

*Urban Strategies for Culture-Driven Growth: Co-Creating a European Capital of Culture* is a welcome addition to the body of knowledge, which examines the European Commission's annual European Capital of Culture (ECoC) award. However, its content will appeal to scholars who are interested in cultural events, urban governance, and community engagement, not just ECoC specifically. Further, it has a strong methodological vein, which would provide insight into tools available for examining, in depth, a multi-stakeholder perspective of cultural activity.

The core idea throughout the book is *strategy-as-practice* which places the analytical emphasis on the processes of implementing the ECoC in Umeå through co-creation. The uniqueness of this is that it attempts to offer the macro and micro, the top-down and the bottom-up, to consider how all the actors and processes intertwined to co-create the ECoC. The authors seek to do this by looking at narratives with 'action nets' which they define as, "clusters of configurations of local bottom-up activity and management of top down activity, with each net translating and carrying a narrative of the program theme story' (p. 47). The emergent narratives of these action nets then result in, "the master story" of the ECoC.

The chapters are divided into varying perspectives and each perspective demanded a different analysis (from narrative analysis to social network analysis). After an overview of the planning process, we are presented with an organizer's view, insider-participant's view, the public view, and finally, a view from the branding and marketing. The book then offers vignettes from the narratives before comparing Umeå to other ECoC cities and making conclusions about the success and challenges of co-creation.

Chapter 5 which examines the *insider-participant's view* was most illuminating in relation to how this co-creation can take hold and diverge with alternative and existing tensions. This is achieved through ethnographic work and an examination of 'narrative repetition' to understand how they developed to create a "convincing plot" (p. 66). Through this process they identified narrative dualities which revealed divergent micro-stories. These micro-stories often became more powerful through narrative

repetitions, thus developing a co-creation which was seemingly counter but became central. Indeed, one of the successes of the program identified by the authors is that this co-creation, whilst risky can develop a stronger inclusive and innovative approach. The vignettes offered in relation to these stories are given a chapter of their own and, as well as illuminating the analysis of the co-creation in Umeå, these offer an invaluable insight into the ethnographic data which contributed to the study. Indeed, in terms of the structure of the book itself, it might have been useful to integrate the vignettes into the flow of the analytical chapters or place this chapter sooner.

As the book progresses, the authors do make the qualification, which is key when examining any ECoC or similar transferable award, that the context of this approach is specific. The co-creation was embedded from the planning of the bid, which presented challenges (chapter 2), but enabled momentum to be achieved. Umeå had very strong municipal 'buy in' from the beginning and this was sustained over the course of the planning, delivery and closure of the program. This book is a very specific case study in this sense, however, the closing chapter does broaden out to look at the implications of co-creation as strategy-as-practice.

The idea of co-creation is moving up the agenda in cultural planning and urban strategies so the final concluding chapter is useful in looking at the lessons learnt by Umeå and how we can further understand co-creation since, "there is no clear direction as to how it should be practiced" (p. 163). Dangers are warned of, such as misinterpretation of narratives and the heterogeneity of these stories not converging in a coherent message. Although, success of this approach can lead to, "originality and pluralism in project ideas and inclusion of a diversity that leads to innovation and a novel synergy" (p. 163). In the context of urban governance and cultural policy making however, the authors do caution that co-creation must not become a strategy to save public funds and exploit communities, especially marginalized communities. They end on a more optimistic note and suggest that co-creation can offer an opportunity after the fireworks have ended in sustaining longer-term partnerships and collaboration.

Overall, I would recommend *Urban Strategies for Culture-Driven Growth* to those not just interested specifically in the ECoC scheme, but scholars who are looking at alternative approaches to analyzing cultural participation and urban governance.