], O'Brien [67,68], Cox and O'Brien [21] and Evans [20] offer reflections on cultural planning, cultural policy and governance of the 2008 ECOC Liverpool. Boland [69] challenges the official rhetoric of Liverpool as the 2008 ECOC.

4. Research Findings

4.1. The Issue of Cultural Funding Dilemma

Hosting cultural events such as the ECOC is an alternative strategy for projecting a cultural image of the city to potential investors or visitors [51]. The ECOC title can be seen as a "hard branding" that can be used to market cities [49]. Reviewing the history of ECOC, different cities have adopted different approaches to ensure the sustained effects of ECOC. The most common way was improving cultural facilities or developing programmes of cultural activities [16]. Since the mid-1990s, with the culture-led regeneration strategy becoming a unique urban cultural policy, the cities started to link the ECOC title with other physical regeneration, such as the constructions of infrastructure or cultural venues [10]. Liverpool identified tourism development as one of the main goals of the 2008 ECOC, hoping to attract tourists, reposition and rebrand the city, promote the city as a cultural destination, and launch the underdeveloped tourism framework [63]. Given the city's current quality and quantity of cultural supply, Liverpool did not need to expand and finance the cultural infrastructure for the 2008

ECOC. Over the past two decades, Liverpool's extensive physical regeneration has provided many cultural opportunities, such as Tate Liverpool, the Maritime Museum and the Liverpool Museum in the redeveloped Albert Dock [61]. However, the ECOC's position offered a focal point for accelerating existing projects, including a large concert/convention centre—ACCL (see above)—and the refurbished Bluecoat Art Centre, providing venues for subsequent cultural activities. The ECOC also incorporated future projects, including the new Museum of Liverpool and World Heritage Waterfront. To facilitate the reading, Table 1 illustrates the key agencies, networks, events, initiatives and parallel regeneration projects of the Liverpool ECOC.

Table 1. The key elements of the 2008 ECOC Liverpool.

| Types | Key Elements |
|-----------------------|--|
| Agencies | Liverpool Culture Company → Culture Liverpool |
| Networks | Liverpool Arts Regeneration Consortium (LARC), Mersey Partnership |
| Events | Eight themed years: Year of Learning (2003), Year of Faith (2004), Year of Sea (2005), Year of Performance (2006), Year of Heritage (2007), ECOC Year (2008), Year of Environment (2009), and Year of Health, Well-Being & Innovation (2010) |
| Initiatives | Creative Community, Four Corners, 08 Welcome, 08 Volunteer |
| Parallel regeneration | Arena and Convention Centre Liverpool (ACCL), Liverpool ONE, Museum of Liverpool, Bluecoat Art Centre |

The event programmes of Liverpool 2008 were by far one of the most ambitious and extensive ECOC programme. The budget of Liverpool 2008 was particularly high, with a multi-year event for eight consecutive years from 2003 to 2010, and subsidising cultural organisation, including event hosting and sustainable development funds [63]. In addition, a so-called 08 Welcome program was developed with an aim of improving the visitor experience, with more than 10,000 front-line employees trained [61]. However, in general, with the end of a major event, the frequency of cultural activities in the next few years may be reduced due to the shortfall of funds, and even some activities may be cut [2]. The City of Liverpool and its partners were committed to continue funding for culture for two more years after 2008. Liverpool Cultural Company also subtly combined existing and new cultural programmes through partnerships to attract local and external audiences [61]. As a result, the media impact is very high. The ECOC title created absolutely positive media coverage between 2003 and 2008. The media's coverage of the city itself has also changed, with the number of positive reports on Liverpool increasing by 71% between 2007 and 2008 [70]. In addition, 80% of residents agreed that the ECOC has improved Liverpool's positive image. Externally, 79% thought that Liverpool is a rising city [61]. In the post-ECOC period (2008–2018), positive stories of urban icons and culture became common topics in media coverage, replacing previous negative reports on social issues. The media coverage of social issues (often negative) was also significantly lower in the post-ECOC period. Proportionally, media coverage related to urban imagery has received relatively more attention, and reports are mostly positive [70].

These changes in the external images are important, not only for one-off visits, but also for long-term tourism and inward investment [63]. It seems that the activities organised under the Liverpool 08 banner were important factors in promoting the transformation of city image. One of the key success factors was Liverpool Culture Company's aggressive marketing strategies and continuity of events. Moreover, the indirect legacy of ECOC is undoubtedly improving Liverpool's cultural and tourism offers. One of the key success factors in this regard was the strong coordination and synergy between Liverpool's ECOC program and other regeneration initiatives, as reflected in the Liverpool Vision's Regeneration Strategy launched in 2000. The ECOC also helped to initiate or accelerate large investment projects already under consideration, such as the Liverpool ONE retail complex. ECOC provided an extra boost to seeing what changes can be made through culture. However, this project would continue to be carried out regardless of whether there was public investment.

Consequently, Liverpool experienced a significant increase in inbound visitor numbers. Based on the statistics collected from Visit Britain – the tourist board of Great Britain – Figure 1 illustrates the trend of Liverpool’s inbound visitor numbers. Visitor numbers started to rise once Liverpool was awarded the ECOC title in 2003, and reached the highest point in 2008, with 553,000 staying visits. However, as with other ECOC host cities, Liverpool experienced a significant decline in visitor numbers in 2009 and 2010. In 2012, however, the number of inbound visitors returned to the 2008 level. In 2017, visitor numbers reached a new record level, with 839,000 staying visits. There is also a steady improvement in terms of Liverpool’s ranking compared with other UK cities. In 2017, Liverpool was the fifth most popular destination in the UK for international visitors, right after London, Edinburgh, Manchester and Birmingham [71].

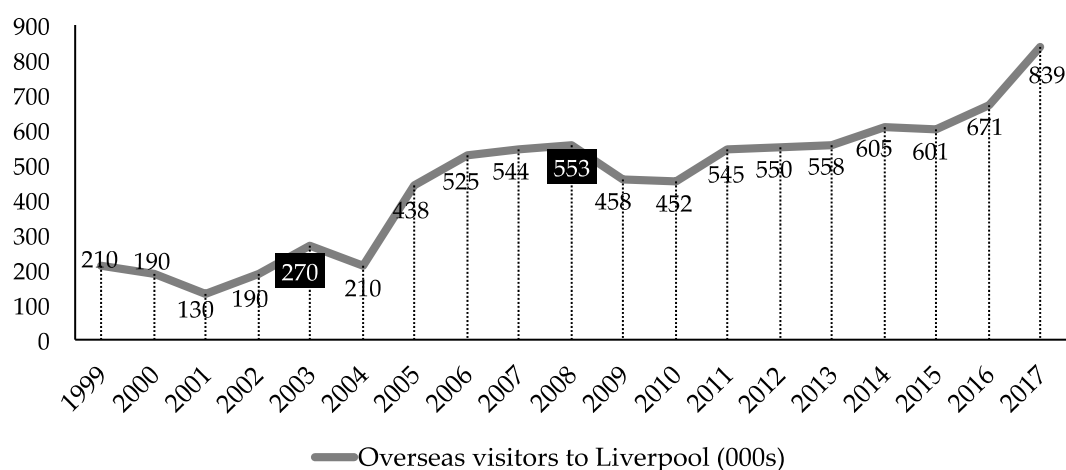


Figure 1. Trend of Liverpool’s inbound visitor numbers, 1999–2017.

4.2. The Issue of Economic Dilemma

As argued by Campbell et al. [65], in the long run, there is a risk for cities relying on the consumption-oriented culture-led regeneration. Even though this approach may benefit from raising awareness and attracting tourists in the short term, attracting tourists and external investment are increasingly dependent on factors that the city cannot control. In addition, the employment in retail and hospitality sectors created by the “customer effect” brought about by cultural policies is often low-paying and part-time, characterised by low job satisfaction, legal rights and working conditions [50]. Therefore, the success of applying cultural policies to urban regeneration should consider the enhancement of cultural production. The 2008 ECOC resulted in an improvement of the “climate” of cultural production in Liverpool, with more public sector support and stronger networking. Since then, Liverpool continued to develop cultural activities. This positive impact does require a relatively level of political commitment and stability. García and Cox [63] note that Liverpool demonstrated strong determination and plans for a long-term strategy and funding for culture beyond the ECOC year. This includes the development of a new cultural strategy up to 2012; maintaining the level of funding for cultural organisations at pre-2008 level; planning to extend cultural and artistic activities to 2009 and beyond; obtaining European funding through the North West Development Agency (NWDA) Grants; and continued community and school engagement programmes. In addition, Liverpool Arts Regeneration Consortium (LARC) has successfully won several national grants (such as the Thrive program) to provide additional projects from 2009, supported by the strengthened partnership built during 2008 ECOC [61].

At the governance level, the establishment of “Cultural Liverpool” as the central organisation for post-ECC development to develop, host and manage cultural activities is the main factor in ensuring the sustainability of the event programme. The Liverpool Cultural Company provided an effective operational mechanism and helped improve cultural management during the title year, but was

dissolved after 2008. In order to maintain and improve the capacity for governance of the cultural sector, Culture Liverpool was established as the successor to Liverpool Culture Company. The aim is to build stronger relationships between City Council and cultural organisations. In order to ensure the legacy of ECOC and the continuation of large-scale event program, the city has developed a cultural strategy up to 2012. The role of Cultural Liverpool is to deliver the cultural strategy of City Council and serve as a sustainable platform for cultural events [61]. In addition, the ECOC status helped to promote greater cooperation and stronger partnerships among organisations, thereby stimulating more effective multi-agency approach in the long run. As mentioned above, the most prominent example is LARC, also known as the “Big Eight”, which consists of Liverpool’s eight largest non-commercial arts and cultural organisations emerged in 2005/2006 [63]. First, the 2008 ECOC encouraged LARC to work together to increase revenue from other sources. For example, LARC received additional external funding (£1.34 million) from the Arts Council Thrive program. This funding enabled LARC to offer a range of programmes aiming to enhance the role of the cultural sector in citizen leadership and urban cultural agendas. LARC also worked with other non-cultural institutions and partnerships such as the Local Strategic Partnership and the Mersey Partnership [61].

In addition to the cultural sector, increasing cities bidding for the ECOC are placing stronger emphasis on the potentials to develop creative industry. As Oerters and Mittag [72] point out, the cultivation of creative industries can be seen as a way to address the challenges of urban regeneration and regional transformation, especially those post-industrial cities and regions face. In the case of Liverpool, the 2008 ECOC didn’t boost successfully the development of the creative industry. The survey of creative industries conducted right after 2008 shows that Liverpool’s external image has been generally improved. It helped to improve the overall morale and credibility of the creative industry. However, the sector believed that Liverpool ECOC had focused on strengthening “culture” and “tourism” offers, but not necessarily extend to the creative industries. There was also a general sense of disappointment that there were no specific ECOC initiatives or clear policies to encourage the procurement from local creative industries [73]. Similarly, Campbell [64] discusses the “ambivalence” of Liverpool’s creative workers towards the 2008 ECOC. Although there was a clear intention to strengthen the creative industry during the bidding stage, the benefits for Liverpool creative practitioners were not so clear. Bullen [74] (p. 161) describes her discussions with Liverpool City Council officials on local cultural policies in 2012, which remained on the concept of “business friendly” city, which needs a “great” cultural programme to “sell the city to a global audience”. Cultural policy seems to be regarded as an agent with the aim of turning the city into a “destination” that attracts inward investment and tourism. Recently, Campbell et al. [65] argue that Liverpool’s need for economic recovery is still urgent, but, in fact, the 2008 ECOC did not attempt to intervene in the local creative industry in a sustainable manner, and the afterthought reflects the growth of business in the creative sector is also limited.

4.3. The Issue of Spatial Dilemma

One of the most common criticisms of 2008 ECOC Liverpool is the uneven geographical distribution of events [75]. According to the 2017 neighbourhood survey (see Table 2), 66% respondents believed that “only the city centre will benefit from the ECOC”. In addition, 63% respondents thought that ECOC “won’t make any difference to the neighbourhood”. In some communities, this consent rate was very high. On the other hand, only 42% respondents believed that “everyone in Liverpool will gain from the ECOC”. In short, most people didn’t think that the ECOC would benefit them at either individual or neighbourhood levels [18]. In fact, from the outset, Liverpool sought to improve cultural access by building community enthusiasm, creativity and participation [61,66]. Liverpool’s Creative Community project was Europe’s largest public and community art programme, with £11 million funding in four years, involving 160,000 participants, including all Liverpool schools (covering 67,000 children). As part of the Creative Community Project community project, “Four Corners” aimed at using art to explore community life in remote and deprived areas of the city and attracted

27,000 people to join. In addition, Liverpool's 2008 Volunteer Program gave working-class residents an opportunity to be trained as city ambassadors [76]. Liverpool had 9894 volunteers registered in 2008 and 851 completed the training process. They became active volunteers as part of the 08 Welcome Programme, giving 5611 days of volunteering [18]. In addition, as part of the Creative Learning Networks program, Liverpool sought to fully integrate school children. Link Officers for creativity and culture were established in each school to improve communication, maximise opportunities for creative and cultural education, and develop a creative teaching and learning collaboration [63].

Table 2. Survey items and results of the three neighbourhood surveys [75,77].

| Survey Items | Survey Result * | | |
|--|-----------------|------|------|
| | 2007 | 2009 | 2018 |
| Participation in the Liverpool 08 event programmes | n.a. | 66% | n.a. |
| More interested in cultural activities because of the ECOC | n.a. | 37% | 44% |
| Attending galleries | 60% | 69% | n.a. |
| Attending museums | 42% | 52% | n.a. |
| Attending live events | 35% | 53% | n.a. |
| Everyone in Liverpool will gain from the ECOC | 42% | 46% | 63% |
| Only the city centre will benefit from the ECOC | 66% | 56% | n.a. |
| The ECOC won't make any difference to the neighbourhood | 63% | 57% | n.a. |
| The city is a much better place after the ECOC | 56% | 57% | 81% |

* Percentage of agreement.

As a result, the survey shows a positive impact on skills and self-esteem of young people involved in the Creative Community project [61]. Participants in the 08 Volunteer programme also indicated that participation in the ECOC has expanded their cultural interests and helped them to develop confidence and new skills [18]. In general, the participation of disadvantaged groups in culture during 2008 was higher than the past, showing that the ECOC helped positively to increase cultural accessibility. As shown in Table 2, 66% of residents have taken part in at least one ECOC event during 2008, and 14% have also tried some new cultural activities. Apart from event attendance, the percentage of Liverpool residents who have attended other cultural amenities rose between 2007 and 2009, from 60 to 69% for gallery and from 42 to 52% for museum attendance, respectively. In particular, participation in live events rose significantly, from 35% in 2007 to 53% in 2009 [75]. As for the geographical bias, the establishment of the above-mentioned local initiatives helped to solve some local considerations. Event organisers made efforts to promote local programmes and differentiate them from those high profile activities designed particularly for mainstream arts audiences and tourists [61]. By 2009, the perceptions of spatial bias became less entrenched [18]. However, 56% of respondents in 2009 still believed that only the city centre would benefit (a decrease of 10% from 2007 to 2009), 57% of respondents believed that the ECOC had no impact on their community (a decrease of 6% from 2007 to 2009), and 46% of respondents thought that everyone in Liverpool would benefit from the ECOC (an increase of 4% from 2007 to 2009) (see Table 2). These indicate that, although the residents' awareness of the ECOC has improved, they still have some doubts about the widespread benefits of the ECOC [75]. Although neighbours' suspicions about the actual impact of the ECOCs on their communities still exist, it is clear that such improvements are possible because organisers continue to invest in geographically disseminated programmes, such as the Four Corners program, which took places in remote and deprived areas. The continuation of Creative Education and Neighbourhoods posts in the City Council and the outreach officer jointly assigned by the Bluecoat Art Centre and Everyman Theatre both show the potential for sustained impact [61].

Ten years after the end of the 2008 ECOC, a follow-up neighbourhood survey in 2018 shows that residents have a highly positive attitude towards the city and its cultural supply (see Table 2), with 44% more interested in cultural activities because of the ECOC (an increase of 7% from 2009 to 2018), 81% agreed that the city was better because of the ECOC (an increase of 24% from 2009 to 2018), and 63% respondents

agreed that everyone in Liverpool benefited from the ECOC (an increase of 17% from 2009 to 2018) [77]. In addition, between 2005 and 2018, grassroots' cultural assets in the city centre of Liverpool increase by 53%, and by 43% for the whole city. At the same time, the focus of grassroots cultural initiatives has changed dramatically, and, in many cases, these initiatives have expanded from purely creative goals (such as performing arts, music and heritage) to broader social and civic roles (such as education, employment and training) [77].

5. Conclusions

It is believed that, despite the conceptual and operational challenges, the paradigm of culture and sustainable development will continue to provide a platform for future discussions on sustainability [2]. As the “fourth pillar” of sustainable development, this paper aims to answer two key research questions related to cultural sustainability: What are the key success factors for sustainable culture-led regeneration? To what extent does Liverpool strike a balance between the three dilemmas of culture-led regeneration? This article is concluded by referring to these two questions, and by outlining the theoretical and empirical implications. The current study contributes to the debate on urban cultural policy and management by drawing the issue about the instrumental role of culture in urban regeneration, investigating an area less investigated. Various challenges and strategies mentioned above can be grouped into the following key lessons.

Although there are many complexities and contradictions in the culture-led regeneration strategy, culture is still one core in urban regeneration policy and will play a gradually important role in future initiatives [6]. After more than 30 years of development, the ECOC can be seen as a source of lessons to guide culture-led urban regeneration. However, despite its good reputation, it is misleading to believe that the title of ECOC can ensure positive and sustainable effects. In the past, many ECOC host cities failed to overcome the three dilemmas proposed by Bianchini [50], which means that there are still some unsolved contradictions in the applications of culture-led regeneration. García [10] attributes these conflicts to the imbalance between cultural and economic priorities in urban cultural policies, that is, culture is used as a tool for economic regeneration, rather than community involvement and development. As a result, the demand for tourists overwhelms that of residents, sometimes resulting in the “spatial” dilemma. Cultural consumption is superior to cultural production, since the former can yield immediate and visible benefits. García [17] further points out that culture needs to return to the core of any discussion about culture-led regeneration; otherwise, ECOC or other cultural projects attempting to link culture to urban regeneration may become meaningless and easily replaced by other initiatives. Therefore, ensuring cultural sustainability is a key element of successful culture-led regeneration.

To answer the first research question, it is necessary to refer to the relationship between culture and sustainable development discussed earlier in the section of literature review. Among them, the argument of UCLG [34] is particularly relevant to the analysis here, that is, the development of cultural sector itself and ensuring that culture has a place in other public policies are two major factors to ensure the sustainable development of culture. As emphasised by Richards and Palmer [2] (p. 396): “the concept of cultural sustainability revolves around the continued support and enhancement of local cultural processes and structures”. In the aftermath of the 2008 ECOC, Liverpool's cultural sector was significantly strengthened, including the development of a new cultural strategy and the establishment of Culture Liverpool as a platform for implementing the cultural strategy and planning follow-up cultural activities. Furthermore, the City Council was committed to continue funding for culture for two more years after 2008. All of these contributed to the sustainability of the cultural production of the city. As O'Brien [68] (p. 46) states: “integrating the cultural sector into the administrative and decision-making network for the city” is an important revelation of the ECOC Liverpool to culture-led regeneration. In addition, there were unprecedented collaborations between public and private sectors and among cultural organisations working together to achieve common goals. The most prominent example was the collaborations between city council, LARC and other

non-cultural organisations, as well as revitalise the underdeveloped tourism network. In addition, between 2005 and 2018, grassroots cultural assets in the city centre of Liverpool increase by 53%, and by 43% for the whole city [77].

The other important lesson learned from Liverpool is to integrate the ECOC into existing strategies, at the early stage when the city bid for the ECOC title. Although Evans [20] criticises Liverpool's early regeneration strategy of lacking culture as the core of urban planning, hosting the ECOC did turn culture as a key element in other public policies. It reflects the argument of Soini and Dessein [35], that is, culture plays a mediating role in achieving economic and social sustainability. Liverpool has benefited from continued regeneration, cultural investment, urban infrastructure and creative economic development over the past two decades, including Tate Liverpool, the Maritime Museum and Liverpool Museum in the redeveloped Albert Dock. The 2008 ECOC further accelerated city's physical development, achieved the city's regenerative goals and reshaped Liverpool as a cultural tourism destination. The major achievement was to establish the urban regeneration company—Liverpool Vision—to coordinate a series of parallel regeneration projects, including ACCL, the new Museum of Liverpool and World Heritage Waterfront, and the refurbished Bluecoat Art Centre. To some extent, Liverpool met the standards of "culture-led regeneration" defined by Evans [20] (p. 14): "manage to better integrate their cultural regeneration within economic and social development strategies and master plans, so that investment in cultural facilities, festivals and programmes can be seen as a long-term project rather than one-off event, led by economic development and regeneration rather than cultural agencies and departments". In addition, as Ecorys [61] found, the long-term strategy of incorporating the ECOC into culture-led development is the key to ensuring sustainable development.

The second question in this study is to explore how Liverpool strikes a balance between the three dilemmas of culture-led regeneration, which is regarded as a keystone of sustainable development in culture. As mentioned above, culture-led regeneration is not a panacea. Although Liverpool demonstrates some successes, the study still reveals several challenges to be addressed, especially the issues about economic and spatial dilemmas. In terms of cultural funding dilemma, Liverpool saw tourism development and city branding as one of the primary goals of the 2008 ECOC. Since Liverpool has accumulated several "hard" cultural capitals (i.e., physical cultural infrastructure) from continuous regeneration in the past two decades, the focus of 2008 ECOC is to strengthen the "soft" type of cultural capital. Richards and Palmer [2] (p. 383) argue that investing in multi-year event planning and financial commitment is a key to "sustaining eventfulness". To ensure long-term success, Liverpool attempted to integrate the ECOC into a complete cultural programme, focusing on multi-annual events lasting for eight consecutive years from 2003 to 2010 [61]. At the same time, the continued subsidies for cultural organisations, including event hosting and sustainable development funds, helped also to ensure the sustainability of event. In addition, the 2008 ECOC served as a "milestone" for realising or accelerating existing projects. As Evans [20] (p. 6) argues, "ECOC should be viewed in this longitudinal frame alongside a city's trajectory of culture and regeneration and associated branding through flagship development and infrastructure projects". As mentioned above, coordination and synergy between Liverpool's ECOC program and other regeneration initiatives were highlighted in the Liverpool Vision's Regeneration Strategy launched in 2000. Overall, to overcome the cultural funding dilemma, Liverpool inserted properly the 2008 ECOC in the city's long-term regeneration trajectory, enhanced the city image gradually, and provided an angle for people to see the changes that can be brought by culture. Consequently, ten years after the 2008 ECOC, 91% of residents surveyed agreed that Liverpool is "improving and has a positive future". Over two thirds of survey respondents (73%) felt that the external image of the city had improved, and 91% agreed that the 2008 ECOC gave people outside Liverpool a more positive impression of the city [77].

As for the economic dilemma, cultural regeneration strategies often involve a mix of consumption and production models, but, in practice, balancing these two aspects remains a challenge [39]. In the case of Liverpool, complete cultural facilities and event programmes provide a sound foundation for cultural consumption. To some extent, the 2008 ECOC has also improved Liverpool's cultural

production climate, including formulating a new cultural strategy, funding for cultural organisations, extending cultural events (i.e., themed years over eight consecutive years), and continuing community and school participation programmes (i.e., Four Corners and Creative Learning Networks programmes), whilst the last one may also help to deal with the concerns of spatial dilemma. As Richards and Palmer [2] (p. 398) comment, “the cultural sustainability of events programme is not only linked to the sustainability of individual events. A healthy and productive cultural climate tends to sustain a number of important events over a long period of time”. However, on the other side of the coin, Liverpool’s creative industry had a sense of being alienated from the 2008 ECOC, although there was an improvement of overall morale and credibility of the creative industry, due to the enhancement of the overall image of Liverpool. In addition, nearly three-quarters of creative industries’ enterprises surveyed felt that the Liverpool ECOC would create long-term, positive impacts for their businesses [73]. However, the “real” benefits brought to creative practitioners were less clear. This finding coincides with the arguments of García and Cox [63] (p. 143), that is, “even with sustained and tangible plans, there is unlikely to be a strong legacy of creative industries’ development resulted from the recent ECOC programmes”. Campbell [64] also points out that, even if there is a link between cultural events and the development of creative industry, the evidence supporting this connection is still questionable. The “marginalisation” of creative industry may attribute to the fact that 2008 Liverpool’s major focus was on cultural consumption that brought immediate benefits. The creative industry tends to be more sustainable and have greater effects on local economic structure, but it takes a longer time to be realised. In this case, Liverpool should be classified as the “culture-led regeneration” model as defined by Evans [20], rather than the “cultural regeneration” or the “creative city” model [78].

Regarding the spatial dilemma, Foley et al. [14] (p. 111) emphasise: “policy sustainability must be premised on measures to ensure greater involvement, participation and outcomes for a wider group of stakeholders. However, the challenge is that ‘trickle down’ benefits are usually limited and the impact is often visual, economic and political rather than social and community based”. One of the early criticisms of the 2008 ECOC Liverpool was the geographical bias. Negative reactions from local residents concentrated on two areas of concern: only the city centre can benefit from the ECOC (66% agreed in 2007) and there is no impact on remote communities (63% agreed in 2007) [75]. However, event planners struggled to deal with this spatial issue by spreading out cultural programmes even in the poorest areas of the city (e.g., 08 Welcome, 08 Volunteer, Creative Community and Creative Learning Networks programmes), and by establishing a sustainable structure to maintain the balance. As shown in Table 2, cultural accessibility, cultural participation, and perceived benefits of the 2008 ECOC all improved to certain levels. Liverpool’s experience reflects the suggestion of Burksiene et al. [24] (p. 51): “the integration of the ECOC programme into long-term strategies might foster polycentric spatial development involving peripheral areas”. Landry et al. [58] also argue that participatory art projects often offer greater flexibility and adaptability to local needs and less costly than capital culture projects. Liverpool’s experience tells us that investing in locally owned programmes will help to ensure the cultural sustainability of events. As suggested by Palmer/RAE [16], unlike the mainstream cultural program, community projects provide real value to urban residents. In addition, those community projects often last a longer time because they are rooted well locally and cared for by those who are involved. This issue is also consistent with the alternative model of culture-led regeneration proposed by Binns [51], namely “regeneration via participatory community arts programmes”, a strategy that focuses on bottom-up regeneration. However, Binns [51] also emphasises that, although community-based projects can address the “soft” issues of social development, such as building social capital and local awareness, they cannot address the “hard” social issues, such as the lack of cultural facilities or the renovation of dilapidated buildings. The result of the 2018 neighbourhood survey may provide some explanations for this dilemma. Although 81% respondents believe that the city is a much better place after the EOCO, a relatively lower percentage (63%) of residents accept that everyone in Liverpool will gain from the ECOC [77]. This point also reflects Son’s [6] criticism of Liverpool’s

ECOC, that is, the revamped image of Liverpool through cultural elements does not address the social deprivation or poverty issues.

It is concluded that incorporating events in city's long-term regeneration trajectory, continued support and enhancement of local cultural processes and structures, and highlighting community involvement and development are three major factors to ensure the cultural sustainability of event. Finally, despite presenting some innovative insights into the issues related to events and culture-led regeneration, it is necessary to reveal the limitations of current study. As Evans [20] (p. 6) states: "the culture and regeneration story requires a historical analysis that also maps change and effects over a much longer time period, within which events form only a relatively small part". There are two main and relevant research limitations in this paper. The first is the lack of some actual evidence, especially the data that proves the long-term effects of events. The second is that, even with relevant supporting data, it is difficult to distinguish which ones are subject to the ECOC alone, and which ones are yielded by Liverpool's long-term and multi-faceted regeneration. These two limitations undoubtedly affect the capability to address fully the research questions and the objectivity of analysis. In the future, more research can focus on legacy study, such as the opinions of residents, tourists and media. In addition, comparative and multiple case studies of the ECOC cities may help to discover the appropriate strategies to overcome the dilemmas of culture-led regeneration.

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