

'If everyone says so ...' Press narratives and image change in major event host cities

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Abstract

This paper looks into the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) programme as a leading example of culture-led regeneration intervention aimed at renewing or diversifying the economic base and positioning of host cities. One of the key claims associated with the programme is that it can transform the 'image' of a city. These image transformation claims are often supported by evidence of heightened or more positive media coverage in the short term. However, little evidence has generally been gathered to determine long-term, sustained image change. The paper seeks to at least partly address this lacuna by presenting evidence on the media representation of Glasgow and Liverpool over three decades. These two cities are widely perceived to be paradigmatic not only of successful culture-led regeneration but also of the power of the ECoC title to transform city image. The paper looks at the importance of the media narrative arc surrounding major cultural events in solidifying 'image change' processes, regardless of the existence of evidence to suggest a change in perceptions by local communities at the time the event is taking place. The core argument is that if media coverage about a particular place shows a significant change in focus and attitude over time, is voluminous enough and cuts across geographical and journalistic variations, then it effectively becomes a key source of evidence of de facto image change. The key proposition in this paper is that evidenceable and sustained change in media representations of place can be taken as tantamount to image change. This is based on the assumption that widespread and longitudinal trends in media representation have the capacity to both reflect and influence public attitudes and perceptions.

Keywords

city image, European Capital of Culture, Glasgow, Liverpool, media narrative, press content analysis

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Introduction: European Capitals of Culture and image-making

Hosting a major one-off cultural event has become a key aspiration for post-industrial cities attempting to catalyse the development

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of a 'creative' economy and position themselves as national or international cultural centres. In the European context, the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) programme – an EU initiative launched in 1985 and awarded to more than 60 cities in 30 European countries – has come to serve as a key platform for the realisation of such aspirations. One of the main claims associated with this programme is that it can transform the 'image'¹ of a city and that this, in turn, can lead to widespread social (e.g. boosting pride) and economic (e.g. attracting tourists and investment) benefits (see Richards and Wilson, 2004).

The first ECoC host city to fully explore these possibilities was Glasgow, host of the 1990 edition. Since Glasgow, image transformation has become a primary objective for many ECoC hosts, as observed by Palmer/Rae Associates (2004) Garcia (2004, 2005) and Garcia and Cox (2013). Indeed, the champions of the Liverpool 2008 bid mentioned Glasgow 1990 extensively as a key point of reference and model to replicate. Yet, claims about the capacity for major cultural events – be it the ECoC or other events – to change the image of cities have rarely been backed up by concrete evidence. Instead, image transformation claims have tended to become self-fulfilling prophecies, with the concerted efforts of local agencies and event organisers to project a 'city renaissance' narrative resulting in media discussion that echoes, amplifies and legitimises this narrative.

This paper looks at the importance of the media narrative arc surrounding major cultural events in solidifying 'image change' processes, regardless of the existence of evidence to suggest a change in perceptions by local communities at the time the event is taking place. The core argument is that if media coverage about a particular place shows a significant change in focus and attitude over time, is voluminous enough and cuts across geographical (i.e. local, national,

international) and journalistic (i.e. popular, broadsheet, specialised) variations, then it effectively becomes a key source of evidence of de facto image change and confirms the capacity for major events to catalyse cultural identity renaissance in some cities, even in the absence of detailed knowledge about public perception, acceptance or rejection of the official rhetoric. The key assumption behind this paper is that sustained change in media representations of place can be taken as tantamount to image change. This is because widespread media representation of special events has the capacity to both reflect and influence public attitudes and perceptions. As noted by Roth and Frank (2000):

in order to better understand the construction and production of festivals one needs to pay more attention to the role of the media. (p. 237)

The paper focuses on the exploration of a large collection of comparable press data published over several decades in relation to two ECoC host cities. The focus is, thus, on written, press media and excludes audiovisual and social media narratives. Traditional press media has been favoured over other sources because the time factor (several decades) is considered essential to capture sustained narrative changes that, in turn, can back-up the mediated image change theory proposed here. Indeed, the advent of new media creates multiple new avenues to discuss how images of place are generated, disseminated and appropriated. But traditional press media, as published in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, offer (with some caveats)² unmatched continuity in the representation of places and are thus the most relevant source of evidence for this paper.

Major city events and image making

Discussion around the capacity for special events to transform images of place became

popular within cultural geography and urban studies circles throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Classic texts such as David Harvey's *The Urban Experience* (1989) pointed at the then 'new' move from managerialism to entrepreneurialism in city governance and interrogated the trend towards imaging and reimagining places through city marketing and special interventions. In his words:

The production of an urban image through, for example, the organisation of spectacles ... becomes an important facet of interurban competition at the same time as it becomes a means to rally potentially alienated populations to a common cause. (p. 233)

Harvey goes on to characterise such spectacles as a 'carnival mask' used to cover-up deeper unresolved social issues. Such view, rooted in political economy, has dominated sociological debate around the uses of culture and events as 'symbolic capital' to represent and 'sell' cities (Kearns and Philo, 1993; Zukin, 1995) and/or reproduce hegemonic power structures (e.g. Lenskyj, 2000, focusing on the Olympic Games). However, an empirical tradition has also developed, this time mainly informed by media and leisure studies, to touch on the same topics without necessarily reaching the same conclusions. As noted by Schuster (2001), 'not every commentator who has taken a look at ephemera has come away critical' (p. 372). Examples include Hiller's work on the Calgary 1988 Games and its capacity to result in 'class role reversal at Carnival time' (Hiller, quoted in Schuster, 2001: 372) and Ley and Old's work on world fairs which, though building on Harvey's theory of 'hegemonic imposition through spectacle', ends up concluding that 'the cultural dupes posed by mass culture theorists are less visible on the ground than they are in nonempirical speculation' (Ley and Olds, 1988: 203).

The last ten years have seen a growth in discussion around the role of the media as makers of place image and identity. Again,

views are divided between a more discursive camp (e.g. McGuirk and Rowe, 2001; Parisi and Holcomb, 1994) who argue mainstream media play a role 'manipulating place identity' because of having a 'vested interest in the continued prosperity of their constituent audience base' (McGuirk and Rowe, 2001: 53); and those focusing on empirical analysis and debating operational frameworks to highlight noticeable change in media trends so as to identify and evidence variation in narrative cycles, that is, media sources varying the way in which they represent the same city overtime (Avraham, 2000; Garcia, 2005; Garcia and Cox, 2013; Reason and Garcia, 2007). Importantly, the latter studies tend to privilege national and international media narratives, thus avoiding the kind of local angle or 'vested interest' against which McGuirk and Rowe warn us.

This paper is entirely based on empirical evidence, gathered over 15 years and covering three decades. As is argued below, the emphasis is on showcasing quantitative trends, to account for the large volume of data under analysis. The paper adds to the literature by offering proof that media narratives of place can visibly change on the wake of a major event intervention and thus contribute to the construction of alternative (often, improved) images of cities previously represented as hubs of failure and decline. The paper does not look into people's perceptions or interpretation of the media texts under discussion (i.e. the paper is not about 'reception', in the sense discussed by Hall, 1980). Instead, it aims to show how opinion formers (press journalists and their editors) present stories about post-industrial cities which have a history attracting negative media attention and have subsequently engaged in the kinds of city marketing and rebranding exercises noted by Harvey and others since the 1980s.

Without denying the importance of early works questioning the capacity for event-led

urban regeneration and rebranding exercises to be fully inclusive and representative of all city voices (see Goss, 1997; Kearns and Philo, 1993), the paper offers, instead, evidence of the impact of such initiatives as a catalyst for narrative transformation in the public domain. Such narrative changes can, in turn, lead on to broader societal effects by raising the sense of pride, aspiration and citizen engagement of local communities (see: Garcia et al., 2010; Melville et al., 2010). However, this is not the point of the paper; the focus is, rather, on offering a detailed account of change as reflected in over 13,600 published stories about two major event host cities from the time of being awarded the event to up to 10 years later.

From ‘myth management’ to data capture: Media content analysis

After over a decade of rarely questioned assertions regarding Glasgow’s success as a European City of Culture and its status as a key exemplar of culture-led regeneration – what its director, Bob Palmer, has often defined as a city’s capacity to ‘manage its own myths’ (Richards and Palmer, 2010), the Centre for Cultural Policy Research (CCPR) at the University of Glasgow committed funds to revisit the city’s experience in order to understand its long-term cultural legacy. The focus of the research was on assessing one of the least tangible but most widely celebrated dimensions of this success story: namely, the city’s apparently remarkable image renaissance, particularly within a UK context (see Garcia, 2004, 2005).

In order to retrospectively capture and interrogate this ‘image transformation’ process after the passage of more than 10 years, the research team at the University of Glasgow opted for a comprehensive press media content analysis exercise that spanned the entire event life-cycle: from the year of nomination (1986), up to the event year itself

(1990) and its aftermath (up until 2003). A similar methodological approach was followed in the context of the next UK ECoC, Liverpool 2008, via a research programme, Impacts 08, that spanned over five years and comprised more than 35 separate projects, including a media content analysis exercise (see Garcia, 2006, 2010; Garcia et al., 2010).

The methodology and key findings of these studies have been detailed extensively elsewhere (Garcia, 2005, 2006, 2010; Reason and Garcia, 2007). In this paper, the focus is on the actual media narrative arc and the variations in thematic and attitudinal emphasis (both over time and across event-specific and city-generic coverage), to show how a cultural event may change the way the media refers to a host city far beyond the event delivery period.

The main question that the paper addresses is how media coverage of special one-off events reflects or affects city image in the immediate to long term. The press coverage that has been collated in support of this exercise is mainly centered around discussions of the ECoC in each of the two cities, but with important variations which are summarised in Table 1.

In order to detect or infer potential shifts in broader city narratives, the media content analysis focused in both cases on the following aspects of ECoC-specific coverage:

1. The *themes* which emerge as most dominant in coverage of event preparation, hosting or legacy.
2. The degree to which the most dominant tone of a given article is *positive, negative* or *neutral*.
3. Combining the above, the degree to which certain themes become dominant as well as consistently treated in a positive or negative way, suggesting the ‘normalisation’ or ‘mainstreaming’ over time of certain types of stories about cities as ECoC hosts.

Table 1. Press content analyses of Glasgow 1990 and Liverpool 2008 compared.

	Glasgow 1990	Liverpool 2008
Focus of press content analysis	All press clippings gathered relate to ECoC activity.	Two data sets were collated: one focuses on articles that make explicit mention to the ECoC; another includes articles about Liverpool in general, regardless of any explicit reference to the ECoC.
Period covered by press clippings	Over 18 years in total, covering both the event preparation and event year, as well as 13 years of coverage post-event.	ECoC-related coverage spans five years in total, covering the bidding process through to the end of the event year. Coverage on Liverpool in general was collected at two additional points (i.e. seven and three years pre-award) thus resulting in a period spanning over 12 years.
Range of press sources used	Combines UK national press, Glasgow local press and other UK local press. The first two are the only sources used for coverage about event preparation and event year in order to ensure full comparability with the Liverpool 2008 data set (see next column). 'Other UK local press' take up to 38.5% of event aftermath coverage (from 1992 onwards) owing to it being the time for the 2008 UK-wide bidding process, involving six shortlisted cities.	Combines UK national press and Liverpool local press exclusively to enable direct comparison with Glasgow 1990 coverage during the event preparation and event year.

The latter question is arguably at the heart of any evidenceable – and sustained – change in the way a city is represented by the media in the wake of hosting an ECoC. In the case of Glasgow, the available data provide grounds to show how certain stories have become practically unquestioned as a result of having been repeated consistently over a long period of time; in the case of Liverpool, the data timespan is shorter but it is possible to identify significant narrative change and argue that this has been triggered by the ECoC in the case when there are clear parallels between new trends in ECoC-specific as well as generic city coverage.

Prior to discussing the most significant findings, find below a brief overview of the methodological approach. In all cases, a

period of testing was required to ensure coding was conducted in a consistent manner across all data sets. This involved having a selection of articles coded by two separate researchers to ensure their choices were as similar as possible (see a more detailed discussion of this process in Reason and Garcia, 2007).

Identifying relevant articles

Press articles were mainly accessed via the electronic database Lexis Nexis, with the exception of the data set covering Glasgow between 1986 and 1990, which was, instead, the original press clippings archive produced by the Glasgow Festival Office (the body in charge of delivering the ECoC) and stored

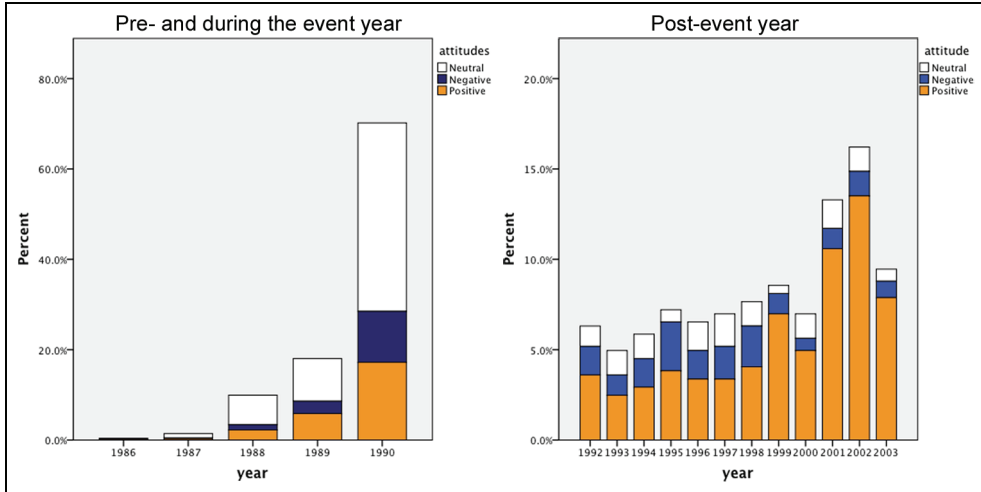


Figure 1. Volume and attitudes of press coverage on Glasgow 1990, 1986–2003 (%).

Pre- and during event: $N = 5023$ articles, of which 85% Scottish papers; 16% UK national press.

Post event: $N = 1318$ articles, of which 48% Scottish papers; 9.2% UK national press and 38.5% other UK local press (mainly from 2008 ECoC bidding cities).

at the city's Mitchell Library. This archive, composed (at the time of the research) of 20-year old article photocopies, was rapidly deteriorating. As such a decision was made to code all the articles in storage (over 6500 in total) of which 5023 were deemed suitable for analysis. All articles in this collection referred explicitly to the Glasgow 1990 ECoC (see Reason and Garcia, 2007).

The Lexis Nexis newspaper database allowed electronic searches in order to identify relevant articles for all subsequent datasets. Identification took place in the following way:

- *Articles on the ECoC process* (for Glasgow and Liverpool): searches were conducted across all UK national and a selection of local papers that included the terms: Liverpool 2008 or Glasgow 1990; 'city of culture' or 'capital of culture'. A series of algorithms were introduced to account for relevant phrase variations. In the case of Liverpool, this

resulted in 1138 national and 5811 local articles. All national articles were coded, while 20% (1155) of local articles were coded thematically and attitudinally. For Glasgow see Figure 1.

- *Articles on the city at large* (for Liverpool only): in order to create a manageable but representative sample of press articles on Liverpool, an electronic search algorithm was created so as to exclude stories about football, which have consistently represented over 80% of Liverpool related coverage in the UK press. The data presented in this paper (Figure 2) only relate to the remaining 20% of coverage. This amounts to 14,453 national and 31,275 Liverpool local articles, of which a sample of 2200 (11% of all nationals, 2% of all locals) were thematically and attitudinally coded.

See full details on the methodology in Garcia (2010).

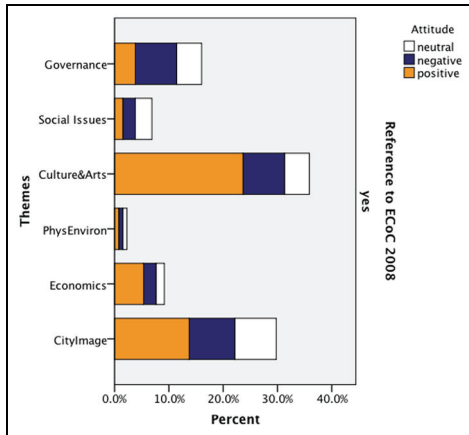


Figure 2. Press attitudes to Liverpool 2008 by theme, UK national press only. $N = 1138$ clippings; Source: Garcia (2010: 26).

Identifying key themes

Following on established practice in press content analysis (Berelson, 1952; Bryman, 2001), the most dominant article theme was identified by looking first into the header, followed by first paragraph and (where available) leading image and/or highlighted quote. Up to two themes per article were coded, particularly in the case of longer articles (e.g. features, opinion pieces) going over 400 words, where the body of the article cover a range of topics in equal measure. In all cases, however, priority was given to the angle chosen within the headline sections.

The selection of key themes has evolved over the years, starting with the Glasgow 1990 Cities and Culture project, where 12 broad themes and 22 subthemes were originally identified for the period ranging 1986 to 1991 (see Reason and Garcia, 2007). The dominant themes were validated in a second exercise, involving assessment of legacy reporting between 1992 and 2003, as identified within the Lexis Nexis database. This resulted in the refinement of top themes, which were reduced to seven. Further validation and coding refinement took place in the

context of the Impacts 08 research programme, covering the period 1996 to 2009 (Garcia, 2006, 2010). The top themes presented in this paper represent the final consolidated coding framework and have been re-applied across all available data sets. They are:

1. City Image
2. Economics
3. Physical Change
4. Arts and Culture
5. Social Issues
6. Governance

Attitudinal analysis

Articles were also coded according to the most dominant attitude as inferred in the heading sections. For simplification purposes, this paper only shows three attitudinal variations (neutral, positive, negative). However, papers were originally coded according to five variations, defined thus:

- *Neutral*: applied to articles that were clearly descriptive in nature. This was noticeable in the case of event listings or 'agenda' items. If articles combined both negative and positive angles, this was not interpreted as 'neutral'. Rather, both angles would be captured and related to two separate themes (as noted in the section above).
- *Positive, descriptive*: applied to articles presenting positive facts (e.g. increase in visitor numbers, opening of a new cultural venue) in a descriptive manner. This was mostly the case with news articles.
- *Negative, descriptive*: as above, but applied to articles presenting negative facts (e.g. the sacking of a high profile event official, traffic disruptions).
- *Positive, analytical*: applied to articles expressing an overtly positive attitude

(by the author/paper) towards the main theme identified. This was mostly the case of cover page headlines, opinion pieces, editorials, review articles and letters to the editor. Typically, headlines would use a celebratory language.

- *Negative, analytical:* as above, but applied to articles expressing an overtly negative attitude to denote concern, criticism against the theme identified.

As in the case of thematic analysis, a selection of articles were coded by two to three separate researchers in order to verify consistency of interpretation. Coders would judge attitude against the specific themes being identified.

Overall, it is important to stress that this methodology and the results presented in this paper lean on a quantitative over qualitative angle, something rare in the existing literature around urban image change. Rather than focus on in-depth analysis of a small selection of high-profile articles (opinion pieces, editorials) the paper explores the value of assessing the full range of published articles on its chosen topic (as available through the Glasgow 1990 archive and Lexis Nexis database) to identify trends across a large data set covering thousands of articles over 22 years. Naturally, simplifications have been required, but any potential coding bias or caveat has been applied consistently across the full data set, thus validating the overall trend identification. The method focuses on content analysis and explicit headline angles over implicit discourse analysis.

Press narratives of urban change: Two decades of regeneration stories

Examining the variations and similarities between the media narratives that surrounded Glasgow 1990 and Liverpool 2008

offers a significant insight into the way that culture-led regeneration rhetoric has evolved and grown over time. Glasgow can be seen as emblematic of the pioneering experiments with culture-led regeneration in the 1980s and 1990s, whereas Liverpool's year as capital of culture arguably represented the high water mark of such strategies in the 2000s, before the global financial crisis struck and opened a period of instability in the cultural regeneration discourse, from 2009 onwards. (See Harris and Moreno, 2012; Lovering, 2009, for a discussion around urban cultural policy at times of austerity.)

The section starts by discussing key findings on Glasgow, which is widely viewed as a pioneer in image management and culture-led regeneration rhetoric. This city developed a formal city marketing campaign more than a decade before this became common practice in other parts of the UK or Europe (Paddison, 1993). This is reflected in media narratives around the preparation, hosting and aftermath of the ECoC title and explains the progressive positioning of Glasgow as a key exemplar of 'success' for all ECoCs to come, and a key referent for cities embarking in a 'renaissance' strategy (Garcia, 2005). The second part focuses on Liverpool, highlighting findings specific to this city but also remarking on key points of distinction.

Glasgow 1990

Below are a series of figures that offer an overview of the key findings to emerge from the CCPR's 18-year media content analysis of Glasgow and the impact of its hosting the ECoC title (see also Garcia, 2005; Reason and Garcia, 2007).

One of the clearest findings is that, as a pioneer in this area, Glasgow faced very low expectations to start with. This is reflected in the low proportion of coverage surrounding the bidding stage in 1986, and the immediate growth in the volume of stories (mostly

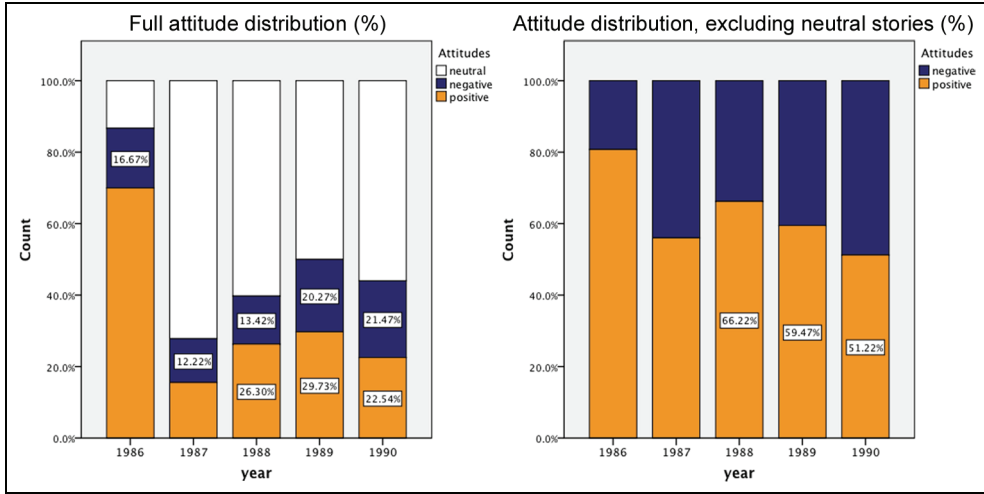


Figure 3. Press attitudes to Glasgow 1990 up to the 1990 ECoC year (%). N = 5023 articles; Source: CCPR Cities & Culture Project Datasets (see Garcia, 2004).

neutral or positive) as soon as aspects of the cultural programme were announced in 1988 (see Figure 1). After the event, the volume of coverage – though experiencing a logical drop to start with, as seen in Figure 1 – began to exceed pre-event levels and became dominantly positive, particularly from 1990 onwards.

Interestingly, up to 1990 itself, the period of time attracting the highest volume of positive over negative coverage was 1988, two years before the actual ECoC event (see Figure 3).³ This was the year when one of Glasgow’s new contemporary art flagship venues, The Tramway, opened up to the public and presented a world premiere of renowned theatre director Peter Brook’s *The Mahabharata*, forcing top London-based art critics to travel up north in unprecedented numbers (for many, this was their first time in Glasgow) (Garcia, 2005). This was a major coup and the point at which discussion on Glasgow’s cultural credentials turned more serious, with Glasgow’s contemporary arts scene no longer indulgently treated as a provincial surprise, but rather as

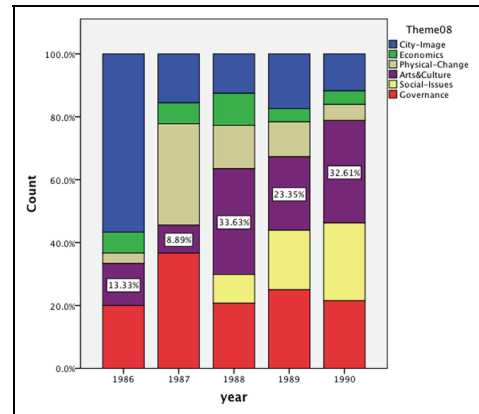


Figure 4. Thematic variations in press coverage up to the Glasgow 1990 EcoC year, 1986–1990 (%). N = 5023 articles; Source: CCPR Cities & Culture Project Datasets (see Garcia, 2004).

a mature contender amongst the best on offer across the UK and internationally. From that point on, the cultural angle started to occupy a greater proportion of total media discussion (see Figure 4) – a clear indication that, for the first time, the city was being judged, not only on its ability to ‘surprise’ and change its image of

post-industrial decay, but on its capacity to deliver a credible cultural programme of ‘European’ standard. Some illustrative examples include:

[Headline] *A Cosmopolitan Cut Above the Sassenachs*: ... Glasgow competes with the rest of Europe in design, architecture and engineering ... The city can finally prove its influence on the rest of Europe and other parts of the world’. (*The Independent*, 11 January 1989)

[Headline] *Scot Free...* It was the relentless application of the highest international standards by organisations like the Citizens [theatre] that brought Glasgow to the point where it could claim its title as European City of Culture, 1990; and it’s only by continuing to apply them that it can carry off its year in the spotlight with any style or credit. (Joyce McMillan, *The Guardian*, 24 September 1988)

During the event year itself, in 1990, it is clear that expectations increased significantly, with the press offering considerable levels of positive *and* negative coverage (see Figure 3). By far, the area that attracted most criticism was the governance of the event, which, in the early years, dominated over culture-related stories, particularly within the local press (see Figures 4 and 5). Tellingly, however, these criticisms, and the dominance of political debate, start to diminish in the event aftermath (1992 to 1997) and become almost invisible in the long term (1998 to 2003): a period that is instead dominated by increasingly positive reflection around key legacies, with a focus on economic and image change stories over everything else (see Figures 6 and 7).

Overall, by 1990 and during its immediate aftermath, the international press contributed a range of celebratory headlines and quotes which, in turn, would be referred to by local and national papers in order to validate claims of Glasgow’s ‘image renaissance’. Some illustrative examples:

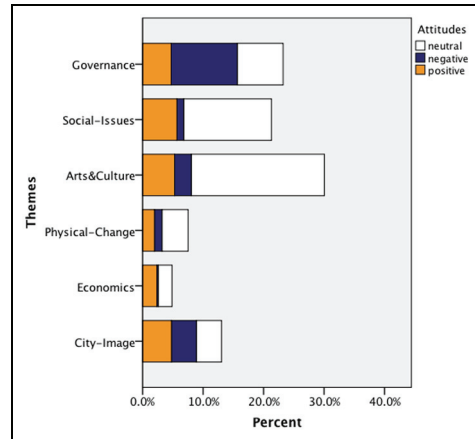


Figure 5. Overall press attitudes to Glasgow 1990 by theme, 1986–1990 (%).

N = 5023 articles; Source: CCPR Cities & Culture Project Datasets (see Garcia, 2004).

Der Tagesspiegel: The city that washed its face: Glasgow – one-time industrial metropolis; European City of Culture 1990.

Wall Street Journal: Glasgow’s no mean city anymore.

New York Times: Newly scrubbed of soot, the city bustles with cultural events, commerce and fresh hope.

New York Times: Good grief, It’s Glasgow!

Sydney Morning Herald: Glasgow’s reputation as Scotland’s biggest, dirtiest, slummiest, most violent city is no more ... The ghost of an ugly past has been laid to rest.

Los Angeles Herald Examiner: The ugly duckling of Europe has turned into a swan.

Vancouver Sun: From tough industrial town to cultural mecca.

It is important to note that most press coverage during the event lead-up and 1990 itself is brief and mainly descriptive (e.g. references in passing as part of event listings), rather than lengthy and analytical; and that this explains the remarkable dominance of ‘neutral’ stories during this period (see Figure 3). However, this trend changes in the post-event period, with most stories about

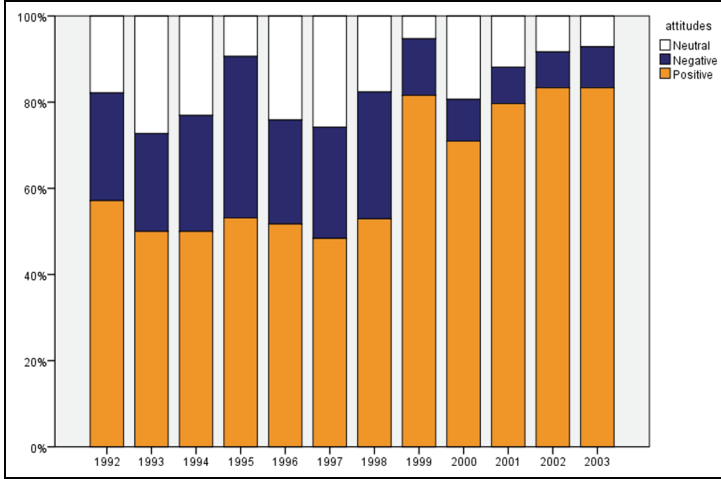


Figure 6. Press attitudes to Glasgow 1990 per year, 1992–2003 (%).
N = 1318 articles; Source: CCPR Cities & Culture Project Datasets (see Garcia, 2004).

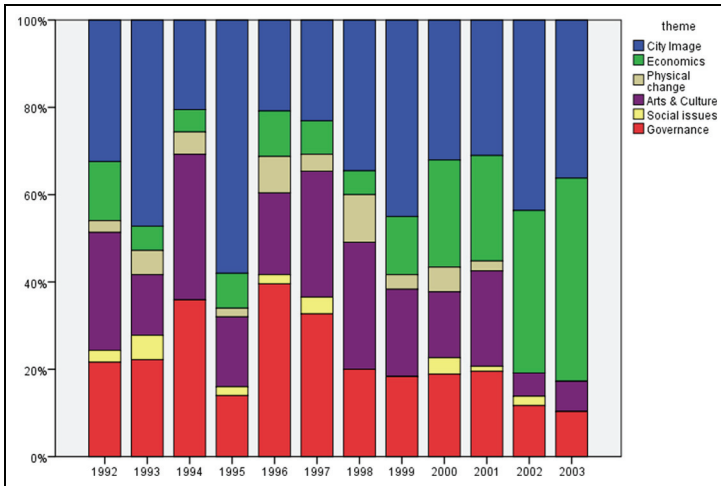


Figure 7. Thematic variations in press coverage referring to Glasgow 1990, 1992–2003 (%).
N = 1318 articles; Source: CCPR Cities & Culture Project Datasets (see Garcia, 2004).

the ECoC taking either a positive or negative spin and focusing on the discussion of event legacies or the lack thereof. This debate over the legacy of Glasgow’s year as capital of culture seems to continue up to 1998, but with the press focusing overwhelmingly on positive stories from 1999 onwards (see Figure 6).

As a final point of interest, a topic that attracted considerable attention one year after Glasgow’s nomination, in 1987, but became insignificant to the ECoC debate in the event’s aftermath is that of the physical dimensions of cultural regeneration (see Figure 4 and Figure 7). Figure 8 is illustrative of the importance given to physical

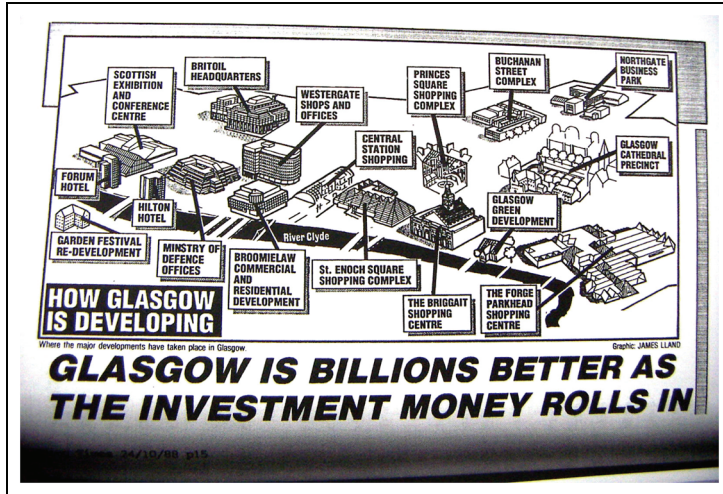


Figure 8. Article on Glasgow's physical regeneration experience.
 Source: *The Herald*, 24 October 1988.

transformation as key to Glasgow's renaissance prior to 1990.

The implications of this finding (i.e. the disappearance of physical regeneration discussion as a leading topic to articulate ECoC legacies and/or city transformation) are touched on further within the next sections.

Liverpool 2008

The media narrative arc surrounding Liverpool is similar to Glasgow in some ways, but in others considerably different, despite the fact that the city followed to a great extent in the footsteps of Glasgow. In the case of Liverpool, a valuable additional insight provided by the available data is the fact that we can compare variations in coverage about the ECoC specifically with coverage about the city in general.

The first noticeable difference between the volume trends for Glasgow and Liverpool is the considerably greater coverage of the latter (see Figure 9, comparing UK national press coverage about both ECoC editions). Indeed, by 2003, the year of

the 2008 ECoC award, the event bidding period had clearly become a key highlight in its own right, not just in the UK, but across Europe. Expectations of the ECoC as a catalyst for urban transformation had rocketed, with discussion about the effects of winning or losing on the immediate fortunes of respective candidates (the six bidding cities, in the case of the 2008 UK edition) becoming a matter of intense speculation, even before the award year (see also Garcia and Cox, 2013: 124–126).

Press coverage of the Liverpool ECoC was largely positive throughout, peaking during the bidding year in 2003, but remaining high during the event itself (see Figure 10). In similar fashion to Glasgow, there was a growth in negative coverage after winning the bid that was mostly attributable to the city's local press; however, this peaked in the year preceding the event and declined thereafter. Like Glasgow, most negative coverage related to governance controversies – particularly issues around event leadership and city politics which concentrated in 2007 (see Figures 2 and 11).

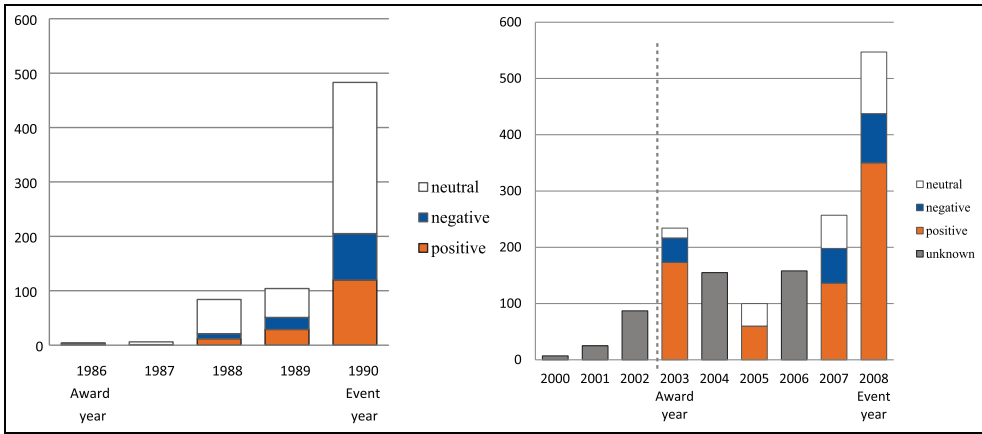


Figure 9. Volume and attitudes of coverage from award to event year: Glasgow 1990 vs Liverpool 2008. Source: CCPR Cities & Culture Project Datasets; Impacts 08 Datasets (see also Garcia, 2004; Garcia et al., 2010).

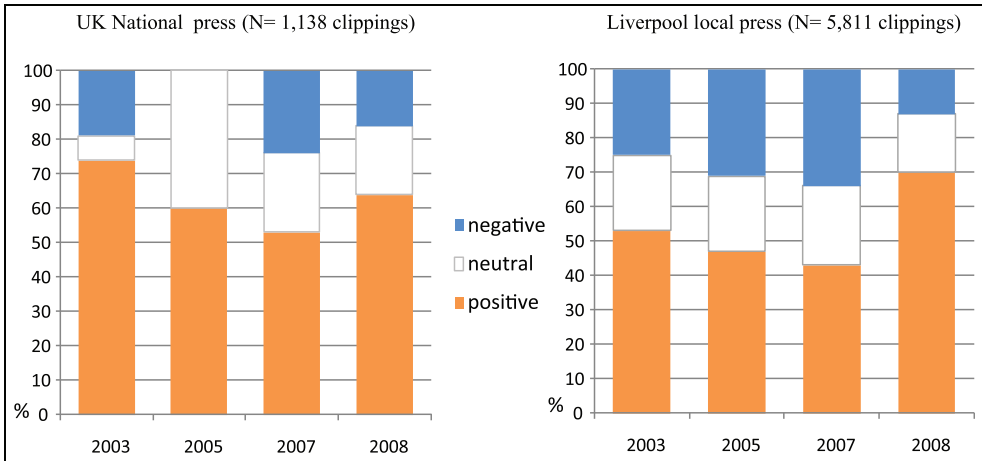


Figure 10. Press attitudes in Liverpool 2008 stories, UK national vs. Liverpool local press (%). Source: Garcia (2010: 27).

As noted, most of the negative governance reporting occurred within the local press, but it is also possible to identify some national stories:

[Headline] *Out with the new, in with the old. As it prepares to be City of Culture, Liverpool should be cherishing its past, not razing it: ... there are two flies in the ointment. The first is*

the age-old Liverpool handicap of divided city leadership. Just as [St George’s Hall architect] Elmes was undone by corporation politicking, the Capital of Culture management has been split by rivalries and resignations. Meanwhile, City Hall is still suffering the fall out from an ugly fight between the council leader and chief executive. At the same time, amid the rush for growth, there is a worrying disregard for



Figure 11. Negative headlines around Liverpool 2008 event leadership and city politics.

Liverpool's existing urban treasures. (*The Observer*, 22 April 2007)

Thematically, as in the case of Glasgow, the most remarkable trend is the noticeable emphasis on the city's cultural offer (particularly, discussion around the quality and/or international standing of its artistic programming), which grew as the ECoC year approached (see Figure 12). This explosion in national coverage dedicated to the city's cultural assets in the context of the ECoC likely accounts for the 211% increase in culture-focused stories in *non*-ECoC related coverage (between 1996 and 2008), and, consequently, the emergence of culture as one of the dominant themes in coverage about Liverpool in general (see Figure 12 and Garcia, 2010: 2).

Debate over the image of the city also followed a similar trend to Glasgow, being most prominent at the bidding stage. This period coincided, as well, with what we could consider to be one of the key 'Glasgow 1990 legacy' media reporting periods, in 2003, when most articles on candidate cities were referring to Glasgow 1990 as a 'successful'

example and a model worth replicating. During this time, the other key dominant theme, which had not been considered as relevant at the time of Glasgow bidding, is discussion on the economic benefits of hosting an ECoC (see Figure 12, National press).

[Headline] *National: No culture amid the cotton?:* Liverpool's experience last year proves that cultural life most definitely does not begin and end within the M25 ... A cultural spotlight on a city can have a fantastic effect on inward investment, and give a real lift to local morale. (*The Guardian*, 10 September 2009b: 15)

[Headline] *Arts! Follow that Spider...* despite this building site ending, it is hard not to be taken aback by the transformation of the city as a result of the £4bn of investment that has poured in since it won the title in 2003. For the majority of the population, the most significant event of 2008 was neither a concert nor an exhibition, but the unveiling of the £1bn Liverpool One development, which catapulted the city from 15th to fifth in the UK retail league, and put it third in Conde Nast Traveller's list of desirable UK locations (behind London and Edinburgh). (*The Guardian*, 5 January 2009a: 24)

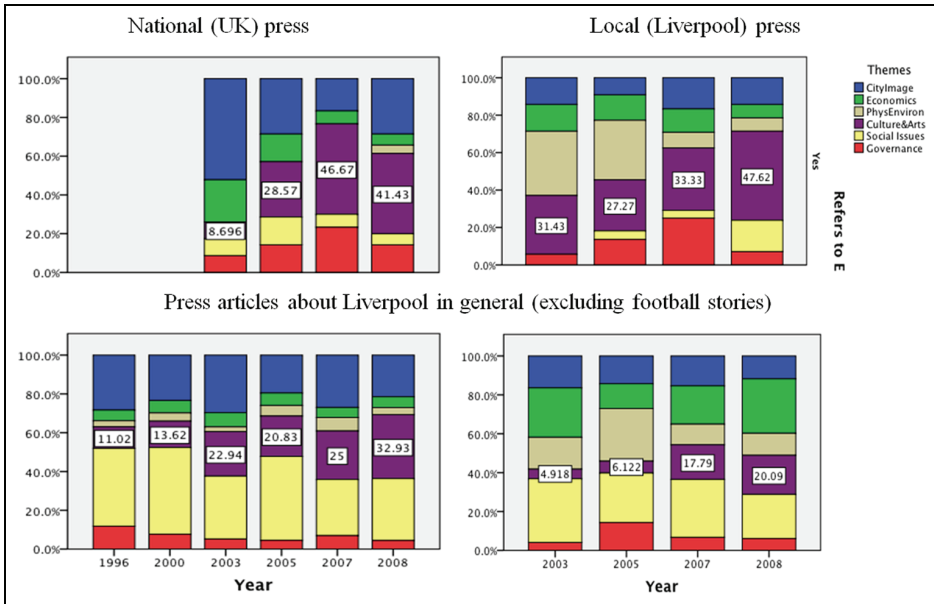


Figure 12. Thematic emphasis of press coverage in relation to Liverpool 2008 (National N = 1138; Local N = 5811) and in relation to Liverpool in general (%) (National N = 14,453; Local N = 31,275).
 Source: Impacts 08 Dataset analysis and Garcia (2010: 12, 20).

Lastly, discussion on physical interventions and impacts retained a far lower profile than had been the case in Glasgow, particularly in the years preceding the event. Almost all ECoC-related *physical regeneration* stories were produced by the Liverpool local press and this was only noticeable during the bidding year and in 2005, three years before the event (see Figure 12, Local press).

As in the case of Glasgow, by the end of 2008, the other relevant factor was the impact of international headlines that would be, in turn, rephrased by national and local media in order to claim ‘success’. Figure 13 shows some examples.

Discussion: The media narrative arc, from 1986 to 2008

The analysis of media narratives around two UK cities that fully engaged in culture-led

regeneration strategies – with Glasgow among the first to do so and Liverpool among the most recent⁴ – suggests that, over 20 years, there have been some noticeable changes in the thematic and attitudinal emphasis of press stories about major events and their capacity to accelerate urban transformations. These can be summarised as:

1. A move from understanding and narrating regeneration as a mainly *physical* process (i.e. involving new buildings or refurbished venues) to perceiving it as a mainly *symbolic* process (i.e. centering around the cities’ capacity to tell a convincing and distinct story about their own ‘renaissance’).
2. A growth in the proportion of positive analysis within dedicated feature articles, as opposed to a dominance of brief and merely descriptive (neutral) stories (i.e. mentioning the ECoC in passing).



Figure 13. National and international headlines about Liverpool 2008 as a ‘success story’.

Source: Liverpool Culture Company (2009).

At the same time, trends in media coverage that have remained similar over three decades are:

1. A focus on the quality of the city’s cultural offer during the event year, contrasting with and emphasis on expected economic outputs and legacies in the event’s aftermath (i.e. Glasgow) or at the time of the award (i.e. Liverpool).
2. An increasing focus on governance issues during the event year, or just before, which become the subject of most of the negative coverage.
3. A continued emphasis on the capacity for cities to ‘change’, ‘come back from the ashes’ or experience an ‘image renaissance’ as most frequent justification of ‘successful regeneration’ or ‘event success’ narratives, particularly, in the event’s aftermath but also during its build-up.

The change in media emphasis around the two key themes within all culture-led regeneration rhetoric (i.e. economics and culture) offers an additional indication of the way regeneration narratives have evolved over time. Throughout the period under analysis,

the underlying motif for the event-led regeneration debate has been the relationship between economic growth and the strength of a city’s cultural offer, but, between the early stages in the 1980s and the late noughties, it is possible to detect a change in the way opinion-formers weigh and discuss the credibility of economic versus cultural outputs as determinant to urban development.

In Glasgow, one the novelties of the ECoC hosting process was the very notion that cultural events could *have* an economic dimension, with organisers pioneering the argument that hosting the ECoC would have a significant effect on the city’s economy (see Myerscough, 1991). Glasgow positioned itself as a ‘first-time’ tourism attraction in the wake of 1990 as this, in itself, was a key motif to claim success. Contrastingly, by the time of Liverpool 2008, the possibility of economic impact was taken for granted and most media reporting required economic claims to be supported with specific evidence of immediate effects (e.g. how many actual tourists have been attracted by the event, how much do they spend as opposed to the average day visitor, etc.) as well as thorough projections of growth and sustainability over time, well beyond the event period (see

ENRS, 2009; Garcia et al., 2010; Raymond, 2010).

Further, while in Glasgow the existence of large cultural institutions was considered a given to secure the ECoC title and gain credibility as a cultural centre (a topic that dominated discussion in the years preceding the event), in Liverpool, as in the case of economic outputs, it became critical to prove the 'cultural case', particularly during the event year. This can be explained on the grounds that, by 2008, in a far more competitive environment than was the case in 1990 (given that, since 2004, most cities were projecting similar 'creative regeneration' claims – Garcia et al., 2010) it was necessary for event promoters to articulate how a credible Capital of Culture is not just targeting tourists seeking an attractive 'shop and dine' destination, but is also appreciated and kept vibrant by the most discerning 'creative classes' (see Florida, 2002). In the context of Liverpool, it is thus significant to observe the dramatic rise in culture-related stories over any other topic and the fact that these became a common motif for city references within the media, even in the case of coverage not referring to the ECoC.

As a final point, is also worth noting once more, however, the thematic trend that has not changed in three decades: and that is the significant volume of coverage dedicated to debating the 'image' of the city, its capacity to undergo a 'renaissance', to 'reinvent' itself or to become 'the next Barcelona' (*The Wall Street Journal*, 28 March 2008), all of these common phrases in the media. For the 1990 edition of the ECoC, as well as the 2008 edition, image dominated both the bidding and legacy stages and served as a key determinant of whether the city had 'succeeded' and had the capacity to become a reference model for future hosts. This is probably the most persuasive argument in support of the view that it is in symbolic, rather than just objective, physical and quantitative terms

that ECoC hosts become success models and international points of reference.

Conclusion: Mediated 'city renaissance' narratives

The journeys of Glasgow and Liverpool illustrate how the media can play a key role in reshaping the contemporary image of cities that have been plagued by widespread negative stereotyping for long periods of time. Media narratives about both cities, which have stood out as either pioneering or latest generation exemplars of 'successful' event-led cultural regeneration, show the clear potential for journalistic discourse to reinvent a city's identity both nationally and internationally. Furthermore, a detailed analysis of press outputs over three decades also reveals a noticeable change of focus in the thematic emphasis and attitudinal positioning of national opinion-formers, and this appears to be in line with the evolving focus of urban regeneration discourse at large.

While in the mid 1980s and early 1990s, the tone and focus of most press articles was that of 'surprise' and wonderment at the possibility that a previously declining post-industrial city could become a cultural hub, by the late 1990s this was pushed as a key aspiration and was a common expectation against which a city's success in a new 'creative economy' would be judged. Physical infrastructure transformation was assumed as a core factor in early media discussions, but this was progressively replaced by broader debate around cultural and creative outputs, thus moving from a material into a more symbolic dimension of regeneration as a key to success.

The one aspect that has remained constant throughout is the focus on discussing the city's overall image and identity in the context of the special event and the capacity for such events to influence non-event-related media narratives. While we do not

have data to assess the relationship between ECoC-specific reporting and general reporting on Glasgow as a city, the assessment of Glasgow 1990 references more than a decade on, and the assessment of generic Liverpool city reporting in the lead up to and during its ECoC year, suggest that event-related narratives have an enduring effect on city representations by the media at large.

Back in the 1990s, Parisi and Holcomb (1994) warned against the existing tension in news narrative, which 'typically mediate between the newspaper's economic self-interest in regional development and the journalistic ideal of public service'. This is a valid point that should inform analysis of city imaging and representation through the press. However, this does not invalidate the argument presented here which is, not about what type of image is essentially 'true', but rather, about proving that city images, as represented through mainstream media narratives, can and do change overtime, and that major event interventions play an important part in making this happen and creating an environment where previously vilified cities become recurrent examples of success and positive reporting. Additional research can show the extent to which such change also impacts on local communities' sense of worth and aspiration.

By 2016, belief in the power of cultural interventions as catalysts for broader urban change is widespread and dominates policy discourse across the globe. This is an assumption that has gained credibility through the recurrent reference to a select group of cities widely viewed as 'success stories'. This paper has considered the examples of Glasgow and Liverpool, but a similar assessment could be made of cities such as Barcelona in the aftermath of hosting the 1992 Olympic Games or Bilbao in the wake of its Guggenheim Museum opening in 1997. In all of these cities, the media have played a key role in telling a story of

transformation and image renaissance, in part by referring to the specificities of each city's cultural and creative offerings but, most tellingly, by dedicating considerable amounts of column inches to dissecting what it takes for a city to 'change its image'.

Ultimately, this suggests that one of the most effective mechanisms for cities to reposition themselves is to have a powerful story to tell about 'change' or, most importantly, about 'overcoming' decline, and to use special events and interventions as a focal point to concentrate attention and generate a sufficient critical mass of headlines backing-up this story so that, over time, it becomes accepted wisdom. The data presented here show how mediated city narratives can change significantly in the wake of a special event intervention and how this change can be sustained by an increasingly diverse number of media over time. More research is needed to compare this with actual citizen perceptions as well as its effects on official city rhetoric and key stakeholder narratives. All the same, some of the data included here already covers part of the latter, as it includes press articles highlighting the views of national and international opinion-leaders within influential policy and practitioner circles.

The paper proposes that if a media story is established and consistently repeated across different platforms over more than a decade without attracting any serious rebuttal, it can become widely accepted. This acceptance will come, not only from the city-elites, decision-makers and opinion-leaders, but also from many of the local and national communities that, having had contradictory or divergent experiences of such cities first-hand, could have, at one time, resisted or contradicted these very narratives of success. A detailed analysis of the latter (i.e. community perceptions) will be the focus of subsequent research, but building on the significant evidence of mediated 'image change' presented here.

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Notes

1. Throughout this paper, the notion of ‘city image’ is used in a socially constructed sense. It is about projection of place rather than its actual, material representation (see Avraham, 2000; Paddison, 1993; Richards and Wilson, 2004).
2. Over the 20 year period recorded here (1986–2008), newspaper journalism has also seen some significant changes, most notably, in its commercial undertaking. While this was rare in the 1980s, by 2008, it was not uncommon for papers to act as sponsors or ‘official presenters’ of special events such as an ECoC. This has been taken into account in the analysis, and no feature articles, weekend supplements or ‘inserts’ published as part of a paper public relations or ‘event presenter’ campaign have been included. On the other hand, newspapers have often used sections of their ‘Culture’ or ‘Entertainment’ pages to offer listings of events (commonly copied from event press releases). This has been common throughout the period under analysis, so such listings have been included – and coded as ‘neutral’ or descriptive event-related items.
3. Note that, although in 1986 the majority of stories are positive, the actual volume of coverage is minimal (only 19 stories in total, versus over 400 and 700 in 1988 and 1989 respectively).
4. Liverpool had been amongst the early adopters of culture-led regeneration strategies in

the UK, investing in its Albert Dock redevelopment in the mid 1980s. However, these developments and their associated media profile were underplayed over the following 15 years and, as a result, the city failed to become a well-known reference point for culture-led regeneration until it hosted the 2008 EcoC (some time after a large contingent of UK cities, including Newcastle-Gatehead and Birmingham, had already succeeded in gaining profile and being viewed as a success in this area).

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