

Marseille, European Capital of Culture 2013 *Ins and Offs*: A case for rethinking the effects of large-scale cultural initiatives

Abstract

Recent studies on urban change have emphasized the importance of culturally driven initiatives in the development of economic and social change. Concerns however have been raised in popular urban studies discourse that these strategies prioritise the economy and tourism over and above the needs of local residents and lead to the re-definition, and even the eradication, of local cultures. This paper looks at the case of the French city Marseille as host of the European Capital of Culture program in 2013. It analyses some of the cultural practices that arise at the intersection of a transnational cultural program and localized cultural acts and documents how some of Marseille's residents have responded to the European cultural event through cultural performances that address and highlight community concerns.

Keywords

Marseille, European Capital of Culture, large-scale cultural initiatives, European Union, culture wars, off event.

Word count

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Creative initiatives and urban renewal: Marseille European Capital of Culture 2013

In 2008, the city of Marseille in the south of France won the bid to host the 2013 European Capital of Culture program (ECOC). One of the driving forces of Marseille's objective in the context of the European Union (EU) led Capital of Culture program was the focus on bringing creativity into the practice and policies of urban change. France's poorest city would now have the chance to generate culture over 12 months, in the form of creative performances and art, while attempting to induce high levels of economic growth through tourism and urban regeneration. In the lead up to and during the ECOC event, however, some local artists and inhabitants contested the meaning attributed to culture in the context of urban renewal and have consequently expressed this through a wide range of cultural acts that address and highlight local community concerns.

Many studies to date on cultural projects and urban regeneration in various cities around the world have focused on the economic impact of these initiatives (Zukin, 1995; Scott, 2000, 2006; Mommaas, 2004; Garcia, 2004, 2005; Hall, 2004; Pink, 2005; Chapain and Lee, 2008; Musterd and Gritsai, 2008) with some referring to the concept of 'creative cities' to denote the use of cultural policies in urban renewal (Landry, 2000; Florida, 2000, 2005). Some studies have also focused on the social divisions as well as spatial, economic and funding dilemmas engendered by creative industries (Bianchini, 1993; Collinge and Musterd, 2008) with many concluding that long-term studies are still required in order to establish concrete evidence of the economic impact of creative initiatives (Garcia, 2004). There has however not been an extended study of how local community members respond to large-scale cultural programs and whether new forms of cultural performances are

generated beyond the parameters of official cultural projects as a result of specific social and historical contexts. As such this paper provides additional insight into local responses to large-scale cultural initiatives and analyses the case of Marseille during the 2013 European Capital of Culture year. It also suggests that the debate needs to take into account the histories that cities have developed in the context of any large-scale culturally driven initiatives.

This paper argues that Marseille's 2013 ECOC year acts as a catalyst for the creation and expression of practices that fall outside the parameters of the *In* (official ECOC program) with some events seen as *Off* (the excluded) and others neither *In* nor *Off* but blatantly 'at war' with the notion of culture. It also argues that in contrast to the official program that presents events and performances celebrating the European and Mediterranean dimension of the EU, local responses embrace the local characteristics of the city such as urban difficulties and social realities and make them the essential focus of their work.

This paper is divided into three main sections and focuses on the case of the Marseille European Capital of Culture 2013 year. First it outlines the political and economic context of Marseille's successful bid, highlighting the significance accorded to the title. Then it reviews the social tensions identified in the media and in local accounts of the Marseille ECOC 2013 year. The final section identifies some of the cultural responses of local inhabitants with regard to the ECOC's attempts to reconcile a socially inclusive cultural program with the overwhelming concern to capitalize on the economic benefits of the cultural year.

Research context

When the ECOC program was initiated in 1985 by Melina Mercouri, then Greek Minister for Culture the aim was to develop a cultural dimension to the work of the European Community (now the EU) as a way of bringing the European community closer together. Initially the cultural program was used as an opportunity to reinforce the status of prestigious European cultural centres—such as Athens (1985), Florence (1986), Amsterdam (1987), West Berlin (1988) and Paris (1989). The selection of Glasgow in 1990 marked the start of the ECOC program as a catalyst for urban regeneration to promote emerging cultural assets in cities that followed such as Thessalonica, Lille and Liverpool (see Garcia, 2004).

Marseille is following the path of cities that have used cultural policy to encourage investment and tourism. While, the value of such a symbolic work may be justified in more tangible economic terms: the growth in the number of tourists, business relocation and inward investment, these economic justifications fail to explain the cultural and social dimensions of local response to the cultural year. To address the attitudes and reaction to the cultural program, this paper examines discourse in institutional and media produced documents on Marseille in the context of the ECOC 2013 published between 2012 and 2013 and interviews conducted with the marketing director of the ECOC 2013, Charlotte Brunet, in December 2012 and local residents of Marseille in December 2012 and September to October 2013.ⁱ In light of this discourse this paper will consider some of the events of the ECOC 2013 program as well as local responses to the ECOC year in the form of: the parallel *off* event – le *Off* de Marseille 2013; guerrilla style opposition expressed by the group FRIC (Front des Réfractaires à l'Intoxication par la Culture); and Keny Arkana's song on the cultural year - *Capitale de la Rupture*. The discourse will be used to understand

the relationships that shape knowledge about human-environment relations (Waitt 2005) taking place in Marseille during the ECOC year and inform social questions about the way some of the locals respond to the cultural year particularly. It will consider the notion of cultural performances through Chatterton's view, that our understanding of culture should not be limited to traditional forms such as theatre, media and music but should also encompass acts 'that challenge rather than reinforce social and economic norms' (2000: 392).

'Marseille c'est capitale': the economic and cultural context of the city that 'most needed' the ECOC title.

Over the last two centuries, Marseille's population has been defined by the settlement of political refugees from various parts of Europe and by migrants predominantly from France's former colonies in Africa and Asia. The structure of attention that prevails in making sense of the city entails the narrative of passage (ancient traders; crusaders; colonisers; migrants) and the north south dichotomy (Europe/Africa; Europe/ Middle East; France/colonies; Christianity/Islam). Meanwhile, the city's image is all too often reduced to statistics that depict Marseille as the city with the fourth highest rate of unemploymentⁱⁱ and highest rate of crime in France (Robert-Diard, 2013), as well as national and local media articles focusing regularly on the city's troubled reputation. Titles in French media such as: 'Marseille: le sang de la drogue, entre shit, fric et kalach' (Etchegoin, 2012); 'Marseille, territoire perdu de la République' (Askolovitch, 2012) and 'La ville brûle, les élus calculent' (Denis and Sportouch, 2013) remind readers of the troubled suburbs in the north of Marseille and recount not only the general social and economic problems of the city but also the incapacity of authorities to deal with crime.

The favoured cultural image of Marseille is that of ‘vulgaire et laide’ (Boura, 2001: 26, 39), ‘une ville sauvage qui n’a plus de politique culturelle parce qu’elle ne sait plus traduire cette identité en culture’ (Grésillon, 2011: 124). These are clichéd character sketches of the city, but they resonate powerfully with the national imagination. In the cultural sphere, Marseille is identified more so with hip-hop artists and the local football team l’Olympique de Marseille. In this context, the issue of culture or ‘lack of’ was one of the key aspects of the city’s ECOC bid. For local policy makers, the cultural focus of the ECOC program was a way of rebranding the city and re-injecting economic confidence in the regional area. Bernard Latarjet, former director of the Marseille-Provence 2013 campaign, evokes the reason for Marseille’s successful bid:

nous étions les plus mauvais. Je veux dire par là que (...) nous avions le plus besoin du titre de capitale culturelle européenne. (...) On a essayé de montrer comment un investissement majeur culturel pouvait être un atout, un soutien stratégique, à l’intérieur d’une politique de développement qui couvrait les dimensions économique, sociale et urbaine (Grésillon, 2011 : 40).

For Latarjet, the economic and cultural context of Marseille was a determining factor in the city’s successful bid. These remarks have been taken up in subsequent discourse in the media and in an interview with the ECOC 2013 marketing director, Charlotte Brunet, to strengthen an image of Marseille as potentially weak in economic and cultural initiatives and needing to be managed through the success of a large-scale cultural initiative such as the ECOC. Likewise, France’s Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault’s opening ceremony speech emphasised this very aspect: ‘C'est bien la bonne voie pour Marseille (...) J'espère qu'à partir de là, les images injustes s'effaceront et la culture créera un climat positif’ (Fiorito, 2013:1).

If Marseille’s image depends for its coherence on a preferred version of its future, its scale of identity is orientated towards the local and the potential for change

in its ECOC program of events. Bright pink banners placed throughout the city of Marseille announce the cultural year: *Marseille c'est capitale* or *Ici c'est capitale*. These words underscore the link between the EU cultural event and the economic and cultural capital it will generate. The theme of the 2013 year titled *Le Partage des Midis - The Sharing of the South* traces to some extent the city's formations: a city connecting the Mediterranean and the southern region of Europe and echoing a past built on maritime trade and inward and outward migration. The title of many of the events and art circuits of the 2013 ECOC program echo the desire for change and growth and emphasise travel, exploration, urban change and connections between past, present and future: *Journeys and Stopovers; Here, Elsewhere; Ulysses; Odysées; The Great Mediterranean Voyage; 2031 in the Mediterranean Futures; Ritual for a Metamorphosis; TransHumance; Mediterranean Banquets; the Water's Edge; Industrial Night; Playing with the City* (MP2013). The story of Homer's Odyseey is particularly felt and the image of its hero Ulysees runs through many of the events. While these themes suggest an investment on the part of the program directors to prioritise the links between Mediterranean spaces within and beyond the French territory and from a European perspective, the program also shows a concern for local participation. Indeed, one of the key concerns of the European Capital of Culture event, in addition to the European dimension, is the role of the citizen and the inclusion of community groups and organizations (ECOC 2013, 2008: 3).

Within this concern for the local, the cultural program is not limited to the city of Marseille but includes neighbouring towns in the Provence area such as Arles, Aubagne, Avignon and Aix en Provence under the title 'Marseille-Provence 2013' or 'MP2013'. Brunet points out that with the exception of Essen in Germany in 2010, Marseille is the only city to link its region to the cultural program. While this

inclusion helps shape a regional identity, this choice is not insignificant from an economic perspective. These neighbouring cities are successful tourist attractions with a long history of cultural festivals (Avignon theatre festival; Rencontres d'Arles photography festival) and allow Marseille to draw from the cultural heritage and experience in cultural event management of its regional neighbours. Furthermore, the interview with the marketing director reveals the ECOC organizing committee's concerns to include community groups and organizations in the ECOC program through creative workshops and artist residences in 'non-traditional creative' areas such as schools, prisons and workplaces.ⁱⁱⁱ Indeed, Brunet emphasises that the ECOC was an opportunity for local artists, who were frustrated by the lack of recognition or support for their work in Marseille, to use the ECOC label and to showcase their work. As such, the ECOC label represents a type of European branding that recognizes the quality of the artist selected and in the long-term provides them with future openings in cultural events. Thus, community participation is largely visible in the presentation of events that mesh together cultural initiatives with local presence and aspirations for transformation. For instance, the *Metamorphoses* street festival encapsulates the symbolic potential for the city to metamorphisise into 'creative' street banquets and installations that create a dialogue between artists and pedestrians (Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1. ‘Le Grand bavardage’ event of the *Metamorphoses* street festival. Artists perform and invite passers by to participate in story telling, music and food set around a series of tables running along one of Marseille’s busiest streets La Canebière. September 2013. Photo A. Giovanangeli © A. Giovanangeli.



Figure 2. Installation of ‘La Ville éphémère’ event of the *Metamorphoses* festival led by artist Olivier Grossetête in the Place Bargemon involving 1000 local residents from Marseille who built a temporary city out of cardboard. October 2013. Photo A. Giovanangeli © A. Giovanangeli.

Likewise, the photographic initiative titled *Unframed* consists of the display of large-scale photographic work on street walls by French artist JR in the working class suburb of la Belle de Mai (Figure 3). In this project the photographer claims to have ‘looked into the identity of the neighborhood’ by inviting inhabitants to provide personal family photos that were enlarged and placed on street walls in order to ‘transform these personal memories into part of the collective history of La Belle de Mai’ (JR artist’s statement). The inhabitants’ role is assumed and known by those who live there. An awareness of this working class area is crucial to understanding the city’s current energy.



Figure 3. Large-scale photographic work on street walls by French artist JR in la Belle de Mai, Marseille. September 2013. Photo A. Giovanangeli © A. Giovanangeli.

Capital, culture and tension in the ECOC 2013 year

The attempts of Marseille's ECOC program to include local voices are, however, not entirely legible. The ambiguous nature of the ECOC year is emphasized by the conflicting media portrayal of the cultural year. On the one hand visible signs of the ECOC's success are noted in local media articles: tourism has increased in 2013 with six million local and international visitors confirmed in October and numbers expected to increase to ten million by the end of the year; 900 events have been included in the cultural program; hotel bookings have increased significantly during the year; new cultural venues have been completed notably the Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations; and the 98 million Euro budget is one of the highest budgets ever proposed by an EU Capital of Culture program (Coulomb, 2013). In his evaluation of the cultural year, Jacques Pfister, president of the Marseille Provence 2013 association, employs positive descriptors to describe the program: 'grande satisfaction', 'on a réussi de grands rassemblements populaires', 'il y eu de grandes inaugurations', 'de belles réalisations', 'nous avons fait parler de Marseille comme une ville en train de changer de statut' (Spagnoli, 2013: 12). Interviews with local inhabitants also reflect this optimism. For them, Marseille during the 2013 cultural year has become a vibrant and energetic city as a result notably of the architectural development that has contributed new cultural spaces and major exhibitions.

According to local inhabitants, buildings inaugurated specifically for the ECOC year such as the iconic Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations and the converted port hangar-turned concert hall Le Silo have altered Marseille's physical image dramatically, while the cultural initiatives have reinforced the international status of the city.^{iv}

This portrayal of Marseille during the cultural year does not lend itself however to a static analysis. In contrast, some of the people I interviewed spoke of the exclusion they felt in relation to the 2013 program - some as artists and others as participants - because of a lack of transparency regarding the nature of events and their location. Despite a concern for local representation in the cultural year by cultural policy makers in Marseille, local theatre performers and artists in Marseille reveal that while some acclaimed local creative projects found substantial support either financially or through the use of the ECOC label, there were also numerous local artists who felt they had been deprived of subsidies usually reserved for creative initiatives in Marseille, as a result of the selective funding process deciding who would receive support in the lead up to and during the ECOC year. Furthermore, Maisetti's work on the selection of artists in the Marseille-Provence program suggests that many local artists felt excluded from playing an active role in the cultural year due to 'la portée internationale de la candidature qui a marginalisé les créateurs qui ne répondent pas à l'exigence internationale de MP2013' (2013: 60). In media statements, Akhenaton, lead singer of well-known Marseillais rap group IAM stated that 'Marseille tourne le dos à ses enfants les plus talentueux' referring to the number of hip-hop artists that have created a significant cultural mark in the local music industry but do not appear in the ECOC program (*Libération*, 2013). This frustration stems from the fact that the ECOC 2013 bid was won precisely as a result of Marseille's ethnically diverse population and hip-hop culture that spoke of urban poverty, violence and corruption yet whose work was not present in the official program.

The potential for Marseille's cultural program to transform the city has been further contested by local responses in the media. Quentin Averous's article titled

'Marseille, capitale déculturée. Ma ville se travestit pour être aux normes européennes' describes the year of culture as being about everything except culture. Rather Averous describes the city as a weak imitation of other cultural meccas such as Paris and emptied of its own personality as a result of a cultural program whose prime objective is tourism and economic development (Averous, 2013). Indeed, the city has undergone major urban changes, with the transformation of the noisy port into a pedestrian friendly area, and the refurbishment of cluttered popular areas into swanky streets. Yet for Averous these changes do not conform to the city's meaning: 'On rase, on aplani, on pave. Une architecture anglo-saxonne, belle au demeurant, mais qui ne tient pas compte du contexte : elle n'a, pour ainsi dire, rien de méditerranéen'. This inhabitant of Marseille argues that Marseille is 'antimoderne, et en cela authentiquement subversive' and he questions why these distinct elements of the city should be erased.

The diverging debates raise serious questions about the relationship between policy makers driving the project and the community groups who feature so heavily in the bid. The city's ethnic diversity was adopted as a predominant theme in the re-branding of the city as a cosmopolitan city and connecting factor to the north/south dialogue in Europe and the Mediterranean zone. Likewise, the ECOC selection panel's report noted that Marseille's bid had 'artistic quality with outreach to the wider population, notably in more difficult neighbourhoods' highlighting that this was the 'major element in the attractiveness of this project' (ECOC 2013, 2008: 4). Consequently, the ambivalence attributed to the role of the cultural year has not only opened up debate on whether this large-scale cultural initiative has had a beneficial impact on the city but it has also generated alternative cultural initiatives.

'Off' and not 'In' and other forms of cultural practices

While the Marseille ECOC 2013 year has enjoyed significant national and international media attention, lesser-known alternative cultural spaces have taken root in the city in varying ways and in response to the European initiative. This can be seen through various forms such as poster art pasted on city walls (Figure 4), literature set during the ECOC foregrounding the Marseille's social context (Fabre, 2013) and cultural manifestos on the Internet (Marseille en Guerre).



Figure 4. Poster placed on various billboards in Marseille. October 2013. Photo A. Giovanangeli © A. Giovanangeli.

In this section I focus on three specific cultural performances situated in Marseille that have responded to the cultural year and that contest culture's potential to transform the city economically. Rather these cultural performances embrace distinct elements of the city that are seen as unique aspects of the city of Marseille. I refer to; the *Off* de Marseille 2013 event; protest videos created by the group FRIC; and hip-hop by Keny Arkana specifically her work titled *Captiale de la Rupture*. These cultural initiatives place in a different light Jones' suggestion that 'situating a branded, politically-sanctioned notion of 'culture' at the centre of regeneration

strategies can be harmful to a city's alternative cultural spaces' (2004: 358). Rather what we witness in Marseille is an alternate cultural scene that is stimulated to address many contemporary issues facing Marseille.

On the 11th of January 2013 le *Off* de Marseille 2013 launched its year long cultural program, precisely one day before the ECOC 2013 opening. Stephane Serpaux, one of the *Off*'s coordinators announced that the *Off*'s priority was the representation of local perspectives and in the *Off* press conference stated that:

Le *In* a décidé de tabler sur la Méditerranée ; nous avons dit qu'il y a autre chose dans cette ville qu'un horizon bleu, que Marseille a des problèmes et que cela fait partie de la ville. On en parle et donc on ne part pas du même point. (*Off* Conférence de presse, 2012)

These statements contest the objectives of the ECOC, which the *Off* organizers see as 'un événement trop souvent perçu comme gigantesque, complexe, inaccessible, incompréhensible, illisible' (*Off* Conférence de presse 2012). Significantly, the *Off* de Marseille 2013, is the first *off* organized in response to an ECOC program suggesting that the term 'off' was selected specifically to rival the aims of the official program. Eric Pringels, one of the cofounders of the *Off*, further highlights this opposition when he describes the *Off* de Marseille 2013 as 'un festival qui veut exister « tout contre » l'évènement officiel Marseille Provence 2013' (*Off* Conférence de presse 2012). Critical work on *off* events suggests that 'la création d'un lieu off résulte de la volonté d'un groupe qui souhaite défendre sa vision de la culture, ses pratiques et goûts culturels' (Vivant, 2007: 132). For the organizers of the *Off* de Marseille this vision includes the work of local artists who are not represented in the official program and they do this by placing the focus on the local landscape and encapsulating aspects that have stigmatized the city or as Vivant expresses in relation to the *off*'s role, 'à la production sociale des représentations de la ville' (131). It is precisely this concern

for the local space that alternative cultural spaces such as the *Off* de Marseille have emerged. The following media release of the *Off* programme describes the event in the following way:

Avec la volonté de mettre l'artiste au cœur du territoire, la programmation se décline en quatre axes qui évoquent les particularités d'une ville faite de paradoxes :

- Poubelle la Ville (Marseille est laide, Marseille est belle)
- Merguez Capitale (Marseille cosmopolite, Marseille est un village)
- Kalashnikov (Marseille est inégalitaire, Marseille est solidaire)
- Mytho City (Marseille se transforme, Marseille se la raconte) (Hennenfent 2013).

The *Off* home page celebrates the paradoxical characteristics that make up the city such as social tension, inexperience, disorder alongside other features such as solidarity, cosmopolitanism, seduction (*Off* de Marseille 2013) and subsequently focuses on cultural performances and events that reflect these aspects of the city.

In contrast with the ECOC's events showcasing Mediterranean themes and desires for urban transformation and largely interpreted by internationally acclaimed artists, the *Off* evokes specific features of Marseille through the work of local lesser known artists in distinct spaces around the city. Some of these projects include:

Portraits de Famille (photographic works of local families); *Phoebe Rocks* (local rock festival); *Yes We Camp* (community created camping ground for visitors and artists) (Figures 5 and 6); *Poubelle Moderne* (installation reconceptualising the notion of pollution in Marseille).



Figure 5. *Off de Marseille's Yes We Camp event*. Part installation part camping site, this venue was made using recycled material and set in one of the northern suburbs of Marseille with the aim of encouraging a dialogue between local artists and visitors. September 2013. Photo A. Giovanangeli © A. Giovanangeli.



Figure 6. An artist who has set up camp at the *Yes We Camp* site discussing his art work with a visitor. September 2013. Photo A. Giovanangeli © A. Giovanangeli.

The *Off* has, however, not been without its share of criticism. As it has grown in popularity and public interest, the *Off* has resorted to similar marketing techniques to those used in the ECOC event (logos, private and public sector funding, web presence, support from ECOC administrators, program selection juries) as well as similar media discourse congratulating the festival's success to date (120,000 visitors; 450,000 Euro budget; 500 volunteers; filled to capacity venues) (Pateffoz, 2013). One of the local artists at the *Yes We Camp* venue I spoke with described some of the paradoxes he personally experienced at the *Off*. On the one hand the festival's aim

was to support many of the local artists that were not selected for the ECOC program but on the other the *Off* developed an equally selective criteria that paralleled those of the *In*, leading to many local artists refused not once but twice.

The evolution in the organizational nature of the *Off* and concerns with project funding and program selection have led to questions on the institutionalisation of the *Off*'s organizational structure (Maisetti, 2013). This criticism however does not necessarily signify that the *Off* has distanced itself from its original aim to provide alternative cultural spaces for local artists. While these questions linger, the festival organizers have announced future programs titled Marseille 3013, further contrasting itself to the ECOC 2013 program that is limited to one year. Particularly interesting in this respect is the ongoing work of the *Off* and its relation to the city, the organizers have identified themes for future events commencing in 2014 and continuing into 2015 that are once more specifically anchored within the context of Marseille: ‘Plein de bouche (Marseille est une démocratie, Marseille est une autocratie), La Cagnasse (Marseille est aride, Marseille est un oasis), Plage des Prophètes (Marseille est une ville, Marseille est une mer) et Villecontreville (Marseille est multiple, Marseille est fracturée)’(Créze, 2013).

A more radical response to the ECOC year has, however, rejected both the *In* and the *Off* ‘s presence in the city of Marseille. The first example is the anonymous collective referring to itself as le Front des Réfractaires à l’Intoxication par la Culture (FRIC) who use video clips to denounce the urban transformations of Marseille in relation to the cultural year. Clad in balaclavas and voices disguised, members denounce the threat that urban renewal has on the popular working class areas located in the city’s centre. In an interview with French cultural magazine *Les Inrockuptibles* FRIC members describe the cultural capital year as:

une opération qui parachève le traitement infligé à cette ville . L'objectif étant «de se débarrasser de la moitié de la population » pour entériner la renaissance économique de la ville. On dénonce la culture comme un outil d'aménagement du territoire mis au service du monde économique« (...) Au lieu de s'appuyer sur le savoir-faire des Marseillais, ils font venir des gens de l'extérieur, s'agace le plus bavard. Il y a une espèce d'angélisme de l'artiste qui débarque pour n'apporter que le meilleur (Alouti, 2013).

The *Off* is also the target of this criticism. For FRIC members: ‘le *Off*, c'est les rejettos du *In*, le guichet des peureuses’ (Alouti 2013).

The criticism directed by FRIC against the aims and effects of the cultural year on Marseille are no different to those expressed in much of the local media and echo the initial ideas of the *Off*. What is different about FRIC is their chosen means of expression. Anonymous speakers identifying with the Zapatista rebels of Chiapas in Mexico read out their terms and present their communiqués or ‘manifestos’ through video and place these on an Internet website titled Marseille en Guerre. The idea of war in relation to the groups identification with indigenous Mexican rebels^v and the website’s name remind us of Mitchell’s reference to ‘culture wars’ (Mitchell, 2000) that describe the tensions between local elites and local residents in the context of culturally driven strategies that prioritise the economy over its residents and threaten to erase local cultures. The identity of the website and the balaclava clad FRIC members are unknown but the message they send opposes the cultural program put in place by cultural and political policy makers. Some of FRIC’s videos refer to the oppositional stance they take with titles such as *machine de guerre*; *Marseille à vendre*; and *la victoire de tout un peuple*. These messages are a response to the war FRIC members feel the political elite has declared on the people of Marseille. In their first communiqué they state that ‘Marseille 2013 et sa culture hors sol’ are conceived by political elites ‘comme une machine de guerre (...) cette guerre est menée contre nous, contre le Marseille populaire’ (Marseille en Guerre). For these anonymous

protesters, culture has been removed from the everyday and confined to events and museums that encapsulate ‘le grand bluff culturel’ (Marseille en Guerre). While these videos and their references to war have the characteristics of extremist guerrilla groups making a public declaration, there are no military weapons or hostages in these messages. FRIC members become actors who enact their views on cultural initiatives and use various techniques to convey their message: voice; costume; metaphor; film; location and a virtual presence.

Similarly to FRIC, the Marseille based hop-hop singer Keny Arkana denounces the cultural year through video on the Internet. In March 2013, Arkana places on the Internet a short documentary that is accompanied by the release of a song - both are titled *Marseille Capitale de la Rupture*, a pun on the Marseille Capitale de la Culture title (Arkana, 2013). The documentary and the music clip juxtapose images of the city’s ethnically diverse population, poor suburbs and urban realities alongside the intrusive presence of cultural events and urban transformations that make way for tourism. More importantly, the song’s lyrics describe the segregation urban regeneration has created in the city: ‘J'reconnais plus ma ville/ Je ne reconnais plus ma rue/ Où est mon centre ville?/ Celui d'avant à disparu!’

Arkana critiques a specific European led ‘culture’ and the role it has been assigned in transforming the city’s landscape: ‘Capitale de la culture Europ-et-haine (...)/ Si c'était une blague c'est sur on ne l'aurait pas cru (...)/ Venu chambouler toute la culture de la ville’. While Arkana laments the loss of the city’s characteristics that are meaningful to its inhabitants: ‘Tout, leurs plans ne sont qu'a l'opposé/ De la tradition/ De l'esprit/ De la ville millénaire/ Qui a toujours rassemblé les communautés’, she also recognizes the long-standing problems of the city: ‘Ici la

jeunesse est en peril/ Rien n'est fait pour elle/ Et ca c'est vrai depuis des piges/
Entassée dans des blocks/ La seule ici c'est dans le shit'.

In contrast to culturally and politically led policies to improve the image and status of the city through a standardized cultural event such as the ECOC, Arkana highlights the varying characteristics of the city and makes them the essential focus of her work, a feature also found in the manifestos of FRIC and the program themes of the *Off*. An ambivalence exists, however, in relation to the future relationship between these local artists and local policy makers. For the *Off*, it seems that future local support and private funding will enable the organizers to rebrand their program in future years through the Marseille 3013 name. For FRIC and Arkana it is the refusal to be a part of any institutionalized system supporting the cultural rebranding of the city that sets them apart.

Concluding remarks

The success of the ECOC bid in Marseille has prompted the acceleration of urban development in order to substantiate the title of European Capital of Culture and has resulted in a focus on Mediterranean and European spaces - underscored by the symbolic positioning of the Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations at the entry of the city's port. This local perspective based on urban metamorphosis encapsulates the strategic role Marseille could play in connecting Mediterranean cities and peoples. This paper has shown however, that various inhabitants do not feel that a matching polyvalent cultural image corresponds to the way the ECOC has portrayed the city. For them a local perspective means foregrounding the complexities and paradoxes of the city: extreme wealth alongside immense poverty; forgotten children of the suburbs; policy makers' self-interest; urban segregation; strong community;

diversity and tolerance. Perhaps these critical views are picking up on an instinct of local place and evoke certain aspects to Marseille's enduring characteristics and fascination. In the context of large scale cultural initiatives, Evans notes (2003: 421) that culture is used to reinvent cities as centres of excellence for business and tourism consumption, its role as a critical force that can question the status quo is being progressively diminished. However, in the case of Marseille we observe that culture takes on varying meanings for its inhabitants and this aspect is significant in showing that the history and past of a city plays a crucial role in how a large-scale cultural event such as the ECOC may impact a city. While large-scale initiatives could be viewed according to Hall as a brand that is no different to that found in other cities using the same 'cultural formula' or 'toolkit' to create tourism and urban development (2004: 257), the end result may not be the same for each city. Marseille's ECOC program has indeed generated local responses as we demonstrate above. If we think of cultural initiatives as acts that challenge social and economic norm as Chatterton suggests, then the oppositional performances to the European cultural event observed in Marseille do just that and add an additional dimension to the local culture generated by cultural programs such as the ECOC.

ⁱ Thanks to Charlotte Brunet for her time and for her courtesy in answering the questions I had prepared for her. Many thanks also to the locals I spoke to during my visit to Marseille in December 2012 and September 2013. These visits were invaluable opportunities to appreciate the conditions of a European Capital of Culture year.

ⁱⁱ France's national statistics office INSEE estimated the figure for unemployment in Marseille at 17.3% for 15-64 year olds. These figures are well above the national average, which has been estimated at 10.6% at the end of 2012. Available at: <http://www.insee.fr> (accessed 15 June 2013).

ⁱⁱⁱ The significance of community involvement is also maintained through the financial support given to the cultural program by local actors: the EU and the French State contributed a combined 14.7 million Euros to the program (2.5%) while the bulk

of the budget has come from local groups (regional, departmental, municipal, private companies) and amounted to a total proposed budget of 98 million Euros. This is one of the highest budgets ever proposed by an EU Capital of Culture program, pledged by one of France's poorest cities (Gresillon, 2011: 34). This local financial involvement is also in line with similar trends of past Capital of Culture Capitals like Liverpool 2008, which was heavily backed financially by local community groups (Jones, 2004: 349). The award has also created a more immediate rush to invest in the city with Marseille piggy backing on other initiatives already in place to develop the economic sector of the city such as the EuroMediterranean initiative promoting investment and infrastructure to specific cities in the Mediterranean area and the French government's 'metropole' initiative to develop strategic economic poles throughout France in cities such as Marseille. The response of local policy-makers to invest heavily in Marseille ECOC 2013 was prompted not only because the cultural program would bring significant economic gains, but it would also enable investment in projects promoting local cultural activity and social cohesion. While grants from a combination of national government, EU and other public sector sources fund the cultural events, the award has also created a more immediate rush to invest in the city.

^{iv} *The New York Times* published a list of the 46 countries to visit in 2013. Marseille was ranked number 2 just after Rio de Janeiro, host of the 2013 World Cup. Paris came in at number 46. The 46 Places to Go to in 2013, *The New York Times*, 10 January 2013. Available at:
<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/01/10/travel/2013-places-to-go.html?src=me&ref=general> (accessed 15 January 2013).

^v In an interview on why the group wore masks, FRIC referred to the 'Chiapas. Dans les années 1980, ces indigènes mexicains se sont battus pour conserver leurs terres agricoles. Ils ont dit 'Nous les indigènes, nous sommes invisibles, nous allons donc nous masquer pour devenir visibles' (Alouti ,2013).

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