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Reimagining the Cultural Impact of Neoliberalism: An analysis of Istanbul and Liverpool Biennials

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Abstract

Biennials are one of the most important stagers of contemporary art practices serving as spaces of reflexivity for artistic production, compressing a glocal sphere offering a culturally inclusive debate. They play a key role in the global transformation of cultural production in a neoliberal age. Based on empirical data collected from the 15th Istanbul and 10th Liverpool biennials, this paper seeks to interrogate the role they play in the relationship between the cultural production and consumption of the arts. The paper presents an alternative perspective from which we can begin to better understand the cultural impact of neoliberalism. It is suggested, on this basis, that as glocal spaces of culture, biennials can generate culturally inclusive debates and participatory constellations offering a more democratic access to cultural participation. They are in this sense a discursive space and facilitate the opening up of a critical space in which cultural policy can offer a more sophisticated means of critiquing the impact of neoliberalism on the arts world.

Keywords: Glocal, Biennial, Art audience, Neoliberal cultural condition, Art production, Consumption, Cultural engagement

Introduction

The issue of cultural engagement is an important topic and one that is particularly pertinent when it comes to discussions of the value of biennials (Chao and Kompatsiaris, 2020; Haines,2011; Tung, 2020). Biennials are one of the most important stagers of contemporary art practices. They serve as spaces of reflexivity for artistic production and compress a glocal sphere offering a culturally inclusive debate. Based on empirical data collected from the 15th Istanbul and 10th Liverpool biennials, this paper considers how far biennials are able to deliver on their aims in an era apparently defined by neoliberalism and, as such, goes on to consider the suggestion that biennials constitute glocal art spaces that are capable of offering a uniquely democratic cultural milieu. This may offer a way forward for other forms of democratic art production.

An art biennial can be defined as a significant international event exhibiting perceivable trends in contemporary forms of emerging and established visual art, occurring biennually, i.e. once every two years. In compromising a wide and heterogeneous range of visual art exhibitions and events (triennials, quadrennials, 'Documenta'), the word 'biennial' is often used as an umbrella term to refer to all such events. Biennials are now fundamental to the display of contemporary art, arguably replacing museums as default spaces for the exhibition of art (Smith, 2012). To begin with, biennials endeavour to provide more distinctive and diverse offerings than traditional art institutions. They are complex structures at the crossroads of a range of complex interests, negotiating processes of neoliberalism which allow for the exploration of various agents involved such as: the market, the state and community actors, as well as their interrelationship to society in general.

Biennials do not exist in a void, they are the product of a particular socio-economic context and in this case that of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism, understood in the above terms can be defined as a dynamic socio-economic philosophy which mutates into different forms, and acts upon the interaction of power relations: '[a] hybrid form of governmentality or a context-dependent regulatory practice, defined and limited by the legacies of inherited institutional frameworks, policy regimes, regulatory practices, and political struggles' (Brenner *et al.* 2010:183). These spaces and their varying adaptations in different contexts not only provide the ground upon which we can understand neoliberalism through policy regulations but also construct a foundation upon which we can begin to observe and examine the influence of neoliberalism on cities' social spheres. Due to the degree of engagement that a biennial can offer a city's culture and economy, contestations of neoliberal agendas by the agents involved become more evident, with the biennial being conducive to observation in urban settings including global cities and 'capitals of culture' (Campbell, 2019). Finally, through welcoming different audiences to the same cultural platform, biennials promote a new form of engagement via the discourses they create for exhibition-making. In this article we present a case study that allows us to look at the impact of neoliberalism from a particular perspective that reflects on the proposition that biennials are not merely handmaidens to neoliberal premises, but that they actually operate as pro-active critical spaces. To this end, we harness empirical data constituting interviews with artists, curators and other cultural producers, collected between 2017 and 2018. In what follows we will present a critical analysis of biennials and the role they play in the relationship between the cultural production and consumption of the arts. Particularly critical in this regard is the role of arts practitioners and stakeholders and how it is they perceive the impact on artistic practice. On this basis, we critically explore the proposition that far from being a vehicle through which a

neoliberal agenda is imposed, the biennial provides spaces of active participation, contestation, and vibrant agonistic struggle (Mouffe, 2007).

Investment in Art production

There is an orthodoxy around arts organizations and management and the delivery of arts events that sees all biennial formats as the products of a neoliberal agenda. In this article, we argue an alternative position that calls for their recognition as cultural spaces which at least have the potential to resist neoliberal rhetoric. From this point of view, biennials can perhaps offer a new way of thinking about how culture interfaces with neoliberalism without being fully penetrated by its economic rationale.

Owing to the fact that the practices of the contemporary art world are increasingly tied to the global capitalist economy (Sevänen, 2018), it is important, before discussing the example of biennials in more depth, to acknowledge the neoliberal condition and its influences on a wide range of cultural phenomena. Understanding the neoliberal context requires one to recognise the period under the influence of globalization, often termed as post-Fordist, post-industrial, or late modern, relating to methods of production existing within the (late) capitalist mode of production (Trott, 2007). These new production processes have signaled the global diffusion of industrial production into a new type of employment platform, involving, for instance, flexible and roboticised or digital working conditions, whilst heralding significant changes in both the production and reception of artworks. Post-Fordist labour in artistic practice can be described as increasing physical and ideological mobility that requires flexibility and adaptive communication skills, as well as in some cases of high-profile artists, a large workforce that can produce artistic products based on the artist's concept. These attributes, influenced by the shift from material to non-material labour, resulted in consumers' re-valuing products according to their symbolic

value (Gielen, 2010). Nonetheless, perhaps the immateriality of cultural production can be harnessed positively through a focus on performance-based, socially engaged and participatory art practices which are harder for investors to quantify. Sholette (2017) uses the term 'bare art' to refer to art's ability to reflect and echo the effects of the capitalist crisis. This ability opens up a cultural sphere in which art's entanglement with capitalism cannot be masked.

The cultural and creative industries have been vital assets incorporated into the policy agenda of governments (Van der Pol, 2007). These developments, often attributed to the increasing dominance of neoliberalism, can perhaps be more observable with the changing practices in cultural production. A growing body of literature on arts investment and production focuses mainly on the use of culture as one of the main tools implemented by policymakers (Caust, 2003). Tied to structural economic changes led by globalization, culture as a resource has been used for the implementation of 'urban entrepreneurialism' by policymakers. Thus, policy agendas are crucial components of post-industrial urban development goals grounded in promoting cities to global investors and visitors alike (Wilks-Heeg and North, 2004:342). As Miles (2015) puts it, culture has become a form of social ordering under neoliberalism. As a result, public art and cultural quarters are in the service of the symbolic economic competition in which cities globally compete. In this respect, through the positioning of culture for hard branding, cultural flagship events like biennials or festivals enhance urban consumption spaces (Evans, 2011). New 'cultural strategies' (Zukin, 1995) for economic revitalisation, including the redesigning of city areas such as cultural districts and the restoration of historical monuments, among others, are becoming prevailing characteristics of cities in which, the consumption of culture becomes the new leisure of experience (Zukin, 2009).

Historical Unfolding of the Biennial Format

Biennials have always been 'glocal' insofar as they – as global events - constitute a localised representation of cultural exchange between different nations. Glocal is a term used as an amalgam of the local and the global, compressing and nuancing a vast range of local and global experiences (Robertson, 1995). An analysis of the historical unfolding of this glocal format indicates the mediation role that biennials have been taking, to the extent that they straddle local, global and transnational networks. The first biennial was held in Venice in 1893 as an exhibition of Italian art celebrating the silver anniversary of Umberto I and like others that followed such as the Pittsburgh and Corcoran Biennials in 1907, and the Whitney Biennial in 1932, it aimed at bringing international cultural practices to local art scenes (Gardner *et al*., 2016). The Venice Biennial, which is still generally perceived to be the largest and most touted, sought to represent the art of multiple nations through its establishment of national pavilions. In this respect, the historical unfolding of the Venice biennial represents an early form of neoliberal capitalist consumption and production of culture; with its foundations in imperial claims and the outbidding of pavilions in which countries showcase global connections. The second half of the twentieth century, encompasses what is often referred to as the 'second wave of biennials' (Gardner *et al.* 2013; 2014; 2016). This represented a significant development for the art world in terms of the various connections promoted by these sites. A shift in influence from the museum to the biennial is considered to have developed in the post-war era of Europe with the rise of biennials beyond European borders, notably with the Sao Paulo Biennial in 1951 (Filipovic et al. 2011). By shifting exhibitions and their focus to beyond European and US

borders, biennials have thus played a significant role in showcasing the socio-political breakaway from western hegemonic cultural practices.

The transformation of the biennial model denotes a symbolic cultural struggle that helps us understand how it has evolved, designating a broader discussion on cultural transformations and their influence on cultural participation. In this respect, particularly noteworthy are the early 1990s - an era that is also known as 'the biennial boom', which denotes the visible influence of globalization on the art world (Gardner *et al.* 2016). It was in this era that the global South accelerated by effectively becoming 'biennialised'. One of the most influential examples is that of the Havana Biennial in 1984. Since then, the distinctive characteristic of these biennials has been their focus on incorporating art from 'peripheral' countries from the continents of Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East. This has been perceived as a direct challenge to metropolitan perspectives and to the colonial legacies of mainstream Western institutions. The proliferation of biennials across the 'global south' is commonly acknowledged as both engendering and contesting globalization, postmodern relativism and post-colonial discourse, namely the intersection and divergence of a range of perspectives that constitute a more culturally democratic outlook towards national and ethnic differences (Gardener and Green, 2016; Zarobell, 2021).

Biennialisation and its Influence on Contemporary Cultural Production

Biennialisation and its influence on contemporary cultural production should be understood as a broader trend that runs parallel to the globalization of the art world, which started to develop after the 1980s. This period was distinguished by the emergence of a new global awareness in contemporary art which was indicative of how culture was coming to be understood and consumed. Biennials came to be characterised by their ability to adapt to changing socio-

political contexts. The term ‘biennialisation’, first coined by Green and Gardner (2016), refers to the proliferation of the exhibition itself but also encompasses, especially in academic discourse, diverse associations and processes such as globalization, gentrification and activism (Montero, 2012; Gardener *et al.* 2016). In addition to the notion of biennials as offering people benefits beyond their cultural value, biennials have also operated to enhance the role of the ‘creative city or global city’ and thereby reflect the cultural logic of globalization (Sassen, 2003; Gardener and Green, 2016). As Gardner and Green (2016:3) suggest, the, perhaps unintentional, co-option of biennials by neoliberalism was apparent.

Biennials have drawn local practitioners into ostensibly globalized networks of art-world attention and financial support, publicised regions or cities previously deemed ‘peripheral’ to the metropolitan centres of London and New York. However, on another level, all this might be considered to imply that these exhibitions have served as mirrors, even handmaidens, to the spread of transnational capital and imperialist politics associated with globalized neoliberalism. The redesign and utilisation of cultural policies to gain the attention of global investors represents another means by which culture has been used in support of the needs of globalized neoliberalism. An increasing number of second-tier cities pursued the model of ‘creative cities’ as a means of enhancing their global competitiveness in cultural tourism and, in many cases, to kick-start the process of urban regeneration (Martin and Papastergiadis, 2011). Exhibitions engaged flexible, mobile, and multi-skilled artists and curators who were able to work across cultures and mediate between different constituencies (Martin and Papastergiadis, 2011).

An exploration of the role of biennials demonstrates that these spaces are not just vehicles for the delivery of culture, but rather that they might engender some of the key challenges that the world of cultural production and consumption continues to face. As some scholars put it, similar to

cityscapes, biennials are much more than vehicles for the delivery of cultural products. They unintentionally serve as landscapes of power in which the 'spectacular' is manifested (Zukin, 2009; Dogan, 2011). And yet, despite the imposition of macro-power relations, it would perhaps be fallacious to assume that biennials serve only as agents of capitalism. Owing to the fact that biennials are part of culture-led investment encouraged by local authorities (e.g. Venice, Gwanju, Liverpool, Basel) they can in fact be evaluated as successful. This success is based upon their objective to engage their audiences with the cultural and historical identity of the hosting cities (Starostova, 2014; Sheikh, 2009). As Miles (2007) suggests, culture-led investment can be evaluated as successful should it engage effectively with local populations and by influencing their sense of belonging by being a bridge between their past and future. For example, the Gwangju Bienniale first held in 1995 was an attempt to redevelop the controversial political history of the city. It aimed to reconstruct an alternative, more democratic image to a city with a history of uprisings (Shin, 2004). In the case of Istanbul Biennial, the use of unused venues like the Ancient Turkish bath (Küçük Mustafa Paşa Hamamm) as an exhibition venue invigorated key historical and social features related with the neighborhood and Turkish history, enabling visitors to reimagine the past.

In the above context it is important to acknowledge the dual function of biennial spaces; first, as an inhabited social sphere offering new opportunities for revitalising urban spaces and secondly, as opening up cultural consumption to a public body that may have previously been ignored. In order to understand the new cultural position biennials can offer, it is worthwhile to highlight characteristics of these spaces in relation to traditional models of art exhibition. Biennials as glocal sites of cultural production offer more liberated, unconstrained and accessible spaces for cultural production insofar as they always remain contemporary and unconstrained by the

collection and preservation of cultural heritage (Filipovic, 2005). These spaces of art provide an opportunity for artists, including emerging artists, from all around the world to present art and often without strict, institutional and standard-based regulations. The artwork concerned does not necessarily have to be restricted by the protocols or prerogatives of the space provided, nor does it have to be constrained by adapting to the valuation of cultural heritage, as expected in museums or galleries for example. In this sense, biennials could be considered as nomadic sites that command a multiplex identity and which aim to re-configure that identity with each edition (Filipovic, 2005). Furthermore, when compared with biennials, museums and galleries, which Basualdo (2003:53) defines as ‘symbolically weighty institutions,’ have less flexibility in this regard.

Biennials provide artists with the space in which they can utilise the language of art in order to construct a social dialogue. The theme of the 2018 Liverpool Biennial was ‘Beautiful world, where are you?’, which sought to bring a dialogue about fear and longing and query whether there is a loss of the world order (Liverpool biennial of contemporary art, 2019). Whereas, the theme of the 15th Istanbul Biennial, 'A Good Neighbour' brought together artworks for the question of how we understand 'neighbour' in a social and global context where political boundaries actually impinge upon lives (Miralyn, 2018). Both these biennials delivered a theme related to socio-politically charged issues and aimed to re-evaluate the issues influence by using art’s capacity to re-interpretate and intervent.

Artistic practices that contain an intervention against capitalist interests - like Liberate Tate, Occupy Museums, and some projects supported by Biennials - can demonstrate this influence. For example, Granby workshop, which was initiated in 1998, and supported by Liverpool biennial (2016) is an influential example, taking a pivotal role in driving generative justice

against the regeneration principles of neoliberal capitalism. Granby Workshop describes itself as a new social initiative model, grown out of community led stakeholders and an assemble studio which operates as a transdisciplinary arts initiative. The project started on Granby Street by renovating old Victorian demolished houses from their ruins and turned them into community land- owned houses, creating generative value for the local community. The workshop followed its innovative manufacturing by producing ceramics for the use of these renovated houses. This is a bottom-up initiative that re-creates productive resources from the leftovers of regeneration. The Granby project is a worthwhile example of how a creative intervention can initiate social justice within a broader neoliberal context (Granby Workshop, 2015; Melia, 2020). Granby, as an anti-gentrification art project, demonstrate arts' and artists' cultural role in driving a socially constructive impetus for urban spaces and at the same time in endorsing a community culture.

In addition to the staging of contemporary art and the engagement of the local art scene with international art, another feature of biennials has been the gradual inclusion of an extended educational ethos with a focus on public participation, sometimes referred to as the educational turn. O'Neill and Wilson (2010) describe this as a turn to education in art- the use of artwork not purely as an aesthetic object upon which to look but as forming part of an educational context or method. For example, curators' use of pedagogical strategies such as integrating discussions and symposiums into the exhibition programs of art spaces. "This is not simply to propose that curatorial projects have increasingly adopted education as a theme; it is, rather, to assert that curating increasingly operates as an expanded educational praxis" (O'Neill and Wilson, 2010: 12). This change reflects not only the production of contemporary art but also its presentation in exhibition spaces in galleries, museums, schools (O'Neill and Wilson, 2010) and potentially the wider public sphere. The educational turn can further be connected to the idea and

conceptualization of the paracuratorial (Hoffman *et al.* 2011), indicating the dispersion of the exhibition into other activities (such as workshops, seminars, performances) that expands the field of display into a trans-space of co-production. In a sense, the paracuratorial approach, which is a common practice in many biennial programmes, enables the art exhibited at these sites to engage multiple actors – both producers and consumers, facilitating dialogue between the audience and the art. Examples include the Asian Art Biennial (Dhaka, Bangladesh 1981), the Cairo Biennial (Egypt 1984), the Biennial de la Habana (Cuba 1983), and the 1987 International Istanbul Biennial, which included activities such as artists' talks, workshops, and performance-based events in public spaces (see list of events organised for public programme). In this context, biennials are not merely platforms for the presentation of artwork; they tend to present a diverse range of activities, facilitating knowledge and new debates, interdisciplinary discussions, events, conferences, and workshops, all of which influence new forms of engagement with the arts.

From the above point of view, biennials potentially offer a new way to interpret how culture interfaces with neoliberalism as they can generate culturally inclusive debates and participatory constellations offering a more democratic access to cultural participation. For example, the 10th Liverpool biennial, as part of its collateral activities, created several inclusive activities at a local level appealing to a broader demographic. Among these was French-Algerian artist Mohamed Bourouissa's gardening project. Bourouissa collaborated with Granby Community Land Trust to construct a 'Resilience Garden' on the grounds of Kingsley Primary School. The artist was inspired by a garden built in Algeria by the patient of the psychoanalyst Frantz Fanon. Fanon was an influential doctor who believed in treating trauma via occupational art therapy. The gardening project aimed to echo the therapeutic and resilient influence of florals and plants (Basualdo, 2019; Trigg, 2018). This project worked with the local public, gardeners, primary

school students, teachers and artists, and as such, it left a permanent legacy to the city of Liverpool.

Given our discussion above, the dual role of biennials for cultural consumption and production in the neoliberal context raises interesting questions regarding the form and nature of the cultural engagement they offer. These spaces serve as a basis upon which to observe and examine the influence of neoliberalism on cities' social spheres and the degree of engagement it can offer to a city's culture. This is especially true since contestations of neoliberal agendas become more evident and conducive for observation in urban settings. By analysing the empirical data collected from the 15th Istanbul and the 10th Liverpool Biennials, we will further inform the above discussion by reflecting upon the influence of these spaces on cultural engagement.

Methodology

We undertook fifteen open-ended in-depth interviews and four focus group discussions with a sample of creative practitioners directly related with the 15th Istanbul and 10th Liverpool Biennials. Since the focus of this research was on understanding the role of biennials in cultural engagement, it was important to engage with agents that directly or indirectly related with the 15th Istanbul and 10th Liverpool Biennials. The sample thus included the art audience, ministry of culture representatives, artists participating in biennials, curators, academics working in this realm, sponsor representatives and the biennial organisation teams. The focus group sample included a mix of each of these representative groups. In order to explore this relationship with the form and nature of cultural engagement that biennials can offer, the interview questions aimed to capture the meanings associated with consumption and production of knowledge in biennials that the chosen sample experienced in their engagement with the biennial. The method we used to analyse the data collected is thematic analysis. This method was found to be the most

suitable analysis method to be applied for this research because the data collected from focus groups and in-depth interviews were texts that require interpretation in the social context of the interviewees. All of the interviews and focus group data were recorded and transcribed verbatim and interpreted using the thematic analysis approach.

Biennials as a Themed Artspace

Our data suggests that, the biennial emerges as an art space appreciated as a liberated platform independent from the constraints of galleries and museums. As the respondents often inferred, the biennial's scale denotes more than the creativity of the artists included but encompasses the broader city, its institutions and publics.

> In my opinion, artworks in biennials are like social projects. It has a more sincere look compared to galleries in terms of conveying the story to a vast number of people because it's beyond just selling artwork; it is not like the artist is on the art market without a price, and the gallery contact is on the work. The work commissioned for the biennial takes a role in the composition. It’s like a social/public project aimed at conveying awareness to the public. (Istanbul Biennial Participating Artist)

When compared with traditional spaces of art, most of the works commissioned for biennials are like a social project with the objective of conveying awareness and engaging in a dialogue with the audience. Filipovic (2005) and Martinez (2005) explain the difference between biennials and other art spaces and focus on the fact that they are always heading beyond the present and into the future via structures that remain contemporary and unconstrained by the collection and the preservation of a cultural heritage: ‘Museums are temples for the preservation of memory... Biennials are a context for the exploration and questioning... of the present’ (Vogel, 2010: 88).

Understanding the motivation, perception, and formation processes behind the construction of biennials' themes and how these exhibition frameworks are perceived was one of the main issues emerging from our data, with respondents often referring to a 'conceptual framework'. This can be evaluated as demonstrating an alternative reading for understanding the discursive underpinnings of creative practitioners involved in biennials. Through the use of new definitions and considerations of discourse, new impositions of values are de/constructed. In a way, the use of the term conceptual framework by artists and curators reflects an intellectual justification – as it is often used within scholarly research contexts and academic lexicon (Jabareen, 2009), working to situate the biennial in constructive terms. The conceptual frameworks of the Liverpool and Istanbul biennials represent an attempt to engage with universal social, political, and economic conditions. In other words, they address global questions that are familiar to a biennial audience.

By pro-actively inviting people onto the biennial stage under pre-defined social and political themes, the audience are potentially encouraged to influence and interrogate both individual and social realities. This was demonstrated in our data by a reference to meanings associated with biennials, expressing their goal of connecting with the experiences of various communities. As Bydler (2004) and Filipovic (2005) highlight from a similar perspective, the biennial takes on different roles, starting from adapting or focusing the themes of artworks in relating to particular social realities. A significant example of this was the conceptual framework of the 2017 Istanbul Biennial:

> At the time when social traumas and political earthquakes have fueled anxieties about the future in an unprecedented way and individual freedom has been forced into a corner, the 15th Istanbul Biennial has chosen to follow personal stories. 'A Good Neighbour' will

> deal with multiple notions of home and neighbourhoods, exploring how living modes in our private spheres have changed throughout the past decades. Home is approached as an indicator of diverse identities and as a vehicle for self-expression, with the concept of neighbourhood as a micro-universe exemplifying some of the challenges we face in terms of co-existence today… The excitement of the artists invited to the Biennial was on display as they produced new works in Istanbul, and the interactions gave us the strength to continue, reminding us how important it was to have realised the Biennial for the past thirty years and to ensure its continuity as a form of resistance. (Istanbul Biennial Director, 'Foreword' in *Istanbul Biennial Exhibition Guidebook*, 2017)

As indicated by the director of the 2017 Istanbul Biennial, the theme 'A Good Neighbour' aims to create a reflexive dialogue with its audience by linking with a reality that engages the locals within a global discussion. Biennials' continuity in Istanbul is crucial in terms of taking on a role of resistance.

> While we were deciding on the theme, we thought being in Turkey should also include thinking about how Turkey is being perceived around the world. In this socio-political atmosphere, there is a very quick process of finding enemies as well as finding neighbours. There are also written and unwritten rules about how we behave. We thought that with all this in mind, it's maybe a good starting point to talk about neighbours and neighbourhood, giving a chance to understand people living next to each other and what it means to co-exist with all the diversity. The truth is we also wanted to find something that could relate to everybody who would stop by in Turkey (15th Istanbul Biennial Curators).

As can be deduced from the perspective of the curators of the 15th Istanbul Biennial, the conceptual framework, ‘A Good Neighbour' represents an attempt to signpost the question of how best to understand the term 'neighbour' in a social and global context where political boundaries are impinging upon lives. Besides the reflexive dialogue brought forth by biennials, another point concerning the biennial’s curatorial strategy is its global-capitalist ambition that works to instrumentalise contemporary art (Kompatsiaris, 2017):

> The conceptual frameworks of Biennials usually follow similar subjects, generally socio-political issues. For the case of the Istanbul Biennial specifically, there are two tendencies. In the past, the focus was more on Istanbul. Historic venues were chosen more to attract a focus on history. Neo-Orientalism was the philosophy which aimed at enabling an experience of the exotic taste in Istanbul. In the last five biennials, as I see it, the exhibition centred on more general socio-political issues and reflected the socio-political content of contemporary art. (Istanbul Biennial Participating Artist)

The collected data regarding the curatorial strategy adopted by both 15th Istanbul and 10th Liverpool Biennial refers to a series of questions posed by the biennial’s strategy, expressing their goal of connecting with the realities of different nations and lives. This has been linked by Bishop (2012) to what has been described as the 'social turn' of art practice, where art practice tackles politics, critiquing and engaging with social issues in pursuit of creating a communal space for the ignition of public discussion. This further points to the fact that exhibiting strategies also serve as a means of reflecting on the cultural politics of political identities from different nations and cultures. As Filipovic (2005:67) asserts, these strategies are employed in order to reflect social realities in relation to structuring aesthetics as well as discursive and political identities on both individual and collective levels.

> The question ‘Beautiful World, Where Are You?’ resonates with the city and impacts on the city. I think it is a bigger global question. It is a question for the world (Focus Group Participant).

> The 2018 Liverpool Biennial will take the first line of Schiller’s poem from 1788 as its starting point, ‘Beautiful world – where are you?’ The years between the composition of Schiller’s poem and Schubert’s song saw great upheaval and profound change, from the French Revolution to the fall of the Napoleonic Empire. It is an era that introduces a modern age of indifference and alienation. It was a very complicated time, and this line really jumped out to her (Kitty Scott), so she tested it on all of us, and we loved it straight away. We thought it was a fantastic starting point for thinking about exactly those issues, and how we find and make sense in the world, in these challenging times (Liverpool Biennial Organising Team).

Similar to the data collected from curators at Istanbul Biennial, the conceptual framework for the 2018 Liverpool Biennial, 'Beautiful World, Where Are You?', aims to posit a global question, inviting artists and their audience to interrogate and reflect upon a world experiencing social, political, and economic turmoil. In doing so, on the one hand, it puts the locality of Liverpool, the city's past and present, under the spotlight. On the other hand, it approaches a much greater concern that cuts through national boundaries, in an increasingly interconnected world.

Glocal Engagement in Arts

Can glocalising experiences transform the way audiences engage with art, offering a more socially reflexive space? The following remark made by one of the participating artists of the Istanbul Biennial works to demonstrate biennials' glocalising influence – their capacity to connect the local with the global.

> Through the biennial platform, you can bring up the concern of your work to an international dialogue. A biennial is an international cultural event. It has an amazing aspect of connecting the reality of your work and your geography with the rest of the world. So many Turkish artists and artworks have been recognised thanks to the Istanbul Biennial. It enabled our careers to flourish globally and our concerns to be heard, and we have gathered so many artists and artworks from all around the world here in Istanbul (Istanbul Biennial Participating Artist) .

Also, as can be deduced from the response below, the influence of the glocal is often associated with processes of de-territorialisation. This process can be described as a loss of the natural relationship between culture and socio-geographic transformation replaced by the impact of global, transnational connections operating within a local realm, in turn transforming local cultural experiences, forming a new cultural sphere (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). De-territorialised artistic expression can be explained as the influence and the impact of artworks in transcending the context in which it is presented. For example, the surveillance camera sculptures installed around Beyoğlu district in Istanbul ,“ Follower” by Burçak Bingöl, took a critical stance to the culture of surveillance. The sculptures ornamented with flower motifs raises awareness to panoptical public life and at the same time invokes its watcher to remember the environmental nature of urban life.

> The postmodern discourse initiated by globalization disintegrated the distinction between race and nation. Now, there is a multicultural game in a global culture where cultures are intertwined. Focus shifted from country to cities where each city takes a dialogue that merges both discourses. Also, these changes influenced individuals on a psychological and philosophical level. Values have changed; individuals are now more open-minded

> towards cultural differences and more easily embrace diversity. (Liverpool Biennial Participating Artist)

As glocal spaces of art, biennials not only provoke a new discourse around art-making but also locate a site that enables a simultaneous presence of both universalising and localising tendencies- a more culturally inclusive space that presents its own narrative around the ways in which the global and the local interact. Can such a narrative influence the way individuals engage with culture, offering a more inclusive form of cultural production and consumption? We can accept that at one level the globalized world order facilitates an easy transmission of the art network, and in this guise, cities can experience a more diverse cultural narrative, influencing the way individuals engage with culture. However, it is worth considering whether or not biennials' potential transformative power is entirely positive in their effects (Wilks-Heeg and North, 2004). Biennials may carry the institutional framework and dynamics of the international art scene to locals, giving them access to a more culturally inclusive space that was previously less accessible. Yet, on the other hand, such processes can tie the art consumer to processes of neoliberalism by exposing them to homogenised culture and the challenges associated with it (Morgner, 2020). As the response below indicates, globally interrelated goods and services have always brought forth a flow of new political values and boundaries that actively confront the assumptions that we might have about the positive effects of globalization and the like. Nowadays, one of the challenges caused by the new ordering often discussed is the backlash against globalization. Political decisions taken by states; like the rise of protectionist, populist governmentality in USA or UK's withdrawal from the EU- 'Brexit,' challenges the dream of global integration. As inferred by our respondent, given the restrictions on commerce movement upon the EU, the implications of Brexit cause dissent. This indicates the other side of the coin -

the fragility of globalization and what has in some ways become a growing anti-global sentiment towards globalization and how globalization is materialised in the cultural sphere.

> Starting with the 1990s, there was an explosion in the art market, especially in London; not elsewhere in the UK, but London. I was working at the Serpentine Gallery during that time, so I had the chance to witness every visible change in the art market. Now, London is one of the global centres in the world, it is a world city. We have the UK's major galleries there... Now, unfortunately, Brexit is a disaster; it will have a devastating impact on the art market. Already, people are leaving. All of the acquisitions that were built up during those years, where we had artists coming from all over the world, are based in London. European artists are moving around. Lots of dealers and collectors were happy to be in this city. Now, if we do leave Europe, there is a chance that lots of collectors will leave. Those artists will leave. The boom, which has happened, has made the UK powerful in terms of cultural diplomacy (soft power). We are about to lose it, I think. (Liverpool Biennial Organisation Team)

A backlash against the effects of globalization such as the protectionist policies adopted by USA, UK-Brexit and their impact upon other European nations, can be interpreted as de-territorialisation in a political guise. As can be deduced from our respondent, these anti-global disintegrative processes are an economic and social thread to many citizens, leading to uncertainty. This demonstrates the other side of the glocal experience, leading to a perceived threat of doubt and a sense of uncertainty. Beck et al. (1992:21) defined ‘a risky life’ as ‘... a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernisation itself’ such as the social challenges encountered by global politics. Under the

theme Neighborhood the 15th Istanbul Biennial iterates a concept right at the problem of hazards and insecurities induced by contemporary global politics. As part of the 15th Istanbul Biennial, Volkan Aslan's (2017) "Home Sweet Home" video tale is a good example of this, echoing the fragile, anxious conditions induced by this perceived risk of uncertainty. The video-story provides a metaphor, narrating the spirit of the current era, reflecting upon constant mobility, the precariat lives and the increasing ambiguity of the concept of 'home'. This condition is further demonstrated by the scene of two women living in a moving boat-home in the shores of Istanbul's Bosphorus, sailing to an unknown location?. At the end of the video, the artist presents a hybrid boat-home image by merging three screens-as if to suggest everyone is "on the same boat." 'Home- sweet home' questions the concept of home in a displaced, de-territorialised world (Trouli, 2019).

Creative Resistance to Neoliberal Taste Rhetoric

Can new ways of creating interactive exhibitions give the biennial audience access to a more critical space of art that was previously unavailable to them and thus become capable of transforming the ways in which the public interacts with art? Biennial spaces can facilitate social cultural participation by opening up cultural consumption to a public body that may have previously been neglected. The implication is that biennial sites, which are positioned multifariously across the city in venues such as (for 10th Liverpool Biennial: Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral, Blackburn House, St. George Hall, The Playhouse Theatre and for 15th Istanbul Biennial : Küçük Mustafa Paşa Hamamm, Greek Primary School, Yoğunluk Artist Atelier) disused shopping malls or cinemas, facilitate a change in the art audience's role, where art no longer corresponds to the supposedly highbrow tastes of the elite but bears the potential to

appeal to the broader public. Biennials effectively serve as sites that are capable of offering a more democratic cultural milieu by enabling dialogue with the audience, often through their endorsement of public, outreach and educationally discursive events, thus permitting opportunities for audiences to become participants in the work: co-production. As Ferguson *et al.* (2010:387) put it, 'Biennials talk about themselves as they present themselves and take account of the audience in the production of the work,' therefore engaging actively within a reflexive process. This democratization of participation has been a key feature of the Liverpool Biennial.

The main demographic for all the Liverpool Biennial team's programs is a mix of city inhabitants and students. The programmes were mainly targeted for students because there were strong thematic differences in the topics chosen. The topics included artificial intelligence and its potential impact on our lives, organic materials, and the ecology of the world. Each speech was conducted by speakers with different social profiles. Mostly it was students, teachers, and some artists who participated. (Liverpool Biennial Education Coordinator)

> Projects in the Biennial are related to the community. There was a project created by the artist Mohamed Bourouissa, 'Resilience Garden', that directly engaged those who made the garden by working with local people, gardeners, school pupils, teachers, and artists. The artist was inspired by a garden made by a patient of the psychoanalyst and writer Frantz Fanon at the Blida-Joinville Psychiatric Hospital in Blida, Algeria. Fanon's patient created the garden as occupational therapy, reflecting the organisation of his mental space through its structure. Bourouissa created a similar garden in Liverpool. A space of resilience... (Focus Group Participant)

The gardening project, described here by a focus group participant, left a permanent legacy for the city and offered a reflexive engagement with the locals. This process corresponds to

Birchall's (2015, 2017, 2017a) discussion around audience participation. Co-production started to become prominent in the 1990s, although its roots in art practice can be traced further back to the mid-to late twentieth century, such as in the pedagogy of Black Mountain College, and the work of Fluxus, or Kaprow's (1965) 'Happenings'-where the art spectator turned into an active participant. Artists and curators used such social situations in order to generate de-materialised, anti-market, and 'socially engaging' works designed to blur the boundaries between art and life (Kaprow, 1993). All of these changes have influenced the understanding of public space and art production while enabling new ways of experimenting with community-based projects. A very clear example relating to this argument is Jeanne van Heeswijk's Liverpool Biennial project. As a collaboration with a community association, the project Homebakedin Liverpool enabled the reconstruction of a bakery building and resulted in a self-sustaining business (Birchall, 2015). The neighborhood started going under the auspices of a regeneration project in 1998. Many homes were destroyed for new investment projects. A group of local community members began establishing Homebaked in Community Land Trust. This started as a bottom-up initiative that endorsed community possession of proprieties and initiated opening a community enterprise bakery in the neighborhood (Birchall, 2015). The project began in 2010 in collaboration with the Liverpool biennial, brought together people from Anfield and Breckfield to reformulate a future for their neighborhood. The project empowered the local community by creating a new economic model to sustain a long-term vision for transforming the neighborhood. Jeanne van Heeswijk (2021:298) calls this 'radicalizing the local' rather than waiting for government intervention in designing areas for their residents' future. Homebaked in Liverpool enabled communities to develop their means to create a self-sustaining future for their neighborhood.

Artists are effectively operating as producers from and within the biennial, by initiating the grounds for socially interventionist and critical art. They are able to challenge the assumptions we make about neoliberal rhetoric by critiquing the capitalist crisis. In Chantal Mouffe's (2007:4) understanding of art, biennials are agonistic spaces critical of neoliberal hegemony. Agonism, understood in these terms, refers to the positive role of conflict in influencing an ideal ground for democracy Mattila (2016:756).

"According to the agonistic approach, critical art is art that foments dissensus that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate. It is constituted by a manifold of artistic practices aiming at giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony."

The Biennial organiser's motivation is a key element in underpinning the democratic access to art. As in the case of IKSV, the main organising body for the Istanbul Biennial, as well as philanthropists that support this organisation such as Koç and Eczacıbaşı are not only organisers, supporters and sponsors for this organisation to take place, but also endorsers of a global cultural climate in pursuit of leveraging Turkey's cultural development in the international arena. This is highlighted by the response of the main sponsor of the Istanbul Biennial:

> Our aim is not to increase the number of people attending the Biennial but to have and welcome diverse groups of people to the Biennial. In February 2017, we conducted research on public engagement in the arts; intending to introduce policy approaches that strengthen public engagement in the arts, the report takes a step forward and offers suggestions in facilitating the active participation of the audience in cultural and artistic events by bridging the distance between the audience and arts institutions, deepening the

> audience experience and diversifying the audience profile. What we are aiming to do is get public to participate into arts (IKSV research and development).

As the IKSV development team suggests, the facilitation of the engagement and accessibility of arts in pursuit of the democratisation of culture amongst the public is one of the most important motivations for IKSV. The ideal motivations of biennial organisers seem to situate these cultural spaces as stimulators of a discursive space for art production and consumption to take place, but this does not neglect their connection to the neoliberal market's hegemonic order. We believe that our analysis in this study presents an alternative perspective from which we can begin to better understand the cultural impact of neoliberalism. As glocal spaces of culture, biennials might potentially offer a widening of the cultural field via artistic intervention that constitute something of a stand against the neoliberal judgement of taste.

Concluding Remarks

Critiques of art investment in the city tend to be ideological. In other words, they are underpinned by a way of thinking that assumes the neoliberal market logic is hegemonic. Of course, the biennial has some characteristics that you would associate with neoliberalism. In the last thirty years we can acknowledge a systematic implementation of culture-led agendas, which resulted in explicit social and economic utility for the cities. However, discussions around the 'creative city' or the 'global city' ultimately serve to underestimate the complexity of these spaces. Chantal Mouffe (2007) offers a well-suited discussion that can indicate the nature of the argument undertaken in this research. Accordingly, a vibrant democracy requires an agonistic struggle among different agents, reflecting the power structures in which society is structured. In

this respect, Biennials act as glocal cultural spaces that can be situated as offering an agonistic milieu. This cross-fertilization between neoliberal cultural rhetoric can be challenged via discursive projects of art which are in turn indicative of more democratic and inclusive spaces of culture. On a critical note, we acknowledge that one of the limitations of this study is the fact it depends on a sample chosen that consists of creative practitioners who have responsibility for delivering the 15th Istanbul and 10th Liverpool Biennial and who, in turn, have invested interest in portraying such biennials in a positive light. We might well assume that they are bound to think constructively of the impact their own practices might have. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that the voices of creative practitioners are important, and it should not be assumed that their actions in practice are beholden to a neoliberal model of economic and social change. Our data infers that, biennials have some role to play in democratising art participation and that they do so by making it more accessible to the public and by exposing the local populace to an international art discourse.

Besides from exhibiting global art, biennials encourage the accumulation of new ideas by focusing on the relationship between global socio-spatial processes and local problems. They are in this sense a discursive space. Far from being a recipe for neoliberal imposition or standardization, biennials open up opportunities on the fringes that render apparent this intersection between the global and local, in which a more culturally inclusive and agonistic milieu of arts can emerge. The art biennial, which lends itself to be encountered as a contested cultural space, serves to challenge the way we currently think about the relationship between the art world and neoliberalism.

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Data availability statement

Qualitative data that supports the findings of this article can be found at URI: https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/627120

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