

# ***IT'S NOT THE WINNING...***

REFLECTIONS ON AHRC RESEARCH  
NETWORK WITH *UK CITY OF CULTURE 2013*  
SHORTLISTED CITIES (2011-12)

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**CITIES OF CULTURE RESEARCH NETWORK MEETING, 31<sup>ST</sup> JULY 2019**

UNIVERSITY OF HULL



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# TODAY'S PRESENTATION:

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- Summary of network's objectives, activities and outcomes;
- Learning outcomes/implications for UK City of Culture (UKCoC) policy and practice;
- Reflections on the network experience.

### 3 THE CULTURAL CITIES RESEARCH NETWORK

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- Funded by Arts and Humanities Research Council (2011-12) as part of 'Creative Economy' strand of [Connected Communities](#) research programme.
- Brought together network of key stakeholders – bidding 'communities of interest' – from UKCoC 2013 shortlisted cities of Birmingham, Norwich and Sheffield.
- Four events including research workshops in each city and final conference in Liverpool.
- Final report available from [ICC website](#).
- Twitter feed still active [@culturalcities](#)

## 4 THE UKCOC 'INCENTIVE' & THE BIDDING EXPERIENCE

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- Bidding for the title [re]energised strategic cultural planning within cities:
  - Collaborative asset-mapping and marketing within Sheffield using culture as an original objective;
  - An 'added value' vehicle for existing cultural strategy in Birmingham;
  - Creation of strategy for 'social change' in Norwich led by arts/cultural sector.
- Evidence of consistent, sustained momentum between ECoC 2008 and UKCoC 2013 bidding experiences for Birmingham and Norwich:
  - Revitalised cultural strategy for Birmingham; reinvigorated confidence in cultural leadership in Norwich; another opportunity to promote cultural offer(s) on national basis via press coverage etc.
- Impact upon collaborative working and cultural communities of practice was significant, within and across sectors and local government departments.

## 5 THE IMPACT OF BIDDING FOR UKCOC 2013

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- Despite the positive incentives, **the impact of bidding and losing** has ramifications:
  - It's a **transient experience** and difficult to maintain momentum without the incentive of bid deadlines and associated activities;
  - **Negative correlations between ECoC and UKCoC** when experienced as two successive losses!
  - **Political and economic context** is significant, including relationship between public subsidy and commercial sponsorship and the capacity of different cities to enable either/both. Affects the extent to which cultural plans go ahead without the 'badge of authority' that comes with the City of Culture title.

## 6 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM BIDDING CITIES

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- Network discussions inevitably encouraged critical reflections on bidding requirements and process, leading to a set of suggestions/recommendations for the UKCoC advisory panel:
  - The **mythological 'Liverpool Model'** – issues of scale, replicability and the perceived dominance of economic regeneration objectives. UKCoC bid requirements should enable a more flexible, relative, 'holistic case' for culture.
  - At the time all was quiet from Derry-Londonderry as winning city, so **lost momentum regarding the incentive of the title** and what the actual benefits would be. More visibility required.
  - Enable greater, sustainable connections between bidding/winning cities and subsequent **learning opportunities for cultural planning**.

## 7 POLICY, POLITICS AND PROFESSIONALISM

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- Conflicts of interest and 'small world' governance of UKCoC programme.
- Programme was in its relative infancy at time of project:
  - Dismissive and defensive response to feedback of shortlisted cities, especially regarding the 'Liverpool Model';
  - Bidding requirements and process evolving with the programme anyway?
- Question of attribution: be mindful of having evidence of impact and influence. Informal (positive) feedback from DCMS but difficult to prove that changes made because of network.
- Importance of maintaining independence of AHRC-funded network: not 'commissioned' evaluation/advocacy work.

## 8 PRAGMATIC REFLECTIONS ON THE NETWORK EXPERIENCE

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- Stakeholder **expectations, momentum and ownership**:
  - Different network members may want/expect different things;
  - Delivering the proposed network 'project' on time and within budget versus managing and co-ordinating emerging ideas (e.g. interesting 'further research' suggestions created by network but never pursued);
  - What next? Network leadership and ownership moving forwards.



## 9 ETHICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE NETWORK EXPERIENCE

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- Interpersonal dimensions of ‘networked’ research:
  - Easy to focus on pragmatic delivery of a ‘research project’ but important to acknowledge **(inter)personal dimensions** of this kind of work (i.e. as a network of people not ‘stakeholders’ or ‘organisations’);
  - Surprised in some cases, for example, by extent of **personal investment** in UKCoC bids for those individuals directly involved in the process;
  - Important therefore to consider **ethical responsibilities** and care for the network alongside own professional integrity and academic objectivity.

# THANKS AND CONTACT DETAILS

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