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Lille 2004: Effects and legacy

Perspectives of a memorable ECoC

Pauline Bosredon and Thomas Perrin

If it is generally acknowledged that Glasgow 1990 represents a “critical juncture” in the development path of the European Capitals of Culture, Lille 2004 remains as a remarkable example of how the ECoC event can be mobilised, and capitalised from, to foster urban regeneration and renewal (Liefvooghe, 2010; Paris & Baert, 2011).

ECoC renewed the image and territorial branding of Lille and initiated a cultural policy that persisted and became a signature of the city policy. Another characteristic of Lille 2004, due not only to its location but also to the authorities’ political choice, was to give a Euroregional dimension to ECoC by developing cross-border events and partnerships.

We propose: (1) to look back at the success of Lille 2004, (2) to present how this event led to a durable cultural policy, and (3) to open perspectives on the cultural and socio-territorial development of Lille and its metropolitan region.

Governance and participation

In terms of participation, Lille 2004 remains a successful ECoC (Werquin, 2006). In total, more than 9 million people participated in 2,500 projects and events of the programme, including 4.8 million participants who took part in the street parties and parades, 2.3 million visitors to the visual arts exhibitions, and nearly 825,000 spectators for the performing arts. 17,000 artists contributed to the ECoC programme. Tourist figures also showed a significant increase between 2003 and 2004. A posteriori, such success can be attributed to two main factors: efficient governance on the one hand, and popular interest on the other hand.

The collective dynamics that promoted Lille’s candidacy for the ECoC title were actually put in place in the 1990s, when the city prepared a bid for the 2004 Olympic Games. Although the Olympics bid proved unsuccessful, the partnerships and contacts that were organised around this project, in short, its governance scheme, became useful assets that were remobilised when the city authorities decided to apply to the ECoC scheme. From the

beginning of the process, essential socio-economic actors supported the initiative, in particular the Comité Grand Lille, an informal but influential group that gathers together civil society actors, entrepreneurs and managers and creates a “growth coalition” to serve the development of the metropolitan region. Some major French firms and companies are based in the Lille metropolitan region and provide potentially powerful economic outreach. This situation is somehow contradictory, when one considers the overall socio-economic profile of the region Hauts-de-France, one of the poorer regions in France, that has a high level of unemployment and includes some of the most socially and economically deprived areas. Yet this particular investment of the socio-economic elites resulted in one of the highest shares of private funding ever achieved by an ECoC: 82 enterprises contributed 13 million euros, which represented 18% of the budget.

The good relationship between the socio-economic circles and the mayor of the city, Martine Aubry, and her predecessor, Pierre Mauroy, no doubt fostered this valuable alliance between the city’s main public and private agents. Moreover, Lille 2004 included other territorial authorities in the Lille ECoC. The metropolitan authority Lille Métropole Communauté Urbaine contributed 18% of the budget, and the region Nord-Pas-de-Calais contributed 15%. In total, 193 cities were partners of Lille 2004. The ECoC proved to be an important milestone in the post-industrial “reinvention” and cultural requalification of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region, and the regional council led several events during the cultural year: an Egyptology exhibition in Boulogne-sur-Mer, exhibitions of works from national museums in the belfries of certain cities, and musical and opera tours in the region. Belgian municipalities in the cross-border region were also included. This multi-territorial scope enlarged the geography of Lille 2004 and gave it a Euroregional dimension.

Participation proved to be another major success factor. Not only visitors, but also inhabitants, contributed to the high participation rate. The organisers observed this “popular alchemy” even at the launching parade of Lille 2004, when the attendance was far higher than expected. One scheme in particular fostered people’s participation: the “ambassadors”, who were volunteers that promoted and disseminated the ECoC programme and activities (Da Lage, 2008). 17,800 ambassadors promoted Lille 2004 throughout the Euroregion, and even at an international level. Hundreds of them volunteered during some of the ECoC performances and a core group of about 200 people were present throughout the year to support the implementation of the ECoC. In hindsight, this system proved to be one of the engines of the popular affiliation to Lille 2004, and the “ambassador” scheme has become a classical device of an ECoC. This system is still continuing in the cultural projects conducted by Lille 3000, the cultural agency that was created from the ECoC.

Strategy and realisation

A very visible effect of the ECoC was the renovation of various heritage and cultural amenities, like churches or the opera. The Parc Lebas was developed in an area that lacked green spaces. The boulevard Faidherbe, a main street that connects the central station to the city centre, was refurbished so as to be easily transformed into a parade venue. Since then it has been the main venue for the performance of important street cultural events. The Tri postal, a former postal sorting centre, was converted into an exhibition centre and has become a core cultural amenity of the city.

Notably, Lille 2004 delivered a core item of the Lille cultural infrastructure: the maisons Folies. These socio-cultural amenities, created on the occasion of the ECoC, are located in different neighbourhoods and some of them were placed in renovated post-industrial buildings (figures 1 and 2). They form a territorial cultural networking of the city based on proximity and interdisciplinarity, which extends to the whole metropolitan region, and beyond. Among the 12 maisons Folies that were established for Lille 2004, three were opened in the nearby Belgian cities of Tournai, Kortrijk and Mons. And, indeed, the Euroregional outreach was one salient achievement of Lille 2004.

Lille gave a cross-border dimension to its ECoC title from the opening ceremony, with a concert by the National Orchestra of Lille, accompanied by English and Belgian choirs, in front of the Lille-Flandres train station, thus highlighting the role of transportation in the structuring of the Euroregion. Even though Lille remained the epicentre of the ECoC, seven Belgian cities participated in a joint programme, and about 25% of the events took place at the cross-border level. Once again, this Euroregional orientation results from a strategy that started before the ECoC with, at the beginning of the 1990s, the connection to the fast train line to London and Brussels and the consequent building of the Lille Europe station and the Euralille business district (Perrin, 2016). At the political level the city actively co-operated with bordering Belgian communes, and in 1991 the Conférence Permanente Intercommunale Transfrontalière (COPIT) was created. Thus Euroregional cultural cooperation did not start with Lille 2004, but the ECoC was a catalyst to reinforce and promote this dimension.

Thus Lille 2004 was simultaneously a confirmation and a renewal of the policy decisions taken by the city's authorities. Its success, especially its popular success, though somehow "prepared" by a previous chain of development, also contributed to the choice of maintaining a cultural dynamic in the city, as shown by the legacy of the ECoC.

Apart from its success during 2004, particularly in terms of attendance, the reputation of Lille as ECoC is due to its "temporal thickness" (Grava-

ri-Barbas and Jacquot, 2007, p. 2) is the magnitude of its legacy and the sustainability of the event. The ECoC had the driving effect – real or expected – of positioning creative economy at the heart of the public authorities’ metropolitan strategy, in a context in which culture has “an increasingly strategic role for the definition of a new competitive context for cities and regions in the post-industrial society” (Inglehart, 1998, quoted in Sacco and Blessi, 2007, p. 113).

Cultural action and sustainable management

First of all, this sustainability depends on the continuity of the cultural action occurring within the facilities created in 2004. Among the twelve “maisons Folie” initially inaugurated, only three no longer exist as such: those of Tournai, Maubeuge and Arras. The two “maisons Folie” of Lille (MF Wazemmes and MF Moulins) remain under the direct control of the City of Lille. Their common management provides cultural programming that is mainly focused on popular culture, major festivals (such as Wazemmes l’Accordéon), shows and workshops on social topics such as communities, otherness and discrimination. Operating in their neighbourhood as local cultural centres, they have been involved in the programming of major recurring events since 2004.

The Condition Publique in Roubaix, the Hospice d’Havré in Tourcoing, the Ferme d’en haut in Villeneuve d’Ascq, the Fort in Mons en Baroeul, the Colysée in Lambersart, the maison Folie Beaulieu in Lomme, the maison Folie in Mons and the Buda Island in Kortrijk have remained cultural centres, although some have abandoned the label “maison Folie”. This is the case, for example, of the Condition Publique (Perrin, 2015), which now has the specific appellation of “Public institution for cultural cooperation” (Établissement public de coopération culturelle). This institution attempts to combine local-level projects that are developed in partnership with associations and schools from the surrounding neighbourhood of Pile, one of the poorest of Roubaix, and a demanding artistic programme with a regional outreach.

The strong social dimension of these cultural facilities, particularly those located in the city’s popular districts, and the scale articulation from very local to metropolitan and even international levels, characterise the Lille 2004 legacy. However, this ambition has so far been only a partial success and appears to be quite challenging in the neighbourhoods where people are experiencing great socio-economic difficulties.

“Permanent policy” and “festive city”

The association Lille 3000 was created right after the ECoC, at the initiative of the city and metropolitan authorities, notably Martine Aubry, with the objective of ensuring the continuation of the spirit and atmosphere of Lille 2004. This association asserts a continuity from Lille 2004 and does not hesitate to project itself into the third millennium. As stated in the preamble of its statute:

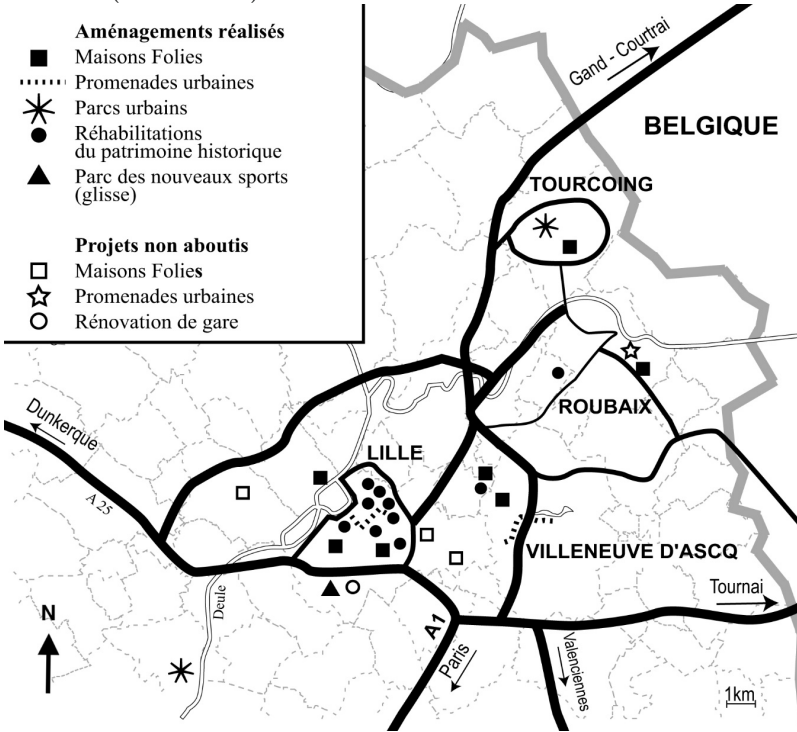
“During 2004, the City of Lille, but also the metropolis, the Nord-Pas de Calais region and its cross-border side, were European Capital of Culture. Noting the important dynamic that has developed during this year, an association has been created to set up, in the continuity of Lille 2004, artistic and cultural events likely to continue this momentum.”

Didier Fusillier, the organiser of Lille 2004, was the director of Lille 3000 from 2005 to 2015 and has remained its artistic advisor. Thus, Lille 3000 acts as both a renewal of and a direct inspiration from Lille 2004. Its main activity is to regularly organise major cultural events of European and international dimensions, approximately every 3 years: “Bombaysers de Lille” in 2006, the travelling exhibition “Futurotextiles” in 2008, “Europe XXL” in 2009, Lille Europe Pavilion in Shanghai in 2010, “Fantastic” in 2012, “Renaissance” in 2015 (figure 3), and “Eldorado” in 2019. Every event, which is like a cultural year or season on its own, is linked to a specific topic and celebrates some specific culture in all its aspects, from popular traditions to artistic productions: Eldorado in 2019, for instance, is dedicated to Mexican culture.

Thus the cultural urban event is at first sight ephemeral: however, many local actors seek to capitalise on the positive effects of these events, sometimes giving the impression of projecting the city into a state of permanent party to transform it into a “festive city” (Gravari-Barbas, 2000).

In addition to these major events, Lille 3000 is responsible for the programming of the “spring, summer and autumn” cultural seasons at Gare Saint-Sauveur, and organises high-profile contemporary art exhibitions at the Tripostal, for instance, “The Silk Road” in 2009, in partnership with the Saatchi Gallery, or “Performance!” in 2017, in partnership with the Centre Pompidou on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of this national art centre.

Figure 1 – Lille 2004 : mapping of the urban developments, achieved (“réalisés”) and unrealized (“non aboutis”)



Conception/realization : C. Liefoghe / J. Domont, TVES, Lille 1, 2009. In Liefoghe, 2010, p. 41.

Urban dimensions and cultural events

Lille 2004 proved to be a high point in Lille’s urban planning. The ECoC triggered urban operations that renewed industrial heritage and combined popular culture, contemporary art and urban cultures, as in the two maisons Folie of Wazemmes and Moulins, or the Halle de glisse, an amenity dedicated to dance and sliding sports, and inaugurated in 2004 in the working-class neighbourhood of Lille Sud. After the ECoC, new facilities were developed in the same spirit. Le Grand Sud is a performance hall inaugurated in 2013 as a flagship project of the Lille Sud regeneration programme, according to the communication from the City of Lille. The hip hop centre “The Flow” was opened in 2014, also in Lille Sud, offering recording and dance studios and a performance hall.

The Gare Saint Sauveur is a former freight station that was converted by the City of Lille and opened on the occasion of the season Europe XXL, organised by Lille 3000 in 2009. It has become a significant cultural site and is part of a wider mixed-use development project on a vast 23-hectare wasteland, which includes housing, culture, sports and green space. But several associations denounce the excessive densification of the project and the lack of space for nature in the city. The site is indeed strategically located at the gateway to the city centre and the City of Lille expects significant urban transformation in terms of land and property values.

In the current context of competition between cities, the continuation of the cultural and festive event contributes to the creation of a favourable atmosphere to develop the creative economy and to attract a population with strong cultural capital.

“Recently culture has been seen as a form of capital (Throsby, 1999) that acquires a central role in the future development of mature, post-industrial economies as a major engine of innovation and creativity – and therefore of new production and consumption concepts (Rullani, 2004), and of new competitive models (Porter, 2003).” (Sacco and Blessi, 2007, p. 114)

This “creative attractiveness” is a particularly salient issue for post-industrial cities like Lille. The service-oriented transformation of the economy is regarded as the only possible solution at the dawn of the 21st century. In 2004 Martine Aubry clearly focused on culture “as a territorial development project” (Paris and Baert, 2011, p. 41). Lille Horizon 2004, the association in charge of organising the event, referred to the “cultural leap” after 2004: the long-term impact, which cannot be measured, seems to be a desire for a shared culture and a change of mentality, towards more initiative and creativity (Liefoghe, 2010). While it remains difficult to assess the full impact of the event on attractiveness, tourism and employment, Lille seems to have acquired a place among the more appreciated cultural destinations. In this sense, Lille 2004 contributed to changing the image of the city, which was one of the objectives.

Cultural investments and cross-border cooperation

With regard to the future opportunities for cultural policy, we can highlight the growing importance of the metropolitan level. The metropolitan authority of Lille, which has been active in the cultural field since 2000, established a network of “metropolitan cultural factories” after Lille 2004, to link the “maisons Folie” and three major facilities in cities in the me-

tropolitan area: the Arcades in Faches-Thumesnil, the Nautilus in Comines, and the Vivat in Armentières. All these structures have a common goal of working at the local level, organising street shows or local festivals, and ambitious and specialised cultural programming. The metropolitan authority supports the cultural factories with public subsidies and relies upon this cultural policy's effects in terms of influence and attractiveness. This policy has been extended with the successful bid to be the World Design Capital in 2020. This event will be organised and conducted by the metropolitan authority.

At the regional level, the inscription in June 2012 of the Nord-Pas de Calais mining basin on the World Heritage List and the inauguration of the Louvre museum branch in Lens confirm that this cultural turning point extends beyond the scope of the city, which actually started during Lille 2004 with the region's active participation in the ECoC activities. Yet the culture and creative economy's choice to re-image territories has long been questioned by urban studies on changes in capitalism and its effects on social inequalities (Harvey, 2001; Rousseau, 2009). More recently, the Degeyter collective (2017) showed how Lille's employers and local representatives contributed to place arts and culture at the heart of Lille's metropolitan project, tirelessly promoting the economic, social and territorial benefits of this policy. Criticisms of the real effects of this policy are not lacking and point to the gentrification of working-class neighbourhoods as one of its hidden objectives (Collectif Degeyter, 2017).

With regard to Euroregional cultural cooperation we can observe a certain evolution with, at the institutional level, e.g. the transformation and structure of the COPIT into the Eurometropolis Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai, which in 2009 was the first cross-border institution to adopt the European statute of European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation. The Eurometropolis promotes cross-border cultural cooperation, labels projects and supports stakeholders in their cooperative projects. It organises events such as workshops or forums to foster cultural cooperation. Beyond this institutional reframing, we can also observe that various actors have for a long time developed cross-border cultural events and networks in the Euroregion, quite independently from the existence of a cross-border institution (Perrin, 2012). We can cite as an example the Next festival for performing arts, which started in 2008 and became a flagship cross-border cultural project in the area. The Keep database on EU projects (<https://www.keep.eu/>) indicates that in the areas of "Community integration and common identity" and "Cultural heritage and the arts", the French-Belgian Interreg cross-border programme supported, from 2007, 58 projects involving 252 partners.

Thus the cross-border dimension of cultural life in this Euroregion can almost be regarded as an "integrated fact", but at the same time it is not al-

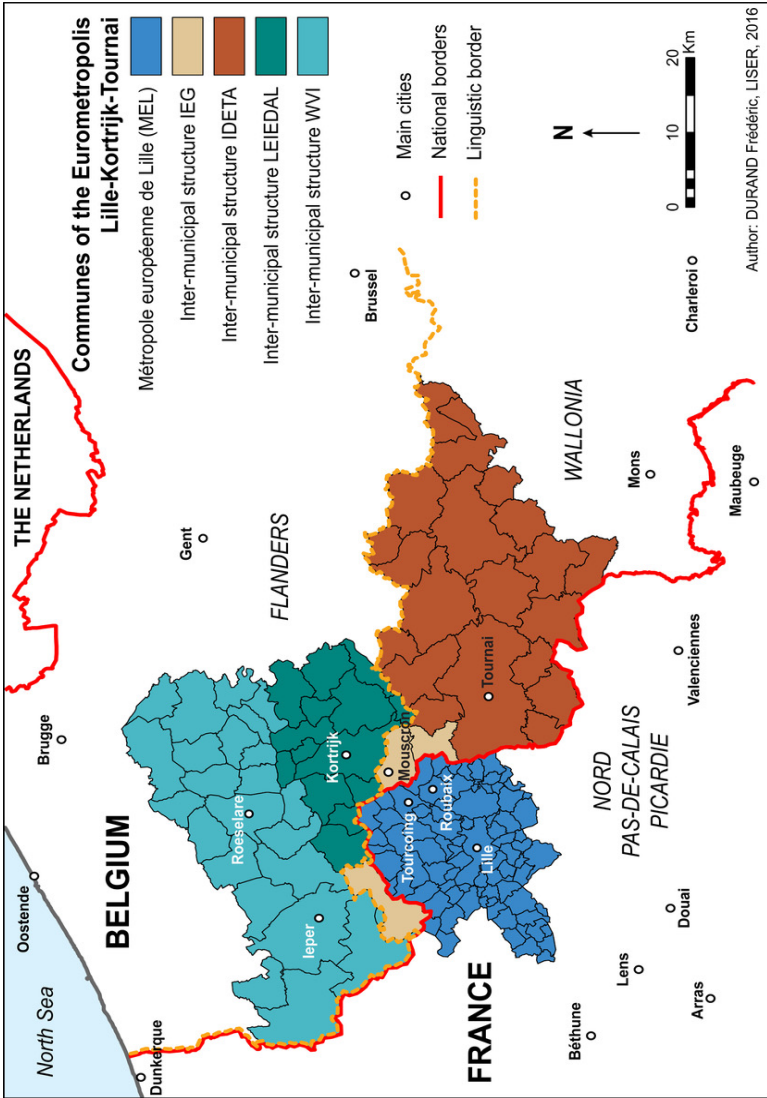


Figure 2 – The Métropole européenne de Lille and Eurometropolis Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai

Author: Durand Frédéric, Lisser, 2016.

ways a salient priority for cultural policies: ultimately, the ECoC Mons 2015 had few cross-border links with Lille, the maisons Folies that were established in Belgium during Lille 2004 do not specifically prioritise cross-border cooperation, and neither do the ones in Lille. Recently, Le Manège, an emblematic theatre platform between Mons and Maubeuge that was set up in the 1990s, stopped its cross-border activities due to political disagreements and lack of support. Even temporarily, such developments show that the European and cross-border orientation may be flourishing less than it used to. For instance, the question remains open on how the Next festival can maintain its cross-border programming following a reduction of the Inter-reg funds after 2020, which reveals the fragility of cross-border dynamics.

More broadly, in recent years, electoral results, whether regional or national, have shown an increased support for Eurosceptic parties in the region. Of course, there are large differences between the most socio-economically affected territories and the wealthiest ones, between the Lille metropolitan areas and the rest of the region, and within the Lille metropolitan area. These results must be interpreted in the light of the national and international socio-political context and require a detailed sociological analysis of the vote, which is not the subject of this article. However, such results, precisely in this region, question the concrete impact of the European positioning of the authorities for several decades, and the reception and reappropriation of these political choices by the people. Participatory assemblies such as the Metropolitan Development Council or the Eurometropolis Civil Forum can address these issues, while the French territorial reform in 2015 introduced new parameters by giving a specific European-oriented statute to Lille Metropolis, now called Métropole européenne de Lille, and by creating the greater Hauts-de-France region from the merging of the former Nord-Pas-de-Calais and Picardie regions.

Lille 2004 shows a remarkable and durable cultural investment. It exemplifies the effects that cultural policy can have on urban and territorial development to create infrastructure, renew attractiveness, promote socio-cultural projects and reinforce European cross-border cooperation. It also shows that such development depends on a strategic vision, cooperative governance arrangements and a concrete budgetary and policy investment.

Such conditions also reveal certain contradictions and fragilities. First, culture can be only one factor among others to radically improve socio-economic conditions. Second, public investment can evolve following political lines. For instance, in spite of a quite stable development cycle of 15 years, the future of the “Lille 3000” policy remains linked to the results of the next municipal elections in 2020.

In the same year, the Word Design Capital will be a key aspect in re-assessing the impact of the creative-cultural oriented agenda on the metro-

polis' life and economy. Questions remain open on whether this event will help design activities to become a real added-value sector, and on its capacity to raise popular affiliation as in 2004, rather than addressing only a so-called “creative class”.

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