

Here are my thoughts on the whole Cities of Culture, Euro Cities, Capital of Culture, UNESCO Creative Cities, Cultural Olympiad etc.

I have been working in the cultural sector from a local government perspective since 2005 and was a professional musician up to that point. I should point out that I still am a professional musician, albeit part time these days.

Going back to 2003 and the bid to become **European Capital of Culture 2008** – Bradford, along with approx 19 other UK cities went to great lengths and some to great expense to develop bids for the 2008 title. Liverpool won the bid but it took a number of years to win the sceptics over. I was involved in a project as part of **Liverpool 08** and witnessed the change of heart that much of the media and then the general public had about Liverpool.

It was when Phil Redmond came on board that things really started to change for the better.

Going back to the other 18 cities who were not successful. They grouped together and lobbied Tessa Jowell at the time and produced evidence of all the work that had gone into the other bids and how it would be a missed opportunity for this to go to waste. She found some funding (approx £20m I believe) and created the **Urban Cultural Programme** – a year long celebration of culture and the arts in cities across the UK. The funding was distributed by the Millennium Commission. Bradford led the five cities of Yorkshire in a year long celebration of culture called Illuminate. Bradford, Leeds, Sheffield, York and Hull shared good practice; co promoted, fell out massively and made back up again. I was the director of the programme for the last 3 months as the previous director jumped ship for another post.

In my view the programme was very successful for a number of cities who got it right. The major problem was the timescale. From the announcement of the funding to the time limit for spend there just wasn't enough time for cities to organise themselves properly, and I feel that there were a number of missed opportunities, not least to link in better with tourism, especially on an international level.

The evaluation doesn't exactly read that way but that was flawed in many ways (in my view). They made the mistake of trying to evaluate something towards the end of the project rather than building in a robust evaluation process from the start. Here is a link to the evaluation report. The UK evaluation was put together by Sandy Craig who was very switched on but the people who evaluated the Yorkshire strand were all over the place.

<http://www.oxfordinspires.org/Intouch/documents/UrbanCulturalProgramme-Finalreport.doc>

This is where Liverpool got it right. They got the figures to substantiate success and they attached an academic research programme to give it weight. Dr Beatrice Garcia led the evaluation process and **Impacts 08** which focused on social and economic impact of European Capital of Culture. There are many now who say that Liverpool deserved a stroke of luck, which it did, but also that it was in the right place at the right time.

<http://www.liv.ac.uk/impacts08/>

Bradford did ok out of the Urban Cultural Programme, using some of the funding for capital projects such as a new city centre gallery but also encouraging some first rate international talent to Yorkshire, sometimes upsetting local / regional practitioners, who felt a little snubbed.

Bradford was also a member of Euro Cities for a number of years but I'm not entirely sure what we gained from that. We ended up pulling out because we were paying £50k a year for the privilege and not getting the return. The funding mechanism, even for relatively small amounts was too cumbersome and we found that we spent more in officer time filling out report forms than the value of the project.

I think that since 2009, when we were awarded the UNESCO City of Film title the world has changed completely. Most local authorities are downsizing, especially in arts and culture and there are fewer and fewer development roles. I think this is also the same within Arts Council, but without

development how do we encourage our next generation of creatives. To balance that there are many who think that great art is born out of hard times and there are some good historical references to draw on here which I'm sure someone in your position will be aware of. There's a whole other paper on views on lottery funding via ACE & HLF and equalities - is it just another tax on the poor (and the North). Those who play the lottery most benefit least? Robin Hood in reverse. I fully understand all the arguments for supporting our national institutions and many of them in the capital but do feel that there could be a better way of distributing funds across the regions.

In terms of twinning - Bradford is twinned with nine other cities around the world but the links are no longer strong and there are very few local authorities who devote resources to twinning. In a way I consider our UNESCO link as a new form of twinning. We have new collaborative projects emerging with India and China and potential projects with a number of European cities, subject to funding. Again, I feel that there could be closer links between culture and tourism outside of the capital and perhaps that will happen if the 'great' campaign eventually reaches us up North.

I am interested in the emerging economies of the BRIC countries and how culture can benefit and I still feel that the UK has much to offer as originators of cultural and creative content. We write the best songs in the world and sometimes the best scripts and stories. I think that Yorkshire and Bradford are prime for emerging tourism markets from these areas of the world in the same way as Scotland as seen a sharp increase (Visit Britain). Our relationship with UNESCO can assist in spreading the word about what we have to offer.

If you ever fancy a trip up to Bradford please let me know. I'd be happy to arrange a sight seeing tour of our fair city, once the wool capital of the world, boasting cultural icons such as David Hockney, the Brontes, JB Priestley and Frederick Delius and now grappling with inner city depravation and a fast growing, diverse, young population.

Best

David

**David Wilson**  
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