

Kiran Klaus Patel (ed.). *The Cultural Politics of Europe: European Capitals of Culture and European Union since the 1980s* (Routledge/UACES Contemporary European Studies). London: Routledge, 2013. 240 pp.

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Initiated in 1985 as an intergovernmental activity meant to promote exchanges between specific cities and Europe, the European Capitals of Culture (ECOC) program has become a trademark of the European Union cultural policy. Editor Kiran Klaus Patel points out that a crucial paradox underlying the ECOC: “on the one hand, it has firm roots in the integration process, whereas, on the other, it has lived from the myth of being independent of the EU bureaucrats”(2013:7). It is this ambivalence that made the ECOC program so successful, as EU institutional actors, governmental and non-governmental cultural producers, as well as European citizens have used it to negotiate their distinct agendas. The volume’s main contribution is to show that the flexibility that has allowed for new links to be forged among these groups has been accompanied by an increasing involvement of the EU in the ECOC program. As such, it offers a novel angle onto the broader changes transpiring in the relationship between EU institutions and other stakeholders.

The book is organized in three parts: the first analyzes the trajectory of the EU cultural policy, with a focus on the distinct phases of the ECOC since its inception until 2012, while the second and third parts draw upon a series of case studies illustrating the wide range of responses to the program. I will focus my review on two contributions that are especially thought-provoking, as they explore the ECOC as a possible site of conceptual and political flexibility in Europeanization. They do so in different, though theoretically sophisticated, ways: one from the perspective of diverse meanings and institutionally-mediated uses of “culture” and the second on the relationship between the ECOC institution and transnational experts.

In her analysis of the ECOC’s institutional history, Monica Sassatelli identifies three phases in the evolution of the ECOC, marking different approaches to the meaning of “culture” central to this process of legitimizing cities as “European.” “Celebration” had characterized the first stage, with the lion’s share taken by highbrow artistic events, followed by a more inclusive approach to “culture” viewed as a key source for “urban regeneration” in postindustrial settings. The third phase, which Sassatelli calls “capitalization,” has entailed a view of culture as a self-regenerating form of capital. That is, cities look upon the ECOC title as itself representing capital, standing as a solid promise of long-term economic and cultural gains. Within this phase, Sassatelli points out the “paradoxical” correlation between the growing importance of the ECOC to the EU, and the EU’s increasing flexibility about the local actors’ pursuits of their own visions of the program.

Yet, instead of being paradoxical, this is relationship perfectly logical if we view the ECOC as part of broader political landscape of Europeanization. That is, the ECOC has achieved its initial objective: to become a pivotal vehicle not only for asserting a specific understanding of European culture, but also for conferring, attesting to, or denying the European quality of a given locale. The EU can now afford to loosen its stake in this process.

Editor Kiran Klaus Patel addresses this paradox in his own contribution, in which he examines the rising role of transnational experts in the shaping of the ECOC content. He brings Althusser's concept of interpellation to bear on the dynamic relation between the European Commission and the transnational experts involved in the ECOC. Patel shows it is a relatively small group of transnational experts (as opposed to the national or local actors in the specific ECOC cities) who have taken the role of ideological planners of the ECOC program. These transnational cultural experts, though initially a relatively small group of British cultural entrepreneurs, have insisted that the ECOC set forth their "European dimension" in a more systematic manner. They have implicitly assumed the role of cultural translators between the Commission and the ECOC sites, thus expanding their own sphere of influence at the expense of local voices.

At the same time, the Commission, while holding tight to its institutional ownership of the ECOC program, has benefited from having these experts do the hard work. A key buzzword for the justification of the ECOC program, "the European dimension" is, like many others, a very blurry category, as "what it represents in the end, what does it mean is very, very hard to find," as a EP member confessed to Patel. It is exactly this conceptual porosity that offers the cultural experts their share in the game, as they attempt to imbue "the European dimension" with meaning while claiming ownership over it.

In comparison to other domains such as law and economics, however, the professionalization of independent cultural entrepreneurship has not led to a higher autonomy for the experts working with the ECOC program. Instead, Patel contends it has offered simply an illusion of decentralization, while it simultaneously encourages a more hegemonic intervention in the member states' cultural affairs (87). By approaching "integration by interpellation" as "a particularly subtle means of wielding power, aimed less at the management of state affairs but rather at the conduct of individuals and groups" (73), Patel's analysis adds nuance to earlier views of the European Union acting as a sovereign transnational state (Shore 2000).

In fact, this strategy directly echoes much broader changes in practices of governance, like the accountability regimes of the "audit society" (Power 1997 in Strathern 2000). Audit, as a practice of measuring, evaluating, creating (or transforming), and legitimizing economic and social value, has become a new 'technology' (in Foucault's sense) of self-remaking by "helping/monitoring [people] to help/monitor themselves" (Strathern 2000). Professionalization, in an audit society,

entails a subtle transformation of an individual into an extension of an organization via a continuous alignment of that individual's values to those of the organization, all the while enticing the prior to perceive this change as self-beneficial (Shore 2008). If we approached the relationship between the cultural experts and the Commission using this argument, in which the commission provides the rhetoric and categories of evaluation, while asking the experts to fill them with meaning, then the ECOC program might be, in fact, more representative of the development of the EU as a whole than Patel would like to suggest (*pace* Uta Steiger in this volume).

This point of view would beg a different question relevant to the volume as a whole: if the development of the ECOC program directly reflects adjustments characterizing other sectors monitored by the EU, why then would the European Commission want to maintain an image of the ECOC as a *sui generis* project? If the ECOC program became too formalized, it would lose its appeal. Therefore, the EU bureaucrats must keep it alive by stressing its uniqueness. Both the institutional actors and the cultural experts, despite their interest in creating audit grids to quantify and assess “cultural diversity,” or “Europeanness,” are also aware that the success of the program stems from its intrinsic plasticity: the ways in which local actors play around with these categories, adding ironies, nuances, or plain ridicule, or using them as rhetorical terrains to pursue their own agendas. (See Banu Karaca's excellent contribution about 2010 ECOC Istanbul, which, though initially planned and pursued by a network of NGOs and independent cultural producers, ended up being hijacked by the state.)

In sum, the varied methodologies and angles of analysis, combined with some of the contributors' conceptual sophistication, add significant value to the book, making it an important resource not only for the scholarship on Europeanization, especially the cultural making of the European Union (EU), but also for the sociology and anthropology of policy and institutions.

#### References:

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