

2010

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## Recommended Citation

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# Becoming European? Constructing Identity in Urban Regeneration Discourse in Ireland

*Alan Gerard Bourke*

Drawing upon policy documents and interview data, this article is concerned with how the conservation, interpretation and promotion of built heritage are used as categorical identity referents within urban regeneration discourse. The paper is critical of two inter-related dynamics. First, it addresses the relation between “culture-led” urban regeneration and the construction of a “sense of place”. Second, it problematizes parallel attempts to constitute a sanitized and marketable urbanism expressed via a rhetorical and contrived veneer of European identity. A fundamental premise of the discussion is that the challenge of articulating a coherent and “distinctive” sense of urban cultural identity has become problematic in the context of European regional cities – not only *between* various cities, but also *within* such cities themselves. To this end, the dilemma facing many regional cities is that which in advertising parlance is referred to as the problematic of “parity marketing”—that is, the task of marketing a product which is virtually indistinguishable from its competitors (Holcomb 1999: 56, Kearns and Philo 1993: 18).

Although processes of “Europeanization” can be conceived of in a number of ways beyond the scope of the present discussion, recent accounts have conceptualized it as a societal transformation encompassing culture, identity, and forms of urban governance (Featherstone and Radaelli 2004, Milner 2007, Delanty and Rumford 2005, Healey 2005, Sassatelli 2008). Within this process, the “Europeanization of the cityscape” (Delanty and Jones 2002) is that which encapsulates a concerted attempt on behalf of urban planners and policy-makers to express a post-national cultural identity contained both within and beyond the confines of the nation-state. As such, the dilemma facing many contemporary European regional cities is not so much in axiomatically *being* European, but rather in *becoming* European, a problematic which contributes decisively to both the definition and process of the consolidating project of Europe (Sassatelli 2008: 236). Based empirically upon the example of Cork, Ireland, a guiding claim of this paper is that such supra-national processes are keenly felt at the local level. Indeed, just as the age of British imperialism is clearly discernable from the built heritage of the city, so too have contemporary processes of Europeanization become progressively inscribed upon the physical appearance of the city.

The analysis traces the articulation of culture-led planning in urban regeneration, its usage and conceptualization in policy discourse, and the alignment of such initiatives with processes of Europeanization. The discussion is structured as follows: Part (I) offers a contextualizing discussion of contemporary research on “culture-led development” and its alliance with consumption-oriented urban branding initiatives in creating a marketable “sense of place”. Part (II) situates these initiatives in relation to concomitant attempts in constituting a marketable urban identity, one which embraces a sense of European commonality whilst seeking to preserve the difference through maintaining, and elevating, the signifiers of locality. Part (III) presents a general outline of methodological orientation and provides some brief contextual information on Cork City. Part (IV) details how the conservation, interpretation and promotion of built heritage in Cork are used as a contested identity referent within renewal discourse. Part (V) concludes by suggesting that regeneration discourse is operationalized with the imperative of sustaining economic viability, one in which the existent built heritage of the city acquires a newly ascribed functional commodification held amidst the marketplace of European cities.

### **Capitalizing Culture**

As cities throughout Western Europe have undergone a restructuring of their economic base over the course of the past thirty years, urban policy-makers have increasingly turned to culture-led regeneration initiatives as holding the key to a city’s prospects of economic revival (Couch 2003, Garcia 2005, Mommass 2004, Pratt 2009, Richard and Wilson 2004, Taylor 2000, Young, Diep, and Drabble 2006). In the context of urban regeneration, “culture-led” development is characterized as an attempt to mobilize cultural resources in driving urban economic growth, with such strategies typically premised upon production or consumption oriented models (Bailey et al 2004, Bianchini and Parkinson 1993, Paddison and Miles 2006). Whilst remaining cognizant of Zukin’s (1995) contention that culture-led development actively undermines urban distinctiveness, in terms of producing a homogenized “symbolic economy” based on tourism, media and entertainment, such initiatives seek to exploit the cultural resources of a given urban milieu in foregrounding and promoting the cultural infrastructure and perceived “uniqueness” of a given context. As such, the often nebulously defined culture and built heritage of a city is accorded a key, if indeterminate, role in regard to the prospects of social and economic prosperity. Indeed, Evans (2003: 432) suggests that the marriage of convenience which has come to exist between culture and commerce entails that any form of urban planning policy is now, *ipso facto*, essentially a variant of cultural planning (see also Evans 2001: 6-7, Mommaas 2004).

The discussion here focuses on the role of built heritage in urban regeneration discourse. In the context of an urban environment, built heritage can be read as the bequest of history, a problematic inheritance encompassing the traditions and mythologies of a given collective, and as that which has become “written” upon the built infrastructure of the city. This definition entails the fundamental assumption that

built structures and urban spaces are invested with cultural and symbolic meanings which possess a particular representational and aesthetic purpose alongside their inherent functionality (Ashworth 1994, Graham 1994). The increase in the centrality of the culture concept in planning initiatives suggests that the economic and the symbolic have converged to dominate culture-led initiatives. In essence, the perceived marketability of the built environment is that which contains the potential to set it apart from rival cities in competing for the capturing of both “creative industries” (Hartley 2005) and tourism revenue (Urry 1990). This coalescence between the cultural and the economic spheres effectively serves to commoditize the built heritage of the city into a packaged series of marketable urban spaces (Garcia 2004: 314). However, whereas planners may emphasize a distinct “sense of place” in policy, there remains the tension that far from being either monolithically singular or highly differentiated entities, urban cultures arguably subsume more heterogeneous elements in their composition than they exclude. Accounting for this is a key dilemma facing the “cultural branding” of the city (Crilley 1993, Evans 2003, Greenberg 2008, Hannigan 2003, Holcomb 1999, Kavaratzis 2007, Kearns and Philo 1993, Mommass 2002, Paddison 2003).

Germane to the present discussion is the recognition that the contemporary prevalence of urban branding strategies in regeneration discourse effectively serves to conceal the manifold ideological positioning contained within initiatives which seek to synthesize the material and symbolic economies of the built environment (Evans 2003: 417). If many cities situated on the Western European periphery now lack the economic and symbolic vitality once the preserve of their industrial past (Jones and Wilks-Heeg 2004, Young et al. 2006), their contemporary configurations have thus come to increasingly rely upon appeal to the touristic gaze (Urry 1990). As such, the perceived uniqueness and cultural resonance of a city’s sense of place becomes a means of mutual differentiation to be achieved between cities in order to increase the volume of tourist footfall. The inherent danger resides in how the alignment between branding strategies and culture-led planning initiatives has tended to become an increasingly uncontested issue within planning discourse, a state of affairs which serves to mask the often implicit neo-functionalist emphasis placed upon achieving social integration. By this is meant that the EU has long recognized that attempts at closer economic and political functional inter-dependence will not in themselves result in a united Europe, and have thus instigated a variety of culturally-oriented initiatives over the past three decades by which to achieve this aim. As Sassatelli (2008: 3) notes: in the first European communities, from the ESCE to the EEC, culture was intentionally excluded due to its potentially divisive effects.

The implementation of cultural production initiatives which foreground such variables as heritage and identity are also typically consumption-orientated. European cultural policy initiatives enacted over the course of the past three decades have seen many cities espouse a rhetorical cosmopolitanism and parallel projection of cultural vibrancy, a process Young, Diep and Drabble have referred to as “domestication by cappuccino” (2006: 1690). A key focus of attention has been the promotion of “cultural tourism” as a means by which to re-position the economic

base of the city (Evans 2003: 418). Indeed, Moloney (2006: 26) suggests that the “urban tourist” has become a figure of increasing importance for the urban economy. According to Bayliss (2004), the attraction of the cultural heritage industry accounts for approximately thirty percent of European tourism revenue, with attendance at cultural events and heritage sites doubling over the course of the last twenty years. Such cultural consumption strategies are not without their drawbacks, however, for the promotion of ephemeral cultural events, such as the European City of Culture programme, or investment in iconic infrastructure (the “Bilbao-Guggenheim effect”) may encourage patterns of short-term tourist footfall albeit with relatively little sustainable impact for the overall image of the city as a potential site of long-term investment (Bayliss 2004, Paddison 1993, Milner 2007, Richard and Wilson 2004).

### **Urban Renewal and European Identity**

Perhaps nothing encapsulates the tensions between culture-led production models of economic growth and consumption-oriented branding initiatives more evidently than the European Capital of Culture Programme (ECOC). Established in 1983 (originally as the European City of Culture) as the brainchild of then Greek Minister for Culture, Melina Mercouri, the project proposed a celebration of culture of “European significance”. The program had been essentially conceived of at a time when many European cities were experiencing considerable economic and symbolic decline and, in accordance with Zukin’s (1995) contention regarding the shift from an industrial to an artistic mode of production, proposed the “anointing” of various cities as cities of culture. Cork hosted the annual event in 2005, and following the Glasgow model (Garcia 2005), Capital of Culture in 1990, in using the event as a catalyst for urban regeneration (Jones and Wilks-Heeg 2004, Bayliss 2004, Garcia 2004), instigated an ongoing series of urban infrastructural projects and aesthetic refurbishments which have significantly altered the physical appearance of the city.

The program has not been without substantive criticism. Mooney (2004) depicts the impact of the ECOC designation on Glasgow as ultimately revealing the contestations surrounding the interpretation of local culture and heritage in which an officially promoted version marginalized the existence of neighbourhoods of severe socio-economic disadvantage (Gomez 1998, Garcia 2005). Similarly, Garcia has suggested that the project is surrounded by a plethora of unquestioned myths concerning the long-term sustainability of hosting the event (2004: 321). In the case of Cork, the emergence of the dissenting *Where’s Me Culture?* group sought to reveal this interpretative contestation by staging numerous “unofficial” events throughout the European City of Culture year. Indeed, notwithstanding gestures to social equity with the inclusion of several community-based projects in the Cork 2005 programme, O’Callaghan and Linehan suggest that corporate sponsorship privileged a claim to the city which promoted the ideals of prosperity and economic growth over those of social inclusion and citizenship (2007: 318).

It is within such EU sanctioned policy initiatives as the ECOC programme that the perceived unity of the Union is encapsulated, not merely in such ascriptions of

cultural commonality, but rather as being normatively guided via the development of a European singular subject embracing both shared ideals and a common destiny (2008: 236). As stated in the Maastricht Treaty signed in 1992, the European Union "... shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the member states, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore" (Treaty of the European Union, Art. 151.1). A side project titled "The City of Tomorrow and Cultural Heritage" identifies built heritage as a priority field of action regarding the preservation of heritage of "European significance". Conceptually, this attempts to position the European Union's mandate of "united in diversity" as an "intersubjective cultural and political construct" (Leontidou 2004: 611).

In political terms, the elevation and valorisation of cultural particularity and concomitant acceptance of a pan-European cosmopolitan commonality thus becomes an inherently dialogic process in which the discursive embrace of multiple identities (the city conceived of as simultaneously local, regional and European actor) is seen as an attractive alternative to the historical legacy of a warring Europe. Indeed, underlying European urban policy debates has been the presupposition that the local remains vital in regard to the maintenance of a coherent cultural identity at the regional and European level (Forrest and Kenneth 2006: 714, Kockel 2007: 85, Sassatelli 2008: 235). To speak of the very significance of the local, however, often precipitates the accusation of assuming a conservative or parochial positionality, not to mention implicitly sanctioning an introverted obsession with an essentialized conceptualization of indigenous or nationalist heritage (Lee 1997: 130). In this view, the project of "becoming European" remains one haunted by normative comparisons with nationalism.

According to Sassatelli (2002), a key variable in the communal history of the project of Europe has been the sustained dynamic of cultural "cross-fertilization", the historically periodic, violent expression of which eventually culminated in the realization that economic and legal integration would not by themselves create a united Europe. Indeed, the inadequacy of such neo-functionalist attempts in achieving social integration helped substantiate the cultural turn in urban policy. The European entity is itself premised upon a fundamental ambivalence in regard to the normative horizons of collective identity, and certainly in its contemporary manifestation, for what is signified as "Europe" is a continuously negotiated entity (Shore 2000, Stråth 2002, Leontidou 2004, Delanty and Rumford 2005, Eder 2006). If a city such as Cork can thus be said to be undergoing a process of Europeanization, the problematic remains of what precisely the designation "European" represents (Stråth 2002). In accordance with Kantner's suggestion (2006) that the project of articulating a collective sense of European identity is one which is losing its analytical force, the introduction of the ascension states to the European Union in 2004 has necessitated a broadening of the terms of inclusivity in regard to the very notion of Europe. Such definitional permeability has prompted many cities to adopt an often uncritically espoused and nebulously defined cosmopolitan identity. Young et al (2006: 1702-5) depict the construction of such cosmopolitanism to be an inherently paradoxical

enterprise as it necessarily suggests the presence of a differentiated “Other” implicitly juxtaposed against the urban cosmopolite. In effect, this serves to constitute specific geographies of value by which certain forms of difference are pathologized in favour of the marketing of a narrow and contrived range of consumptive practices which strike accord with the prevailing cosmopolitan script. Furthermore, Evans (2003: 437) suggests that such delimited practices of consumption ultimately prove conducive to an increasingly radical process of cultural commoditization which marginalizes those who do not have a firm stake in the gentrification process. This raises an issue of perennial concern; namely, that civic elites valorise rhetorical articulations of localized identity and heritage whilst simultaneously engendering a range of exclusionary consumptive practices in their attempts to position the city as European.

Whilst the increasing amount of dialogue as to what precisely constitutes a European heritage is symptomatic of the definitional ambiguity concerning the extent of the perceived “European-ness” of recent additions to the EU (Stråth 2002), the discussion presented in Part IV is essentially concerned with how this ambiguity finds expression at the local level. Whereas narratives of a supra-national European identity have previously been institutionally derived (Shore 2000: 18, Evans 2001: 189), the challenge presenting itself to the contemporary city is the means by which this process finds expression at the localized level. The discourse of Europe-as cultural, economic, symbolic, and geo-political entity suggests there to be an intrinsic correlation between the localization of the European and global economy, and a nascent recognition in which a provincially peripheral city such as Cork re-conceptualizes its relation within this constellation. Following Atkinson (1999), I argue that such discourses have emerged from a lengthy period of conflict among a variety of actors which appears to have produced an acceptance on behalf of local government that municipal or localized forms of collectivism are no longer tenable (nor are they rendered obsolete) and that new, competitive, and globalized forms of development need to be pursued.

## Method

The primary policy documents drawn upon are Cork Corporation’s *Cork City Development Plan 2009-2015* (hereafter referred to as the CCDP) and Cork City Council’s *Cork Area Strategic Plan 2001-2020* (hereafter referred to as the CASP), with supplementary material drawn from Cork City Heritage Forum’s *Cork City Heritage Plan 2007-2012*, Cork City Development Board’s *Cork 2002-2012: Imagine Our Future: Integrated Strategy for the Economic, Social, and Cultural, Development of Cork City*, and Cork City Council’s *Cork Docklands Development Strategy* of 2001. Both the CCDP and CASP documents fall under the ambit of the National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020, an initiative conceived within the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP). These in turn foster an alliance with the National Development Plan (NDP), which itself functions within the European Social Infrastructural Operational Programme (ESIOP). Far from presenting themselves as conflictual representations of the various socio-economic imperatives guiding urban renewal initiatives, these documents

are promoted as the communicative carriers of an intrinsically unified renewal discourse encapsulating local, regional, and supra-regional concerns. Given that these documents exist largely as the de-agentalized carriers of official policy, a total of fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with key personnel involved in the implementation of renewal strategies in Cork. Those interviewed consisted primarily of planners, policy-makers, and city architects. Interviews were also conducted with personnel decidedly more critically aligned with the renewal policies instigated in Cork: namely, a leading property developer, a historian, an archaeologist and a conservationist.

While “discourse” has been used by linguists to denote single or groups of utterances or texts, social theorists have used the term “discourse analysis” to make explicit the connections between language use, interpretative processes, and power relations (Fairclough 1992, 2003). In terms of how discourse analysis embodies a social constructivist approach, it should be seen as both a method and methodology, that is, it both provides concrete directions for analysing discourse whilst also positioning such analysis within a specific epistemological trajectory. Such an approach views discourse analysis as inherently constitutive of the social world, not as a direct route to it (Philips and Hardy 2002). In recent years, discourse analysis has been constructively employed as a methodology for understanding the urban policy implementation process, and particularly the manner in which various actors exercise power (Jacobs 2006: 39). In effect, discourse analysis recognizes the role of language in urban planning and policy, and the essentially recursive relationship which exists between language and power. The analysis presented below aims to trace a specific discursive trajectory within renewal discourse, one in which the built heritage of the city is evoked as a categorical identity referent in urban regeneration. As explicated in Part IV below, the evocation of history and heritage in policy discourse provides a naturalizing framework within which to articulate current change.

Fairclough’s utilization of critical discourse analysis explicates how power differentials are instantiated through discourse as a means of “structuring areas of knowledge and social practice” (1992: 3). In terms of urban planning and policy, this refers to the positioning effects of discursive structures and the ways in which particular cognitive frames (e.g. heritage conservation, urban renewal, development, and so on) are accepted or disqualified in contrast with “authorized” knowledge as codified in policy documentation. This has been particularly evident in traditional top-down urban planning in which policy has been designed and implemented without the consult of community actors. In particular, the use of critical discourse analysis has encouraged scholars and analysts to view policy language in its cultural and political complexity, and to question the language and imagery used in representing urban transformations. A challenge for urban-focused critical discourse analysis, therefore, is in discerning how community consultation and input may be partial, co-opted, or rendered passive in planning discourse (Jacobs 2004).

For example, Skillington (1998) uses a textual analysis in examining the redevelopment of Dublin’s city centre, and argues that a variety of strategically employed symbolic and referential discourses constituted an insular hegemonic



paradigm that reinforced a tight demarcation between public and private spaces, thereby making it difficult to envisage alternative strategies of development (see also McLaren, A. and McGuirk 2001, Whelan 2003). One way to consider this is to recognise how each party will have the discursive parameters defined for it in part by the other. This evokes a further key feature of discourse –that it tends to be organized around specific practices of exclusion. This enables actors to think in certain ways whilst also limiting the scope of such thought. In this view, exclusion -viewed as delimitating the parameters of discursive possibility-becomes a key component of the means by which discourse is produced.

Of course, the use of discourse analysis is not employed without critique. A criticism which could be levied against the analysis presented here is that the data sources reflect a monolithic view of the relationship between economic stimulus initiatives, the built environment, and cultural ideas of place. Other scholars, by way of comparison, have relied upon a wide-ranging selection of sources, specifically by securing them from social groups with discordant views of the urban regeneration process (Zukin 1982, Brown-Saracino 2004). In confronting such criticism, researchers need to remain cognizant of how particular texts have been written for specific audiences and that this is a key factor influencing the issues and language usage contained therein (Jacobs 2006: 47). Nonetheless, many documents appear sanitized wherein conflictual elements are downplayed or erased and, in so doing, present the regeneration process as intrinsically linear in conceptualization and execution. The analysis of the various policy documents cited above, for instance, is intended to be illustrative of how policy provides a repertoire of concepts to be used strategically in planning discourse in order to influence the social construction of urban identity, in addition to supporting the institutionalization of practices by providing a legitimizing framework for resource distribution (Philips and Hardy 2002).

### ***Location and History of Cork City***

With a population of approximately 120,000, Cork City is the largest city in the South West region of Ireland and a major centre of post-secondary education, employment concentration, and cultural activities. The city's appearance is derived from a combination of its medieval-era street plan, an undulating topography, and its location on the River Lee at a point where it forms a number of waterways surrounding the central "island" of the city centre. Cork's pre-eminence as trading centre and maritime merchant port in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries created much of the tangible archaeological and historic remains which still survive in the historical centre, with notable examples being the Butter Market in the Shandon area, the brewing industries in Blackpool and North Main St. areas, and the Bonded Warehouse in the Docklands area. By the late 1800's, Cork's merchants had developed considerable trade networks with various European ports (Bielenberg 1991). Premised upon a low population and economic base, Ireland's economic boom years of the 1990s were built on inward investment, tax incentives, and a post-Fordist urban economy –in addition to receiving over €1 billion in European Structural and Regional Development Funds (ESRD) (matched with private investment for cultural

and tourism programmes). Such prosperity led to a dramatic upsurge in the amount of capital investment in the housing and public works sectors in urban areas, with Cork being the primary recipient of such investment in the Southwest region.

Chosen as European Capital of Culture in 2005, Cork City Council have vigorously promoted the city as the repository of a wealth of cultural and built heritage. Instigated by the designation of the ECOC, flagship projects in the past five to ten years have included the refurbishment of the city's primary thoroughfares of Patrick Street and the Grand Parade; the refurbishment of Cork Opera House; the development of the Wandesford Quay Arts Project; major extensions to both the Crawford Municipal Art Gallery and Cork Public Museum; the development of a pedestrianized retail area linking Academy Street /Emmet Place with Cornmarket Street in the city centre; and the upgrading of the boardwalk on Lapp's Quay (private development). Significant investment has also targeted the National Sculpture Factory, the Triskel Arts Centre, and the Everyman Theatre Palace. Furthermore, the city also hosts a number of annual festivals, including the Cork Guinness Jazz Festival, Cork International Choral Festival, Cork Folk Festival, and Murphy's International Film Festival, which attract substantial tourist revenue for the city. In Cork, tourism is worth €389 million annually and the equivalent of 2,456 jobs to the economy (Moloney 2006).

### **Interpreting Heritage and Habitus**

There are all kinds of sensitivities that you have to embrace, that you encounter when you get into all this... peoples' troubled relationship with the past. (Interview with city architect)

Following the end of the Irish war of independence in 1921, the necessity of cultivating a renewed sense of indigenous identity and cultural autonomy in Irish cities was arguably performed through an ardent denial of the infrastructural legacy left behind by the departing colonial power (Moane 2002). Commenting upon the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century neglect of the architectural legacy of British sovereignty in Cork, one respondent suggested that "I think there was an element of... you know... the people on the hill can go fuck themselves. It was like shitting in your own backyard" (interview with city planner). Historically housed upon the hills of Montenotte overlooking the city, the "people on the hill" refers to the landed gentry classes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As such, there arose a deeply paradoxical and problematic relationship of both affection and disdain exhibited toward existing infrastructure and the built environment, as the legacy and signifiers of colonial form came to co-exist with the freshly inscribed wounds of a partitioned nation. British red mail boxes, for instance, were repainted green. As suggested by another respondent:

I think you had a complete identity crisis following independence and the place became nothing like it was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. And we were like the Italians living in the ruins of Rome when the Renaissance came... living among the ruins and monuments of something else. (Interview with architect)

The mills, warehouses, distilleries, breweries and other industrial buildings which survive in many parts of Cork bear witness to the great economic expansion of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Whereas Cork was once a thriving port city exhibiting notable similarities with other cities situated on the Western European periphery, and notable appendage within the British imperial matrix, its subsequent industrial and economic demise left it devoid of such vital civic coordinates. Many of these buildings, apart from being an important part of the city's industrial-era legacy, are also of significant architectural and social interest. Furthermore, the CCDP "... recognizes that our heritage is economically important particularly because of the role it plays in the tourist industry" (Cork Corporation 2009: 92).

Discursively, such utterances evoking the history and heritage of the city can be seen to provide a naturalizing framework within which to articulate contemporary development and closer ties with Europe. The dilemma implicit in contemporary policy initiatives is in striking an equilibrium between competing imperatives of conservation and development, a balance which finds expression in the rhetoric of achieving an harmonious complementarity between culturally discordant elements. As expressed in the CASP document:

Historical areas and buildings of heritage importance can and will change. The City Council recognizes that such areas must grow and evolve if they are not to stagnate. The aim should not be solely to preserve areas of architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, scientific, social, or technical interest or which contribute to the setting of important protected structures, but to guide their evolution in a way that protects what is special and distinctive. (Cork City Council 2001b: 76)

Of interest here is the sharp transition from the probabilistic "can" change to the definitive "will" change, in addition to the recurring juxtaposition of growth and stagnation which resonates in both policy documents and interview data. Discursively, the transition illustrates how a policy suggestion is used to provide a legitimizing framework for resource distribution. In suggesting that the built heritage of the city serves to both restrain and enable present development, the document positions urban regeneration as implicitly representing a natural continuity with past practice, albeit one which promotes "growth" rather than "stagnation". The document thus seeks to contextualize the privileging of City Council agency in a wider social and economic context.

It is with this in mind that one of the key thematics begins to emerge from the policy documentation, that which will be referred to here as the "synergic re-interpretation" of the built environment—that is, a strategic intervention into the urban realm that seeks to interpret, as well as integrate, existing historical infrastructure in accordance with the dictates of contemporary objectives. The specific emphasis placed upon the renewal of the historical city centre is oriented to investing this area with a dynamic conducive to present day economic practice by means of a re-

interpretation of the area's traditional role. This dynamic clearly resonates with the CCDP, which presents one of its core objectives as being the necessity of ensuring that "elements of cultural significance are identified, retained and interpreted" (Cork Corporation 2009: 92). What intrigues regarding this objective, apart from the ambiguity of what constitutes an element of "cultural significance", is the implication that the public need to be assisted to understand their environment by ensuring that there is an appropriate hierarchy of buildings that emphasises the relative importance of different public places. As stated in the CCDP "... With new pressure for development Cork needs to integrate new development into its existing structure and existing character areas. This will be a function of elements and hierarchy, with buildings, spaces, uses and their scale clearly communicating the importance of place within an overall structure" (Cork Corporation 2009: 235). This can be seen as being part of a concerted effort by Cork City Council to produce a marketable identity and brand resonance for the city.

Concerning the "branding" of the city per se, the CASP document states that "a high emphasis should be placed upon leisure in urban renewal projects, an expanded programme of cultural events, and interpretation of the city's heritage" (Cork City Council 2001b: 56). The Shandon area, located on the north-side of the city centre, is seen as having great potential in this regard, despite "lacking interpretation" as of yet (Cork City Council 2001b: 99). A problematic replicated throughout such interpretative discourse is how such utterances neglect how the area in question is interpreted and given significance by local residents. If such areas are seen to lack the necessary qualities conducive to increasing the frequency of pedestrian footfall, they are, therefore, seen to require "re-interpretation" and "re-integration" with present day economic practice. Although perceptions of the city centre in planning discourse tend to see it as both historical resource and as site of unfulfilled economic potential, the overall strategy of the City Council is to channel these antagonistic elements into a symbiotic complementarity by constructing a distinct cultural identity for the city. As such, the on-going refurbishment of visibly dilapidated areas of the city, such as the Coal Quay and the docklands region, have an inherently symbolic value insofar as their previous "failure" can become transformed into symbols of economic prosperity and serve as areas of European cultural significance. To this end, an explicit ambit of the CCDP is "to develop and establish the city centre as an international destination for tourism, business, culture, leisure and the arts" (Cork Corporation 2009: 179). Depicting strategic areas of the city as inherently deficient (e.g. as "lacking" integration and interpretation) instantiates both discursive closure and serves to normalize and rationalize regenerative initiatives.

### ***Becoming European?***

The policy architects of Cork's regeneration have also sought to explicitly position the embrace of a European identity in terms of historical continuity. As stated by Cork City Council (2001a) "Long recognised as the natural capital of Ireland's Southern coast, our city had always looked outward to the commercial and cultural

traffic of the European seas". From a development perspective, such appeal to an external catalyst has had to grapple with an immanent reluctance to embrace the imperative of change. As stated by a leading property developer in the city:

I think Cork is trying to catch up. I think it's trying to catch up badly. I think it's trying to catch up late. We have restricted development plans in the city which do not allow for modern trends. They concern me greatly. We have to push push push every hour of every day. I do not understand for the life of me why whatever we come up with has to be queried and questioned. You have no idea of the difficulties we have getting our schemes for A to Z. It is just unbelievable. (Interview with property developer)

For many regional cities, integration within the contemporary European spatial order necessitates the upgrading of developmental logic, with the contemporary manifestation of this post-national spatiality giving rise to a reformulated set of supra-national aesthetic reference points. As the cultural coordinates of localized particularity (a "sense of place") becomes confronted by those of the wider European collective, the example of Cork resonates closely with the dilemma encountered by many contemporary regional cities. Indicative of the interpretive conflict at the heart of regeneration discourse, the imperative of achieving what one respondent referred to as a "better understanding" of the city's role within the systemic logic of the contemporary European order was emphasized as follows:

All Atlantic ports have lost their role. And so what we have is a Western fringe of Europe that has had to get used to the fact that it is no longer the link to colonial trading. I do not think that that is a bad thing, but there is a need for reintegration; economically, socially and physically. (Interview with city architect)

What is neglected here is how the *cultural* dimension has come to be seen as central to this process of integration. In this view, the homologous relation which exists between localized particularity (e.g. the "character" of the city) and a more broadly conceived European sense of belonging becomes a unifying theme, within which the discursive construction of a Europeanized "sense of place" is rendered a valuable economic asset. The capturing of the designation of European Capital of Culture was clearly pivotal in this regard.

The import of a discursive "Europeanization" is also clearly evident in policy documents explicating the trajectory of urban renewal. A particularly striking instance of this occurrence, and notable instantiation of what has become known as the "Barcelona effect" has been the revamping of Cork's primary thoroughfare, Patrick Street, by Catalan architect Beth Gali, a development which prompted considered mixed feelings among the Cork public. Closely aligned to this logic is the realization that Cork must aspire towards closer European integration in both a symbolic and cultural sense, in addition to economically, socially and physically as suggested by the

city architect quoted above. Whereas the CCDP contends that "... the creation of a new city quarter of vibrant mixed uses and sufficient scale is to bring about an urban transformation in Cork and develop a city of European significance" (Cork Corporation 2009: 194), the ambit of the CASP document is expressed as

Realizing a shared vision of Cork, as an economic, social, cultural, political, and environmental capital of a prosperous and thriving European city region... to provide a framework to enable Cork to become a leading European city region – globally competitive, socially inclusive and culturally enriched. (Cork City Council 2001b: 25)

It is here that the contradictory juxtaposition between the creation of an urban realm that seeks to achieve multiple objectives, in addition to an emphasis upon the consolidation of a "shared vision" for the city, begins to emerge. According to the CCDP (2009), for instance, the city's primary thoroughfare, Patrick Street, has a potential that "satisfies multiple objectives". The difficulty here is that this "shared vision" is enacted within strictly defined discursive parameters. Official documentation which suggests the "need to build a brand for Cork" (Cork City Council 2001b: 68, see also Barker 2006) entails that the promotion of a "sense of place" becomes incorporated into the retail experience as the built environment of the city is given a repackaged identity and promoted on the European and international stage. Such imperatives substantiate a delicate duality of both proximity and distance to the European normative ideal. Upon this reading, the European Union champions the celebration of locality, albeit if problematically conceptualized through such amplifications of "heritage" and "cultural identity", whilst simultaneously providing a critical counter-balance to the fragmentary economic and political aspirations these articulations may give rise to. In regeneration discourse, there exists a conflict-ridden dialectic contained within the rhetorical espousal of being *united in diversity* -the official motto of the European Union- between the desire to re-evaluate, and elevate, the value of a city's built heritage and sense of place, whilst simultaneously embracing a Europeanized aesthetic which exceeds that sense of place. In this view, a city such as Cork declares itself to be "European" in policy documentation, but only in a sense which compliments rather than dominates what is held to be the existent character of the city. As stated in the city's docklands strategy; "Critical to this is maintaining a 'spirit of Cork' in rebranding the area as a place with the highest quality of architectural and public space design" (Cork City Council 2001c: 7). To this end, the fostering of closer ties with the European entity thus presents the urban habitus with a new set of cultural co-ordinates which themselves require accommodation within the existent cultural and historical narratives of the city.

Although it is unsurprising that city planners, architects and developers should replicate the language of policy discourse by emphasizing the ultimate goals of global competition, social inclusion, and cultural enrichment, their comments must also be considered in light of the normatively guided, if often rhetorical, espousal of European inclusivity. Such concerns in turn resonate with the fundamental ambiguity

that much sociological-informed discourse directs toward the conceptualization of what precisely constitutes a distinctly national or European identity (Anderson 1985, Shore 2000, Stråth 2002, Sassatelli 2002, Leontidou 2004, Delanty and Rumford 2005, Eder 2006, Kantner 2006). On this note, the resurgence of regional nationalisms within the European polity is of perennial concern for the European Union, and one partially serving to legitimize the prioritization of cultural policy initiatives within and between cities. The ECOC and town/ city twinning programs are two such initiatives (Cork is twinned with Coventry, Rennes, Cologne and Swansea). Run by the European Commission (the executive body of the EU), the town-twinning program serves to foster bonds of citizenship and a sense of shared identity between comparable towns and cities: "Twinning promotes mutual understanding, and is a conduit for cultural exchanges across the social spectrum. EU support for town twinning injects a structuring effect and strengthens the strategic direction, as well as the European content, of such activities" (European Commission 2010). If germane to much planning and policy discourse is the recognition that economic and cultural vitality is dependent upon becoming more closely affiliated with the European order, the dilemma facing renewal discourse is that of reconciling the tendency toward the essentialization of indigenous culture against the more explicitly constructivist orientation of the European Union. In Cork, as elsewhere, such a dilemma is heavily mediated by the dialectical interplay of the competing imperatives of conservation and development.

### ***Conflict, continuity and change***

A thematic running throughout the policy documents is the imperative of attracting necessary capital investment in both an economic and cultural sense, as to do otherwise is to encourage stagnancy and the concomitant redundancy of the city centre as a hub of economic and cultural vitality. The rhetoric of achieving a sustainable equilibrium between the old with the new, albeit with the implication that choosing the old as a value in itself is to encourage urban decay, is thus revealed as a choice increasingly circumscribed and informed by economic and political imperatives. The imperative of striking a balance between competing discourses of conservative and development can be seen in the following two sets of comments:

It is possible to come up with a balanced approach between the needs for knowledge and the need for the preservation of built heritage. It is possible, but it takes negotiation. It takes will. I think in that in some parts of the country that will does not exist. There is a sort of crazy race to get things done. (Interview with conservationist)

I view developments as critical, as being of critical importance. I do not view them as some might, as a threat. I think that unless you have developers prepared to invest in our city, you will have a city that will decay. (Interview with property developer)

The comments of the conservationist actor suggests regeneration discourse to be an inherently conflictual system of dispositions incorporating antagonistic visions of what precisely the policy dictates of urban renewal should encapsulate. On the other hand, the comment emanating from the property developer is indicative of Evan's (2003: 421) suggestion concerning the potential "brand decay" of the city. In terms of how the renewal of the city centre has been strategized within policy documents, the interpretation and branding of built heritage is orientated towards the synergic re-interpretation of cultural and economic capital through which the "consumer" (variably the tourist, business person, or resident) can achieve aesthetic satisfaction through what Moloney (2006) has deemed an "enhanced visitor experience". As stated in the CCDP:

Of particular priority in the next few years should be the development of projects that create quality *strategic walkways* through the city centre and those that bridge existing junctions that currently provide a *poor quality pedestrian experience*. (Emphasis added, Cork Corporation 2009: 184)

As such, much emphasis has been placed upon the creation of "visual and formal relationships" and "pedestrian linkages" between the historical core and arterial retail streets. Although this re-imagining is packaged and presented as a shared vision, interview narratives suggest a vision of a city which has struggled with prolonged economic and cultural stagnation. A concern implicit within such renewal initiatives, however, is that this impulse will find expression via the search for an aestheticized and commoditised fiction of an "authentic" heritage (Urry 1990: 106, Bridge 2006: 724), a sentiment embodying the ensuing implication that contemporary developments are somehow lacking in such authenticity. Indeed, such ambiguity in regard to the interpretive malleability of "culturally significant" heritage is indicated by the *Cork City Heritage Plan*; "the heritage of Cork City is continually changing, evolving, and being created. We are generating the heritage of the future while trying to understand and enhance that what we have inherited from the past" (Cork City Heritage Forum 2007: 5). In this light, a key imperative regarding the marketing of the city centre has been to create a normalizing "design template" for heritage related "signage and interpretation" throughout the historical core. Discursively, it is interesting to consider how the pronoun "we" is constructed and employed in the above extract. "We" can be used in an inclusive sense to create a specific community of interest, albeit if hierarchically organized. However, "we" can also be simultaneously used in an exclusive sense as a means by which to maintain boundaries. In other words, the above "we" has been constituted in a hierarchical sense initially evoking planners and policy makers, and only later is the community admitted into the discursive relation through the consultative process. In practice, this may well perpetuate forms of regeneration which focus on economic growth as the solution to all societal concerns, with the key problem being that the interpretation accorded heritage will tend to derive from authoritative discourses and practices which are largely confluent with official policy.

The prioritisation of infrastructural and aesthetic issues in policy initiatives



is itself inherently divisive due to the plurality of social and cultural issues it potentially excludes, the articulation of which is often left to the “archipelago of local protest groups with the least formally empowered voices” (Crilly 1993: 250). The result is a lack of representation and amplification of issues regarding the means of implementing what Zukin has referred to as the “critical infrastructure of gentrification” (1995: 260), with the outcome being that a homogenised range of hotel developments, restaurants, cafes, boutiques, high-end retail outlets, art galleries, and so on, come to dominate the urban core. Epitomized by the critical voice of the *Where’s Me Culture?* collective, such concerns were continuously present throughout Cork’s tenure year as European Capital of Culture in 2005. This group advocated for a greater degree of cultural inclusivity and civic participation in what was perceived to be an exclusionary official programme (O’Callaghan and Linehan 2007). In likewise manner, urban planners and policy authors often fail to adequately account for the cultural plurality which constitutes the collective habitus of the city, notwithstanding the occasional rhetorical acknowledgment of such cultural vibrancy in policy discourse. Furthermore, policy initiatives risk codifying a commodified model of urban growth, one in which a unified image and brand resonance for the city is supported and reinforced in planning discourse. The synchronization of commerce and consumer culture that this represents, leads to a vision of regeneration inherently circumscribed by the entrepreneurial strategies at work. Such urban regenerative re-imaginings thus remain implicitly subjugated beneath the imperative of sustaining economic viability, one in which the existent built heritage of the city acquires the ascription of functional commodity amidst the marketplace of European cities (Garcia 2004).

## **Conclusion**

The case study of Cork reveals a number of conceptual assumptions about the relationship between heritage, culture and identity discourse. The evident awareness of the historicity of the city centre permeating the policy documents and interview narratives carries the implication that contemporary development can only be carried out through a considered contextual appreciation which involves the retention of the city’s existing structure, character areas, and importance of place. It is within such terms that urban heritage can be interpreted as both an enabling and problematic constituent of urban form. Whilst it is deemed problematic from a development perspective, insofar as a concern with preservation serves to restrain the adoption of a purely instrumental approach towards infrastructural renewal, it is also enabling in that the dilapidated condition of particular areas and structures can be pressed into timely alliance with contemporary developments through an intensification of their use rather than through new construction. In accordance with Kearns and Philo’s (1993: 5) contention that the manipulation of culture involved in city branding also tends to be a manipulation of history, a claim presented in this paper is that regeneration initiatives in Cork have sought to re-position the identity and heritage of the city within the European normative constellation.

The approach taken does not overlook the fact that traditional top-down approaches to planning and policy, including attempts to maximize the surplus value of historical and cultural resources, are often undermined by ground-up lived realities in which residents transform urban space in unexpected and unintended ways (e.g. Jane Jacobs). Indeed, the same could be said for how macro-processes of “Europeanization” are undermined by micro-level local interventions, including historical sensitivities and attempts at heritage conservation. Yet, detailed discussion of these interventions has been beyond the scope of the present discussion. Rather, the paper’s emphasis upon interrogating official discourse has had the effect of centring the analysis upon processes of municipal decision-making which seek to bridge the local, national and supra-national contexts. In particular, the discussion is intended to provide concrete evidence of how a regional municipality utilizes efforts to preserve the built environment and claims about local heritage in order to encourage tourism and economic regeneration. The contextualizing of local planning within European policy serves to legitimate the vision of renewal being proposed, and the use of discourse analysis assists in displaying how policy architects exert a normalizing view of urban redevelopment.

In conclusion, this line of interrogation suggests two presuppositions: on the one hand, the marketing of an objectified cultural heritage would seemingly be premised upon the capacity of civic elites to extract surplus value from such material and symbolic regeneration initiatives. On the other hand, such marketing endeavours are themselves complicit in diverting attention away from the addressing of pervasive social inequities – effectively presenting what Harvey (2006) has deemed a “carnival mask” of municipal heritage. As such, this paper has argued that cultural and economic imperatives have oriented toward the synergic re-interpretation of the built environment, one in which the signifiers and semiotics of local culture and heritage have become reconfigured as potential resource and co-opted into the logic of contemporary development.

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