THE CULTURE OF URBAN RENEWAL: GLASGOW, BRITAIN, AND THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

by

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Abstract

Annually since 1986, at least one city in the European Community has been elected to host the European City of Culture festival and in 1990 the celebration was held in Glasgow, Scotland. While festivals have become an increasingly important as urban-renewal strategies undertaken by many cities, Glasgow was the first city in Europe to use the festival in its larger urban-renewal program. Traditionally an industrial city, Glasgow, along with many British cities, was undergoing a significant social and economic transition in the 1970s and 1980s, as deindustrialization become the norm rather than the exception. While this study documents how the locus of the struggle over what kind of city Glasgow was going to become was local, it nevertheless seeks to incorporate an understanding of the larger political transition to Thatcherism in Britain and the development of a supranational form of governance within the European Community. Hence, while building upon some of the recent theoretical trends in urban studies, such as urban regime and growth theories, to describe urban politics and explain urban change, this study not only details the local role that the festival had in Glasgow's urban redevelopment but characterizes urban change as affected by many processes, mechanisms, and authorities that operate on varying geographical scales. Moreover, this study describes, in some detail, the specific configurations of actors in institutions not only to show how various individual projects compatible in some ways and conflicting in others, but also to present how institutional resources at these different scales were mobilized and invested in by individuals and networks in order to achieve the perceived ends of various

factions. While it is important to examine these higher scales of authority in order to understand the material and social changes that took place in Glasgow, locally different interpretations of Glasgow's transition from being a city primarily industrial to something different, produced a host of conflicts over what resources would be valued or devalued. Important not only for Glaswegians but also for many Scots across the country, these struggles were often expressed, during the European City of Culture, through questions of culture and identity.

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Table of Contents

Title	Page
Title Page	i
Abstract	ii-iii
Acknowledgements	iv-v
Table of Contents	vi
Introduction	7-18
Chapter 1: The Politics of Place and Urban Governance	19-67
Chapter 2: European Culture or the Culture of the Europeanist	68-122
Chapter 3: Westminster: Glasgow in the United Kingdom	123-183
Chapter 4: Glasgow: The Culture of Rent	184-238
Chapter 5: The Culture of Tension and Renewal: Glasgow the Capital of Culture	239-292
Conclusion	293-304
Annotated Bibliography	305-321
Curriculum Vita	322-323

INTRODUCTION

Festivals and urbanization have been tied together since the origins of the Western city. In ancient Greece, for instance, the Great Dionysia festival, which resembled a large lively street party, was held in Athens to venerate the god Dionysus. While many would revel in its debauchery, excessively drinking wine and feasting, the festival proved remarkably important in shaping the physical development of early Athens, as the archeological remnants of this religious festival are visible today in the remnants of ancient amphitheaters that were constructed specifically to extol Dionysus.[1] No less significant during the medieval period in Western Europe, the impact of festivals on urban development can been seen in the distinguishing radial urban pattern of these European cities, which resulted in part because of trade and commerce and in part because of the fairs and festivals held in the main plazas of the center for religious purposes.[2] In addition to religious rationales, from the medieval period forward, there have been countless numbers of secular festivals whether military, civic, family, or guild-based that were held in cities and towns. Hence, there is truly a wide variety of meanings and functions attached to different types of urban festivals and one should follow the perspicacity of Mona Ozouf and "hesitate before speaking, in the singular, of 'the traditional festival'"[3]

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[1] Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects*, [1st ed. (New York: Harcourt, 1961) 139-40.
[2] Patrick Le Gales, *European Cities: Social Conflicts and Governance*, *European Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 67.
[3] Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988) 1.

Nevertheless, something remarkable has happened to the explicit rationale behind hosting festivals in many cities throughout the world. To get a glimpse of this change, one can turn to Ozouf's study of 18th-century France, wherein she recounts how many the country's leading intellectuals, such as Montesquieu, criticized the fêtes common at the time as being a serious drain on the country's economy, mostly because of the resulting lost hours of work.[4] Today, even in France, the situation is noticeably different.[5] Towns and cities, sometimes with the support of their national governments, are increasingly staging celebrations, not to honor some particular symbol or tradition, or to engender pretentious displays by the social elites, or even to allow an appropriate time and space for moral transgressions (even if these conditions are implicitly interwoven into these celebrations); instead, festivals are held and engineered explicitly to boost the city's economic fortunes. While this kind of boosterism may not be novel, as it has been a characteristic of many cities in the United States of America for a long time, it is striking how festivals, which often ran contrary to the economic rationality of market forces, have become fully enveloped by the forces of commercialization and commodity production. It is not that nobody opposes the logic behind large-scale city celebrations, because there are many who do indeed question the economic arguments used to justify such events, but one need only glance at much of the scholarship in urban economics and tourism studies, which

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[4] Ibid. 1-2.

[5] Sue Collard, "Politics, Culture and Urban Transformation in Jacques Chirac's Paris 1977-1995," *French Cultural Studies* 7 (1996). The French bicentennial festival (also a European City of Culture festival), which cost about FF500million French Francs was said to bring in FF5,000million, and was therefore billed as being a important revenue generator for Paris, and for France as a whole. Gerry Kearns, "The City as Spectacle: Paris and the Bicentenary of the French Revolution," in *Selling Places: The City as Cultural Capital, Past and Present*, ed. Gerry Kearns and Chris Philo (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1993), 99.

notably informs the actions of social practitioners who influence patterns of urbanization all over the world, to notice that there is a growing consensus that festivals, whether centered around music, the arts, civic issues, food, dance, or folk traditions, are extremely important tools in assisting in local economic growth, especially in city centers. The theory, in short, is that festivals help to spur local consumer spending, capture a larger share of the competitive tourist markets, and promote inward investment (markedly in real estate), and, therefore, urban boosters of many political stripes, i.e. Conservative, Socialist, Labour, Green, Christian Democrat, etc, will argue that by showing off the rich assets of their respective metropolises, they are able to induce short-term growth in order to bring about long-term investment by persuading businesses and people of the right sort to locate in their cities.

It is not infrequent today to read about how a class of old industrial cities is being transformed into new “consumption cities,” “touristic cities,” or "cities of spectacle,” because, for many, the rise of shopping malls in city centers, the redevelopment of waterfronts into promenades for consumers, the construction of casinos, megabars, discos, and other entertainment centers such as museums, aquariums, convention centers, stadiums, etc., all represent a new era for cities, where, perhaps in some cases the cult of Dionysus once again reigns. While this pattern of development may not be new, as Haussmann, for example, famously refashioned parts of Paris for museums and the consumption of consumer goods, this discourse on the city does help to mark a profound shift for many cities whose fortunes grew during the heyday of the industrial revolution due to of the

construction of massive factories, processing facilities, and commercial warehouses. Throughout Europe, in what appears today as an overnight phenomena, a new kind of urbanization began to take shape in urban areas with remarkable simultaneity in the 19th century, as the force of the global market and the development of new technologies transformed many cities into the workshops of the world. One could, of course, list these cities, perhaps beginning with Manchester, as it is well-known as the birth place of the industrial revolution, and then moving on to Lyon, Hamburg, Turin, etc., in no particular order. As the 19th century wore on, the number and size of these cities grew as the technique of industrialization spread, and so too did certain patterns of urbanization. While different in every city, the general design was large-scale production concentrated in a single central cluster, often on a harbor or river front, with an area of working-class housing nearby, often to the east, of the industrial zone. The social geography of these 19th-century industrial cities was, perhaps, most brilliantly captured in the descriptions offered by Fredrick Engels in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, published in 1844, which not only remarkably characterized many cities across Europe, but also those in the United States of America.[6]

However, today, a new pattern of urbanization has emerged around the globe, as these cities, which were once oriented to the global market through the production and storage of wares of various types, have become the sites for the large-scale growth of service-sector industries, such as finance, insurance, real

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[6] James E. Vance, *The Continuing City: Urban Morphology in Western Civilization* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1990) 303-09.

estate, and, mostly assuredly, entertainment. In a sense, this last ‘industry’ shows in the starkest clarity how cities whose fortunes once relied on production are now leveraging their futures primarily on conspicuous consumption, as there seems to be no end to the ostentatious displays that cities that were once the great warehouses and workshops of the industrial world (such as Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Leeds, Manchester, Detroit, Marseille, Barcelona, Bilbao, and so on) are willing to indulge in. These cities must have bigger buildings, more grandiose stadiums, more flamboyant waterfronts, and grander spectator festivals in order to increase their urban fortunes in the battle against one another to secure inward investment.

The present study is not about festivals, *per se*, nor is it a theoretical statement about the rise of a new type of urbanization; rather, it uses a particular festival, the European City of Culture, as a lens to get a glimpse of the mechanisms, processes, and authorities that shaped a new kind of urbanization in Glasgow, Scotland, in the 1980s. Fundamentally, this study examines an industrial city during a time of significant economic and social change, and asks, How do other political and institutional changes affect the economic and social development of a city? While this study documents how the locus of the struggle over what kind of city Glasgow was going to become was local, it also seeks to incorporate an understanding of the larger political transition to Thatcherism in Britain and the development of a supranational form of governance within the European Community. On the one hand, these higher scales of authority shaped the possibilities and realities in Glasgow, and on the other hand, the success or failure of what happened in the city influenced the policies of these other

institutions. Moreover, I work through, in some detail, the specific configurations of actors in institutions to see not only how the various projects of different individuals are compatible in some ways and conflicting in others, but also to show how institutional resources are mobilized and invested in by individuals and networks in order to achieve the perceived ends of various factions within these institutions. While I believe it is important to examine higher scales of authority, I am still sensitive to how, locally, different interpretations of Glasgow's transition from being a city primarily industrial to something different produced a host of conflicts over what resources would be valued or devalued. These struggles were often expressed, during the European City of Culture, through questions of culture and identity.

Glasgow's 19th-century fortunes were born out of shipbuilding, steel, and coal, where the cumulative and synergistic relationship among these three elements launched this West Scotland city to the commanding heights of the global economy.[7] While the industrialization of the city had preceded the climax of the British Empire, Glasgow really came of age during its apex, attaining the title of "The Second City of the Empire." In part, the Empire helped to secure markets from the city's goods, while internally the massive and continual expansion of the domestic economy in the British Isles fueled the industrialization of the Strathclyde region. Glasgow's industrialization was also supported endogenously by a steady stream of Irish immigrants, who were forced to leave Ireland because of famine or persecution, and who flooded into the city's factories seeking jobs, a new life, and a higher standard of living. This massive influx of

[7] Peter Hall, *Cities in Civilizations* (London: Wiedenfeld & Nicolson, 1998) 348-76.

Irish immigration forever changed the cultural fabric of Glasgow, making the city truly unique in Britain. Moreover, many of these Irish were Catholics, and it is not an overstatement to say that the sectarian problems between Catholics and Protestants on the East coast of Ireland would often be mirrored on the West coast of Scotland.

Politically, in the 18th-century Britain had a limited voting franchise but as the 19th century wore on, in part because of protest and agitation, many of those who had previously been excluded from the political process, such as the mass of the working class, were granted suffrage, and they quickly began organizing and taking control of many key elected offices, especially at the local level. In Glasgow, by the 1930s the Labour Party had become the dominant political party, a reign that it would maintain nearly straight through to the present. Moreover, by the mid portion of the 20th century the Labour Party had nationally eclipsed the Liberal Democrat Party as the main rival to the Tory Party, and its electoral victories in 1945 ushered it into control of the government, which not only ensured its position as one of the dominant national parties in Britain, but was an important step in the development of the British welfare state and the post-war Keynesian consensus. Whether Conservative or Labour, each consecutive central government expanded the reach of the states in managing the national economy, which in addition to nationalizing key industries such as coal or airlines, led to an enormous growth in the size and demands of local authorities such as Glasgow's. Working in tandem with the national government, many local governments, especially those controlled by the Labour Party, helped to expand

the provision of public services, and in some cases these local authorities ended up growing into significantly powerful institutions that could manage many aspects of local affairs, from the provision of local housing to the financing of public art.

The relatively symbiotic relationship between the nationalization of services and the expanding domain of local authorities into the provision of services existed for about 30 years. Then, beginning around 1976, after a Pound Sterling crisis, the welfare state in Great Britain was effectively forced by the austerity of the International Monetary Fund to undergo a series of reforms, many of which required critical changes to the structure of local authority finance. Thus, some local authority reforms were already underway when the "real" revolution in local government and an accompanying transformation of the British welfare state happened after the 1979 electoral victory of the Conservative Party, and the ascension of Margaret Thatcher to the position of Prime Minister. Distinguished not only for being one of Britain's longest-serving Prime Ministers and the first female to hold that important office, Thatcher was also one of the only Party Leaders to ever have an ideology associated with her name. Thatcherism, as it has since been called, was the ideological position that the apparent failures of the British economy, represented by Britain's near financial collapse in 1975, could be tied directly to the growth of the welfare state and the culture of dependence that it had supposedly produced. Perhaps more famous internationally for her privatization of many key national industries, such as British Airways, her confrontation with mine workers in the early 1980s, and the

British military campaign in the Falkland Islands, in Britain, her reformation of local government was well regarded as a revolution. Intending to dismantle the massive architecture of the welfare state that had emerged during the post-war Keynesian consensus, Thatcher's policies were deliberate attempts to curtail the growth of the government's provisions of social services by financially starving the providers — the hundreds of local British authorities. The centerpiece of the Thatcherite revolution in local government reform was the introduction of private-sector criteria, such as the profitability of services, and a theory that the private sector nearly always performed better than the public sector in administering services. At the root of the Thatcher revolution was the extension of the private-sector to new domains, such as art, and the vigorous belief that the government should empower private entrepreneurs, not compete against them.

Following the empty chair debacle of the mid-1960s, the 1970s was not a particularly rosy time for the institutions of the European Community.[8] Although 1973 had been marked by the historic entrance of Britain as a full member of the European Community (after having been systematically blocked by de Gaulle for nearly twenty years), the floundering European economy in the 1970s, in part the result of massive global economic restructuring, had led to a remarkably moribund period in interest in wider European cooperation. Nevertheless, it is important to understand certain changes in Britain in reference to the changing role of the European Community. Beginning in the 1980s, after the first direct election of a European Parliament, there was a fair amount of discussion to

[8] The "empty-chair" policy refers to the policy, employed by the French government in the mid-1960s, that exploited the unanimous voting rules of the European Community and brought the institutions to a halt by refusing to participate in any intergovernmental meetings.

reinvigorate the European Community, and although the next major high water mark for the development of the institutions of the European Community probably was not until 1987, with the ratification of the Single European Act, many minor changes were underway that were paving a path for the more robust development of a multilayered system of governance. From the early 1980s, the European Community jurisdiction had been gradually expanding into many domains (some unofficially, as in cultural policy) and had been developing mechanisms for the redistribution of wealth across Europe (for a range of reasons, such as the alleviation of poverty and the restoration of archeological and architectural sites). Some locales, such as Scotland's Strathclyde Region, were very adept at taking advantage of the growth of the European Community, and were able to secure funds directly from the Community for projects within their jurisdictions. Moreover, while the full jurisdiction of cultural affairs had been retained by the each member state of the European Community, there was a noticeable rise in discussion and statutes pertaining to the development of European-wide rules pertaining to culture. While the rules were, in many regards, intended to enhance the powers of the institutions of the European Community, in many ways they also served to enhance the role of minority communities who could argue for their cultural autonomy from the "traditional" European nation-states vis-à-vis a unified Europe. Hence, a strengthened Europe had also — in a slightly less than undeliberate manner — helped to undermine the cultural authority of the European nation-state.

Furthermore, this study attempts to productively use the concepts of identity and culture in approaching a range of topics surrounding the development of Glasgow. Most observers would conclude that identity and culture are intimately linked. On the one hand, one's own culture is reflected in his or her personal identity, as it is hard to separate who a person is from the codes and norms that shape his life. On the other hand, culture helps to establish a precondition for collective identifications by constituting a communal and collective sense of belonging. More recently, culture has become an important site for commercial activity, as heritage becomes a product that can be sold and exploited by many associate tourist-related service industries such as hotels or restaurants. While this poses particular problems for those who wish to preserve a cultural purity and believe that economic exploitation debases the sacrosanctity of a peoples' form of life, the commercialization and commodification of culture has been shown to have important ramifications for politics and identity. In the case of the European Community, the desire on the part of the Europeanists (those who wished to expand the powers of the European Community) to develop a full coherent European identity was to be achieved by exploiting the ambiguity between culture as a set of economic practices and less tangible feelings of belonging. Hence, a political project was being underwritten by the creation of cultural policy. Moreover, when the European City of Culture festival was held in Glasgow, the many cultural events, mostly staged to boost the city's economic potential, became an important site of contest and controversy. In addition to helping raise local consciousness about the culture and social history of Glasgow,

the festival more generally gave important support to those who were invested in the resurgence of Scottish nationalism.

The present study is organized into five chapters, which detail: (1) a literature review and criticism of some contemporary theories of urban development; (2) the development of cultural and urban policy within the institutions of the European Community; (3) the effects of the Thatcher political revolution on art and urban policy; (4) the role of political power and economic interests in the refashioning of Glasgow; and (5) the importance of culture and identity in urban conflicts. What I hope to achieve is not just another study of Glasgow, although the city is certainly emblematic of the problems facing a large collection of cities that are increasingly using culture as an option for urban renewal. Nor, while criticizing two dominant theories in urban geography (urban regime and growth theories) for their localist bias, do I simply indulge in offering a new critique of theories of urban politics and development. Rather, I would argue that by looking at various histories of a very specific initiative (and many of its accompanying policies and projects) by means of several institutional scales, one is able to see a more adequate characterization of how processes, mechanisms, and authorities influence patterns of urbanization. Moreover, by making use of the concept of culture, I hope to more adequately present the behavior of people within institutions, as well as explain the increasingly significant role that culture has in the economic fortunes of cities.