City/Capital of Culture schemes in European medium-sized coastal cities: the cases of Hull (UK) and Pafos (Cyprus)

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# Introduction

Cultural events, and in particular mega events, have long been an integral part of urban agendas as tool to foster economic development and urban regeneration in the context of inter-urban competition within capitalist economies (see for example Harvey, 1989). The impact of mega events such as the Olympic Games or the FIFA World Cup on host cities has been studied and commented upon in relation to increased international visibility, inward investment, funding from central governments, urban transformation and economic development (Chalkley and Essex, 1999; Smith, 2012). However, such events have also sparked criticisms due to the often huge requirements for public funding, disruptions of ordinary activities, environmental impacts, socio-spatial disparities and protests they entail (García, 2004; Hall, 2006; Gotham, 2015: Müller, 2015).

In Europe, while mega events are still a key feature of urban policies, the largest among projects of this kind show signs of crisis. Examples are Rome’s withdrawn bids for the 2020 and 2024 Olympics, Stockholm’s withdrawn bid for the 2022 Winter Olympics and the Amsterdam-Rotterdam joint bid for the 2028 Olympics failing to get support from the Dutch government. Policy makers in European cities also appear more inclined to search for smaller-scale – though still large – events, as the social, economic and environmental sustainability of mega events, together with the role of local contexts and meanings, appear to be gaining importance. In other words, policy makers are keen on bidding for events that require smaller efforts, entail less disruptive side effects and are more in line with the ‘DNA’ of their cities.

Among these events, City/Capital of Culture schemes are growing in popularity, despite the limits to cultural funding imposed by national and local austerity policies. The European City of Culture (ECoC) was proposed in 1983 by the Greek Culture Minister Melina Mercouri, with the support of her French counterpart Jack Lang, with the aim of bringing together European people, encouraging cultural exchange and showcasing the diversity and richness of European cultures. The first European Cities of Culture were all well acknowledged for their role as cultural cities, where the event was delivered as a cultural festival. Athens was the first city where the event was held in 1985, followed by Florence, Amsterdam, West Berlin and Paris. In 1990, Glasgow represented a watershed in the history of the initiative (Bianchini et al., 2013): for the first time, the ECoC was celebrated through a year-round cultural program and was characterized by a focus on urban regeneration. Furthermore, despite its cultural and heritage assets, Glasgow was at that time strongly associated with its industrial history and heritage, rather than with its role as a cultural capital. Since then, the event – known as European Capital of Culture since 2001 – has been displaying a focus on economic, urban and, more recently, social regeneration.

A number of similar initiatives, either in the form of annual or plurennial schemes, is being implemented across the continent. Examples are the Italian Capital of Culture or the Ibero-American Capital of Culture, which was held in Lisbon in 2017. In this context, the UK City of Culture (UKCoC) was proposed in 2009 by the then Culture Secretary Andy Burnham as the UK’s quadrennial cultural festival and subsequently launched in 2010 with a competition to select the first UKCoC. The rationale to establish the UKCoC program was to allow other UK cities to benefit from the regenerative impacts of culture that were witnessed in Glasgow, European City of Culture 1990, and Liverpool, European Capital of Culture 2008 (DCMS, 2009). Derry-Londonderry in Northern Ireland was the first UKCoC in 2013, followed by Hull in 2017. Coventry will be the next UKCoC in 2021.

Policy makers in European coastal or port cities of any scale appear to be particularly keen on bidding for City/Capital of Culture titles. Many of such cities have been European Cities or Capitals of Culture. Examples are: Glasgow 1990, Antwerp 1993, Copenhagen 1996, Rotterdam and Porto 2001, Genoa 2004, Liverpool 2008, Marseille 2013, Donostia-San Sebastián 2016, Pafos 2017 and Valletta 2018. Future ECoCs include Rijeka 2020 and Galway 2020. A similar tendency is visible in the case of the UK City of Culture, which so far has been held in two port cities and has involved several coastal cities in the competition for the title.

In the light of the growing interest of local policy makers in seeking to secure the regenerative potential of such events in terms of repositioning and socio-economic regeneration, the aim of this chapter is to explore City/Capital of Culture events in the context of European medium-sized coastal cities, using the examples of Hull (UK) and Pafos (Cyprus). For the purpose of this chapter, medium-sized coastal cities are broadly understood as second-tier cities, regional capitals and local service centers, in proximity of the coast and where the local economy is mostly related to port and maritime activities, fishing or seaside tourism. The experiences of Hull UK City of Culture 2017 and Pafos European Capital of Culture 2017 are brought together to discuss opportunities and challenges for such cities arising from smaller-scale, though still large, cultural events such as the UKoC and the ECoC. City/Capital of Culture schemes may create favorable conditions to help coastal communities tackle structural socio-economic decline, for example as a consequence of deindustrialization, as well as the negative aspects of their characteristic geographical and symbolic marginality. This of course requires that the achievements of the CoC year are consolidated through a plan for ensuring a long-term legacy for the city that goes beyond physical renovation.

# The case of European medium-sized coastal cities

If policy makers in medium-sized coastal towns and cities in Europe are increasingly interested in bidding for City/Capital of Culture events, they do so in relation to different objectives. Bianchini et al. (2013) distinguish different typologies of ECoCs – encompassing but not limited to medium-sized cities – according to local conditions: cities responding to deindustrialization and restructuring, where the regenerative impacts of cultural events are more visible due to a stronger need for change; heritage cities, where the purpose of the event is to showcase local heritage assets; cities embedded in relatively strong local, regional or national economies, attempting to enhance their cultural status; geographically/politically marginal cities, seeking to put themselves ‘on the map’; multicultural cities, where the event is an opportunity for intercultural dialog and for the integration of immigrants. European medium-sized coastal cities may feature in all these categories: deindustrializing local manufacturing/production centers, port or fishing towns, small and medium heritage cities, regional service centers that have been experiencing sustained immigration flows. In particular, many of these towns and cities, even if located in the proximity of larger ones, display a certain degree of geographical isolation, as they stand in relatively poor sections of road and rail transport networks, or at the end of national transport networks.

Hull and Pafos are examples of coastal cities facing these challenges. In the UK, coastal towns and cities are among the most deprived areas of the country[[1]](#endnote-1). Many of these towns and cities had thrived as industrial ports or seaside resort towns in the nineteenth and twentieth century. However, deindustrialization, global economic restructuring, changes in international maritime trade patterns, changes in tourism dynamics have particularly hit UK coastal communities, especially in the case of single-industry towns specializing in fishing, cargo handling or tourism (Leger et al., 2016). For these reasons, they are also subject to negative external perceptions related to deprivation and unemployment and are in many cases perceived as left-behind, neglected cities (see for example House of Lords – Select Committee on Regenerating Seaside Towns and Communities, 2019).

In Cyprus, all major cities are located on the coast, except for the largest and most important one, the capital Nicosia. The position and climate of Cypriot coastal cities allowed them to develop a strong tourist industry. Among the country’s coastal cities, Limassol – the second largest city after Nicosia and the main port of Cyprus – has developed a strong commercial economy and is known for being the most cosmopolitan city of the island. Since 1974, due to the partition of the island and the differences in demographic, social, cultural and economic scopes between the two sides, the evolution of cities in the north and in the south of the island has been following significantly different trajectories. In the north, the rapid demographic decline following the departure of the Greek community exposed the historic centers of cities to sudden impoverishment, abandonment and decay of the built environment, as well as to a chaotic sprawl of peripheral areas and problems of maintenance of public services. To solve this problem, a regeneration strategy was carried out in recent years (Oktay and Rustemli, 2011). Conversely, in the south, the major challenges that cities have to face are connected with rapid demographic growth, late implementation of building regulations and heavy foreign investments in summer houses. This situation caused haphazard urbanization, lack of public transportation, loss of agricultural land and green spots, aesthetic degradation and pollution. The cutting of Nicosia in two different cities (Lefkosia and Lefkoşa), and the turning of the capital into a border (and militarized) city, resulted in a unique form of urban evolution, both on the Greek and on the Turkish side. The walled town witnessed abandonment, decay and social segregation (Oktay, 2005) for a long time, while it is now subject to extended refurbishment works in the south side.

# Hull UK City of Culture 2017

Kingston upon Hull is a port city on the Humber Estuary, in Northern England. Its population, after peaking at 300,000 inhabitants in the 1930s, is today 260,000 and it is increasing due to immigration from Eastern Europe and the arrival of asylum seekers from the Middle East. Hull boasts a 700 years’ history as a port city (see for example Starkey et al., 2017) and has been – by size, amount of custom revenues and traffic – among the country’s main ports in the nineteenth and early twentieth century (East, 1931; City of Hull Development Committee, 1937). Since the Second World War – and in particular since the 1970s due to the collapse of the fishing industry as a result of overfishing, falling demand and the disputes with Iceland about distant-water fishing (Byrne, 2015; Byrne and Ombler, 2017) – Hull has been characterized by a steady socio-economic decline. As many other deindustrializing European port cities, Hull displays figures of unemployment, deprivation and health problems above the national average, as well as a younger, relatively low educated population[[2]](#endnote-2). For these reasons, external perceptions of Hull have traditionally been negative. Preconceptions about the city were strengthened when, in 2003, Hull ranked as no. 1 in *The Idler Book of Crap Towns: The 50 Worst Places to live in the UK*, a fact which was extensively reported in the UK’s media.

Despite such challenges, the city’s industrial profile includes medical, pharmaceutical, logistics, chemical and petrochemical industries. Recent investments in the city encompass R&D activities in a range of sectors, such as renewable energies, healthcare, telecommunication, maritime industry and tourism. In particular, the Green Port Hull partnership has been promoting the port of Hull as a hub for the development of renewable energies in the country, which features as a pillar of the city’s future development strategy outlined in the 2013 City Plan. Within this framework, Siemens invested £310 million in a wind turbine manufacturing facility at Alexandra Dock.

Since the 1980s, a coherent urban regeneration strategy has focused on strengthening the city center’s retail offer and redeveloping nearby waterfront areas. Examples of waterfront redevelopment are Hull Marina, built on the Humber and Railway docks and opened in 1983, Victoria Dock Village, developed between 1988 and 2004, and the 1991 Princes Quay shopping center. The 1994 City Regeneration Strategy and the 2000 City Plan reaffirmed the priority of fostering urban regeneration in the city center and on the waterfront. This led to two action plans for the city center in 2003 and 2009. However, the implementation of the latter was halted in 2010 due to the impact of the economic and financial crisis on real estate markets.

In this context, local policy makers bid in 2010 for the UK City of Culture 2013, which was eventually assigned to Derry-Londonderry in Northern Ireland, another medium-sized port city. In 2013, Hull City Council bid again, this time successfully, for the 2017 title, after having been shortlisted together with Dundee, Leicester and Swansea Bay. In this latter successful bid, the Hull team built a strong case through a narrative of “a city coming out of the shadows” (Hull UK City of Culture 2017, 2013, p. 4). Hull was the adopted home city of poet Philip Larkin, where he lived from 1955 to 1985, and already had a developed cultural infrastructure, as well as a number of maritime heritage assets, despite being characterized by low levels of cultural engagement. Nonetheless, its designation raised skepticism at local and national level regarding its attitude as a cultural city and ability to deliver such an event, which faded away in 2017 as the event progressed.

Hull 2017’s operational budget was £32.8 million (Culture, Place and Policy Institute, 2018), in comparison with Derry-Londonderry’s budget of about £25 million to deliver the UKCoC 2013 (Boland et al., 2019). This corresponds to approximately £125 (€135) per resident in the case of Hull and £225 (€245) in the case of Derry-Londonderry. As a matter of comparison, Aarhus ECoC 2017 and Wroclaw ECoC 2016 had operational budgets respectively of €61.9 million (Fox and Rampton, 2018) and €78.1 million (Fox and Rampton, 2017), corresponding to approximately €184 and €124 per resident.

The operational budget for the UKCoC 2017 in Hull was coupled with a £100 million investment in a range of physical improvements. The former Fruit Market, located between the city center and the waterfront, was redeveloped into a cultural hub and creative quarter orbiting around Humber Street. The City Council also implemented a series of public ground works in the main square and other areas of the city center. Many of the city’s flagship cultural facilities were also refurbished, such as the Ferens Art Gallery and Hull New Theatre. A few new cultural venues were built, namely Stage @TheDock, an open stage on the River Hull, and the Bonus Arena, a 3,500-seat venue in the city center, although the latter was conceived as a legacy project.

The Preliminary Evaluation Report of Hull UK City of Culture 2017 issued in March 2018 (Culture, Place and Policy Institute, 2018) illustrates the immediate impact of the event. In 2017, more than 2,800 cultural projects were delivered across more than 300 venues in the city. A total attendance figure of 5.3 million was estimated. Tourism increased from 5.56 million visits and 360,400 overnight stays in 2016 to 6.2 million visits and 415,900 overnight stays in 2017[[3]](#endnote-3). This increase was estimated to have produced at least £300 million in terms of value added for the economy. About 800 jobs in the visitor economy and cultural sector were created between 2013-2017. 28% of the surveyed new businesses started since 2013 reported that their creation was ‘mainly’ or ‘partly’ due to the UKCoC title. The event also contributed to improving internal and external perceptions of the city. 3 out of 4 residents said they were proud to live in Hull. Nevertheless, the number of those considering Hull ‘extremely’, ‘very’ or ‘somewhat appealing to visit’ increased by only 1%. Similarly, while residents’ happiness and life satisfaction on a 0-10 scale rose in early 2017, it returned to 2015 levels by the end of the year, signaling the short-term impact of the program. However, the majority of Hull 2017’s volunteer workforce – accounting for 2,400 volunteers overall – agreed or strongly agreed that there had been an improvement in their self-esteem (71%) and their confidence (68%) as a result of their participation in the event.

After 2017, the delivery company Hull 2017 Ltd was transformed into the legacy company Absolutely Cultured Ltd, who delivered in 2018 and 2019 well-attended cultural events such as *Dominoes*, *Urban Legends: Northern Lights* and *The Witching Hour*. A cultural strategy for 2016-2026 was issued by the City Council, focusing in particular on Hull’s connection with Scandinavian countries. Hull City Council is implementing the £27 million legacy project Hull Yorkshire’s Maritime City, which aims at creating a coherent cultural offer related to the city’s maritime history and heritage. The project is expected to include the restoration of a number of maritime heritage assets, namely the Maritime Museum, the Dock Office Chambers, the North End Shipyards, the Spurn Lightship and the Arctic Corsair. Such cultural offer, combined with the construction of a cruise terminal opposite The Deep, Hull’s aquarium, is expected to attract cruise passengers travelling through Hull to other destinations in Yorkshire, the rest of Northern England and Scotland into the city.

# Pafos European Capital of Culture 2017

Pafos is a coastal town located in the western region of the island of Cyprus, in the (Greek) Republic of Cyprus. Unlike many ECoCs, Pafos never had an industrial background and its port is mainly devoted to tourist activities, such as short cruises, guided fishing trips, scuba diving and water sports. In a country such as Cyprus, of small proportions in comparison with the other members of EU, smallness is an intrinsic condition. However, Pafos suffers from perceived marginality and neglect, even in the national context. With a population of around 65,000 living in the urban area, and 92,000 in the whole district (CYSTAT, 2018), Pafos is the smallest of the four district capitals of the Republic of Cyprus. It had a glorious past in ancient times, when it was at the center of pilgrimage routes from the whole Eastern Mediterranean to the Aphrodite’s temple of Koukla. Pafos is indeed famous for being the mythical birthplace of the goddess of love. In addition, it used to be the capital of the island during Roman rule. This golden past has left an enormous archeological richness[[4]](#endnote-4). From that time, however, the town lost its political and economic prominence, constantly declining in favor of other cities like Nicosia or Limassol. At the time of Cyprus’ independence, Pafos was no more than a big village at the center of a mainly rural region, characterized by plantations of tobacco and bananas. After the Turkish invasion of 1974, Pafos experienced an important expansion of its tourism economy, that still thrives on the beautiful shores and the archeological sites of the town. Famagusta used to be the Republic’s main tourist city. However, as it is located in the occupied area, it has been marginalized by the international community since the partition of the island. The growth of tourism drove the demographic and economic growth of Pafos, attracting people from the surrounding villages and from abroad. It also redefined Pafos’ geography; it caused the enormous expansion of the coastal area of Kato Pafos (the Greek name for Low Pafos) at the expense of the old town, which is located more inland, on a small hill that locals simply call “city center”. Kato Pafos used to be confined to the harbor and the surrounding buildings, but, in a few decades, it was transformed into a leisure marina. A long waterfront of hotels and apartment blocks now runs for kilometers along the rocky coast. Tourism is currently the main industry of the region[[5]](#endnote-5) and it is living through a new golden age. In the years before and after the ECoC, Cyprus happened to have a record number of tourists, with each year since 2016 breaking the previous year’s record (Ioannidou, 2019). Moreover, in order to accommodate the growing population, new neighborhoods were built outside the old town, with larger roads, parking spaces, supermarkets and all the facilities of modern cities. Due to the combination of these two processes, the old town lost its role of center for local social life. It declined, shops closed, houses were abandoned and decayed. The old town also paid most of the cost of the ethnic war. In fact, the Moutallos district, where the Pafos’ Turkish Cypriot community used to live, was abandoned in the immediate afterwards of the aftermath of partition. Its dwellings are currently occupied by Greek refugees from the north side, but for legal reasons the property of the buildings still belongs to their former inhabitants. This situation prevented all this area from being targeted by real estate investors and did not see any renovation work in the period between the 1974 war and the designation of Pafos as ECoC nearly 40 years later. The Moutallos district became a pre-war ghost town.

In 2013, Pafos was designated European Capital of Culture 2017, becoming the first Cypriot city to be honored with this title. A few months after the designation, as a consequence of the economic crisis that hit the financial system of the Republic of Cyprus in March 2013, Pafos policy makers had to cut the budget allocated to the ECoC from the original €21 million to around €8 million (approximately from €323 to €123 per resident), including the Melina Mercouri Prize granted from the EU (Fox and Rampton, 2018). The bid highlighted the cultural resources that the city has inherited from the past to recover the role of Pafos as a bridge between West, East and North African world, as well as a way to heal some of the social wounds of the town and reconstruct the social cohesion lost after the ethnic war and the growth of foreign immigration (Municipality of Pafos, 2011).

Working on perceptions of Pafos in the national context was another important theme. Pafos and Pafians are the subject of derision by the other inhabitants of Cyprus. The city suffered from a biased reputation of being the most “backward” area in the island, with a peasant attitude towards life, arts and culture. Pafians are taunted for their heavy accent, for speaking in traditional Cypriot dialect instead of formal Greek, or for other stereotypes. These reputational problems are related to the city’s geographical position and small size. Pafos is considered to be faraway and isolated from the rest of the country, on the western edge, at the end of the highway that connects all the main cities of the unoccupied area. This, together with the city’s small size, creates the image of a place always a step behind and detached from the rest of the island; some Cypriots even joke about Pafos being in a different country.

Research involving key people involved in the ECoC program[[6]](#endnote-6) revealed that the organization of Pafos 2017 embraced this narrative, and set as the main goal of the organization the filling of this gap between Pafos and other cities like Limassol or Nicosia, in terms of cultural offer. The ECoC was interpreted as a catalyst for new reactions in the social environment, eventually able to sustain themselves in the future. In this sense, the search for visibility and centrality and the international artistic offer was meant to be a window for opening Pafos to the world and let the city be positively contaminated by other ideas and different ways of thinking. Creating a new environment, suitable for cultural production and consumption, was a means to foster this transformation, giving the city the physical infrastructure and the self-confidence to consolidate its own cultural market and ecology for creative production.

According to the Final Evaluation (Tsagkaridis, 2018), Pafos2017’s cultural events generated 207,000 attendees. The vast majority of the interviewees deemed the experience as a positive or very positive added value for the city (92.27%). Of around 130,000 foreign visitors travelling to Cyprus from 41 different countries in 2017, only a minority pointed at the ECoC as the reason why they chose to visit Cyprus. This supports the local and national focus of the Pafos 2017 organization, who seemed less interested in improving the international attractiveness of the city than in changing the image of the city in the national context.

No data about the impacts on the city in the period after 2017 is available. No legacy plan or funding was in place. At the end of 2017 the ECoC organization was closed down, and no legacy institution was established.

# Opportunities and challenges for European medium-sized coastal cities of culture

City/Capital of Culture events, as well as other hallmark events, should be understood longitudinally within cities’ experiences of culture and regeneration (Evans, 2011). In European medium-sized coastal cities, such events may be remarkable pivotal moments and may contribute to triggering long-term physical, socio-economic and symbolic transformations. In Hull, despite the fact that some of the physical interventions such as the redevelopment of the Fruit Market area were already being implemented or had been planned prior to 2017, the UKCoC 2017 arguably acted as an accelerator, setting a clear deadline and helping to raise additional resources. An example is the £13 million grant provided by the UK government in 2016 (Hull Daily Mail, 2016), which was mainly used for the refurbishment of Hull New Theatre. Similarly, the public realm improvements undertaken in 2015-2016 have concentrated several years of renovation works in less than two years. The extent and the timescale of these works had a transformative impact, also in terms of perceptions and pride. Cultural events and art installations in the area subject to renovation – as suggested by Zukin (1995) – had the function to ‘humanize’ public space (Culture, Place and Policy Institute, 2018) and help residents to familiarize themselves with, and create a sense of ownership of, refurbished areas.

In Pafos, on the occasion of the ECoC, €29 million were spent in a massive refurbishment program (Sivitanidou et al., 2017) that focused primarily on the city center and the old town: a new pedestrian area was created, the streets and the square were repaved, a new open space suitable for events was put in place, and a new public park was opened near the town hall. These projects were bound together by the concept of “Open Air Factory” that inspired the whole bid. According to the organizers (Sivitanidou et al., 2015) the aim was to fix a series of the city’s long-standing shortcomings, such as the lack of development planning and the consequent scattered and haphazard urbanization of the last decades. Thus, the “Open Air Factory” intended to go beyond the simple increase of audience numbers, outdoor space for events and cultural facilities. Rather, it aimed at making Pafians re-engage with their own city and at re-weaving an integrated social fabric linking different spaces and buildings. The renovation works focused particularly on the Old Town, for which a new name was coined: “Ano Pafos” (High Pafos). This was counterposed to Kato Pafos name, with the aim of rebalancing the relationship between the two areas of the city and to give a new centrality to the Old Town. High symbolic value was given to the Moutallos district, that was completely renovated and where an abandoned caravanserai (the Xani tou Imbrahim) was restored and transformed into the Ibrahim’s Khan cultural center. This project had the double purpose of being a “placemaking tool” (Dova and Sivitanidou, 2019) for the area, and a bridge towards the Turkish Cypriot community of Pafos.

The experiences of the two case-study cities and their potential legacies need to be contextualized within the current local, national and global socio-economic conjuncture. Hull is arguably suffering from the impacts of a nation-wide crisis of retail, which has been emptying high streets throughout the country (see for example Butler, 2019). This process risks undermining the short-term positive impacts of the UKCoC 2017 as regards economic revitalization. The national and local political climate is also changing. In 2016, as in many other deprived coastal and port cities in the country (see for example Kilcoyne and Ledwith, 2019), the majority of Hull citizens who took part in the EU referendum – accounting for 67% of total votes – chose to leave the European Union (Hull City Council, 2016). The referendum results arguably exposed the anger of those living in the many UK ‘left-behind’ coastal towns and cities that particularly suffered the long-term impacts of the 2007-8 economic and financial crisis and the following austerity policies. The 2018 local elections marked an erosion of the traditional Labour majority, while at the 2019 European elections, which were characterized by a considerably low turnout (Young and Corcoran, 2019), the newly established, right-wing populist Brexit Party gained 44% of the votes (BBC, 2019). Brexit represents a challenge for UK cities of culture more broadly. The UK’s participation in the European Capital of Culture 2023 was cancelled by the European Commission as a response to the British government triggering Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty (BBC, 2017) to leave the EU, thus leaving Veszprém in Hungary the only ECoC in 2023. The port cities of Belfast-Derry (with a joint bid) and Dundee (which were running for the UK title together with Milton Keynes, Leeds and Nottingham) were excluded from the competition in late 2017, in some cases after years of work and considerable financial resources had gone into the preparation of their bids.

Pafos’ economic and social conditions make it different from many other coastal and port cities in Europe. The historical lack of a developed industrial sector as well as of the subsequent necessity to tackle the effects of the global restructuring of manufacturing, poses to Pafos other specific challenges. Pafos is not at the low point of a trajectory of decline. Rather, it is leaving a period of growth and expansion that calls for a transformation of the city’s image from that as a small and unimportant town, to a big city that fears no comparison with other well-known international urban centers. Pafos 2017 took advantage of the title as a means of capitalization (Sassatelli, 2013), to improve its connections with other cities and to highlight its image as a hub. Hosting mega events can provide the spotlight for a city to emerge and be acknowledged as part of an elite acting in the cultural world as centers rather than peripheries. To some extent, this has also happened in Hull, as the UK City of Culture 2017, in particular its opening events, contributed to contrasting initial skepticism about its chances to be a cultural city.

The experiences of the two case-study cities are also characterized by the willingness to tackle the geographical and symbolic marginalization arising from their nature of medium-sized coastal cities. In Hull, the UKCoC 2017 was an opportunity to project a positive narrative about Hull across the country through its cultural program, communication and marketing activities. Symbolic actions were also implemented, such as the display of Hull on the BBC’s weather maps. The Preliminary Evaluation Report (Culture, Place and Policy Institute, 2018) shows that awareness of Hull as the reigning UKCoC reached 59% nationally in 2017, in comparison with a baseline figure of 39% in 2016; in addition, 46% of respondents to the UK Perceptions Survey 2017 said that the event had changed their perceptions of Hull for the better.

Pafos 2017’s organizers seemed interested in contrasting the long-lasting situation of symbolic and identity marginalization that the city had been suffering[[7]](#endnote-7). This situation is rooted in the postcolonial condition of Cyprus (Bryant, 2004), which chained the local society into a subordinate relationship with the Western world, confining Cyprus to the fringes of Europe and modernity (Argyrou, 1996, 2006, 2010). This is reproduced within Cypriot society itself, with the relationship between different cities mirroring the relationships between Cyprus and other countries in Europe). Pafos is then placed in a very marginalized position in a chain of center-periphery relationships. Geographical distance and isolation mean a temporal delay on the timeline of history: being far means also being backward. This chain goes from the centers of production of Western modernity (the metropolitan areas of North West Europe), trough Mediterranean Europe, Greece, Cyprus and Pafos at last, on the brink of Europe. In this sense, Pafos has similarities with European Capitals of Culture in Eastern Europe such as Riga 2014, Pilsen 2015 and Wroclaw 2016, which took advantage of the ECoC title to renegotiate their position in the symbolic geography of Europe (Turşie, 2015b). The search for visibility and networking with partners in Europe and in the whole world appears to be part of strategies to counteract the results of smallness and isolation.

According to the Pafos 2017 organizers, this process of “urbanization” can be realized only through a transformation of Pafians into citizens, in which the attitude towards culture plays an important role. This strategy has been pursued at the cost of reinforcing Pafians’ symbolic marginalization. The fact that Pafos 2017 organizers tended to view Pafians as “not-proper-citizens” in fact served the self-justification narrative of Pafos 2017 itself. Pafos2017 proved a sizeable success in sparking Pafians’ interest in cultural activities and developing an audience that could sustain local cultural markets. Moreover, because of the ECoC, the city has been equipped with cultural facilities like a theatre, exhibition spaces and cinemas that were previously outdated or just lacking. The main challenge it had to face was the abrupt stop of every activity after the end of 2017. The lack of a legacy project risks undermining the momentum and achievements of the ECoC.

# Conclusions

Despite the fact that cultural events and mega events alone are by no means sufficient to tackle structural challenges in European medium-sized coastal cities, it appears possible to argue that certain large-scale events can help local policy makers cope with issues of external perceptions and geographical and symbolic isolation. Hull and Pafos can be understood as different examples of European medium-sized coastal cities benefitting from City/Capital of Culture events. Such events – smaller and more sustainable than the largest international mega events – may represent an opportunity for these cities in two different ways. On the one hand, although cultural events of any scale alone cannot be considered a panacea for local structural socio-economic problems, event-led urban regeneration may be a catalyst to help tackle socio-economic decline trends. On the other hand, City/Capital of Culture events may fulfil the need of acknowledgment of small – yet growing – coastal cities, by putting them ‘on the map’. For example, as minor a thing as the inclusion of Hull on the popular BBC’s weather maps due to its status of UKCoC 2017 arguably had an impact on local pride and awareness of Hull across the UK’s population. Similarly, in Pafos the ECoC title has been hailed by residents as a possible way to stop young people from moving to other cities or abroad, due to its possibility to enhance local pride and the image of the city among its inhabitants (Farnaki et al., 2018).

Both case-study cities, as many other European medium-sized coastal cities, have been suffering from physical and symbolic isolation, affecting many aspects of social and economic life, local identity and self-representation. Hull and Pafos took advantage of this difficult experiences to produce new narratives of themselves. City/Capital of Culture schemes in fact proved themselves suitable tools for negotiating geographical relationships and reshaping symbolic representations of space (Turşie 2015a). Coastal cities can normally rely on their maritime history, commercial networks and multicultural heritage to redesign borders in order to place themselves at the junction of different worlds, rather than at the fringe of one sharp-bounded space.

Hull and Pafos, as examples of European medium-sized coastal cities of culture, share similar challenges, as well. The most crucial one is to keep the momentum generated by the event and reinforce the achievements of the culture year. A cliff effect (Tommarchi et al., 2018, p. 162), i.e. an abrupt stop of cultural activities due to lack of funding and organization or to adverse economic conditions or political isolation, represents the main threat to be addressed thorough legacy planning, which should take place from the very outset of event planning itself.

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# Biographical notes

Enrico Tommarchi is a research assistant and PhD candidate at the University of Hull’s Culture, Place and Policy Institute (CPPI). He has taken part in the evaluation of Hull UK City of Culture 2017, while his research focuses on mega events, the opportunities and threats that they raise for urban heritage and their connection with port-city socio-spatial and symbolic relationships. He holds a Master’s degree in Urban and Regional Planning from the IUAV University of Venice, where he has also worked on cultural planning, strategic urban planning and cultural mega events. He is interested in the geographies of port and coastal cities, urban regeneration, the socio-spatial outcomes of mega events, socio-spatial inequalities and urban fragmentation.

Federico Cavalleri holds a PhD in Social and Cultural Anthropology from the University of Milano-Bicocca. He worked in the volunteering office of Pafos European Capital of Culture 2017. In Pafos he also carried out his doctoral research, focusing on the entanglements between cultural mega events and the local socio-cultural context, especially in relation to identity building, Europeanization and nationalism. He also collaborated with the “Cultural Barometer” project at Neapolis University, Pafos, with the evaluation of Pafos European Cultural Capital 2017 and with the Culture, Place and Policy Institute at the University of Hull.

1. For example, Middlesbrough, Hull, Blackpool and Hartlepool (together with Liverpool, another coastal city) featured among the ten local authority districts in England with the highest proportion of their neighbourhoods in the most deprived 10 per cent of neighbourhoods nationally in the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2015 (Source: Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Unemployment in Hull was, between April 2018 and March 2019, at 6.4% against 4.1% nationally (Source: Office for National Statistics, 2018). Hull ranked third among the local authority districts with the highest proportion of their neighbourhoods in the most deprived 10 per cent of neighbourhoods nationally in the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2015 (Source: Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015). Stroke, coronary heart disease (CHD) and respiratory problems are among the most common causes of death that presents figures above the national average (Source: Hull City Council, 2018). With regard to education, in 2018, 24.1% of Hull’s residents held a Level 4 qualification in comparison with 39.3% of the UK’s population. 11.4% had no qualification, in comparison with 7.8% nationally. Source: Office for National Statistics, 2018. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Source: Visit Hull and East Yorkshire, 2017, 2018. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. The archaeological site of Kato Pafos is listed in the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Every year the Pafos region receives around 34% of the total tourists visiting Cyprus (CYSTAT, 2017). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. This information refers to research conducted by Tsagkaridis, K., Flora, K. and Cavalleri, C. based on interviews with some key personalities of Pafos2017 undertaken during the ECoC year. The results are yet to be published. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. See endnote 6. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)