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# Virtual Space and the Contention over Representations of the City

*Tuuli Lähdesmäki*

## **Abstract**

The European Capital of Culture (ECOC) is one of the longest running cultural initiatives of the European Union (EU). The EU annually designates one or more cities with this much-competed-for city brand. In various cities the ECOC designation has caused tensions and disagreements over the decision-making process, funding of cultural events, and the use of urban space. These disputes have also generated urban activism that uses various platforms to contest ECOC policies: public discussions in the local media, Internet sites and blogs, as well as alternative events and activities organised by the citizens themselves. This chapter investigates the conflict related to the ECOC designation of Turku (Finland) in 2011, which ultimately produced alternative meanings and representations of the city. The study focuses on a local group of urban activists and their project, 'Turku—European Capital of Subculture 2011.' The opposition on the part of these activists to the official ECOC designation was expressed through an appropriation and alternative interpretation of urban space using online texts, images, and videos. The Internet in general, and social media in particular, enabled the project to create critical communalities. Drawing on virtual ethnography and a 'close reading' of textual and visual material, I will analyse the urban polyphony and explore how these activists challenged official meanings of the city and its public spaces.

**Key Words:** City, European Capitals of Culture, Internet, public space, representation, social media, text, Turku, urban space.

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## **1. Introduction**

Scholars in sociology, geography, and urban studies have proposed descriptions, definitions, and theories of the city showing that it consists of several physical, social, and cultural layers.<sup>1</sup> These discussions have approached the city as a physical space, a mental state, a discursive construction, and a product of social interaction. In this chapter, the city is understood as produced by various spatial, visual and textual representations that are then 'read' and interpreted by its inhabitants. Representation is a core concept in visual cultural studies and fine arts. Some scholars have, in fact, noted that the field of art studies is generally based on 'representationalism'—a process according to which people perceive reality only through representations produced by language, images, and other sign systems.<sup>2</sup> In addition, scholars have emphasised that representations are always connected to a particular point of view and thus not objective, neutral, 'natural,' or innate—

although some representations are more easily taken for granted or considered normative than others. The plurality of urban representations forms a multi-layered fabric of significations generated and disseminated by both 'official' and 'unofficial' discourse. Therefore, different meanings of the city co-exist, overlap and are constantly being negotiated, accepted or rejected. This has led to a discussion of the relation between representation, complex power structures and social hierarchies.<sup>3</sup> Representations shape people's notion of reality and their perception of everyday social practices in various ways, which makes the production of representations a political act. As Leena-Maija Rossi states, 'representation is politics.'<sup>4</sup> 'Official' representations of a city are political and ideological instruments that help those in power to influence public opinion, renew the image of the city and attract capital. Place marketing and branding are very popular means used by politicians and authorities to 'sell' their city.

Since the 1980s, place marketing has emerged as a key feature within urban and regional policies as well as public management to encourage development and increase attractiveness and competitiveness.<sup>5</sup> In practice, place marketing often includes activities that identify and promote distinctive qualities of a particular place in order to attract new inhabitants, visitors, and investments.<sup>6</sup> City branding and image-creation therefore aim to modify the collective image of the city. The recent boom of festivals and various mega-events can be linked to an increasingly fierce competition for the attention of important stakeholders; including consumers, investors, and policy-makers.<sup>7</sup> The role of events such as art festivals or sports competitions in regenerating and rebranding cities is an active field of research.<sup>8</sup>

During the past decades, several international or supranational organisations have created both permanent and temporary brands granted to cities that apply for them and fulfil a number of set criteria. One of the best-known European city brands is governed by the European Union. The annual designation of the European Capital of Culture is one of the EU's longest-running cultural initiatives. Since 1985, the EU has designated cities—first as European Cities of Culture and later as European Capitals of Culture (ECOC)—for one year at a time. Since its launch, the designation has grown into a much-competed-for brand.

According to the latest EU decision on the ECOC, the cultural programme of the designated cities has to satisfy two main criteria, called 'the European Dimension' and 'City and the Citizens.' The first criterion requires the cities not only to foster co-operation between cultural operators, artists, and cities from other member states of the EU but also to highlight cultural diversity in Europe while underlining common aspects. The second criterion encourages direct participation of those who live in the city and its surroundings. Another objective is to raise interest in the city and its activities, nationally and internationally, and to promote long-term cultural and social development of the city.<sup>9</sup> The implementation of the ECOC year is financed mainly through local, regional, and national sources. If the

set criteria and expectations are met, the EU grants each designated city 1.5 million Euros for expenditure.

The ECOC initiative is meant to have a positive impact on the cities by revitalising their local cultural and economic sectors while also creating social cohesion and a feeling of community. However, results of the ECOC designation have often been exactly the opposite. Event organisation, marketing strategies, the rhetoric of city branding, management, and financing policies associated with the ECOC year have caused tensions, debates, objections, and even counter-movements in several cities, as indicated by various studies.<sup>10</sup> The host cities have been criticised e.g. for failing to enable local cultural ownership, overcome real social divides, and create lasting cultural legacies. According to Cian O’Callaghan, the problems lie in the very core of the ECOC initiative: the multiple objectives are often contradictory and only rarely mutually reinforcing. The events should incorporate economic and cultural objectives, introduce local culture and cultural heritage as well as European cultures and identities, stage international arts events, and simultaneously advance the local cultural sector and social inclusion objectives. According to O’Callaghan, ‘mutually antagonistic discourses and policy objectives that the ECOC is constituted within create inevitable fragmentation, anxiety and dissonance in the host cities.’<sup>11</sup>

The debates over ECOC reveal diverging notions of the city, because not all citizens accept the official discourse and programme. This kind of conflict inspired a counter-movement in Turku—a city of 180 000 inhabitants in Southern Finland. In 2007 Turku was designated as a European Capital of Culture for the year 2011. An independent foundation—Turku 2011—was created and took care of planning, coordinating, and promoting the cultural events. Altogether, Turku’s ECOC programme consisted of 155 official projects. However, the total number of events in the city was much higher since many of the projects covered various types of smaller activities and performances.

In the following chapter, I will focus on the counter-movement that criticised the Turku 2011 Foundation, city authorities, and the way they represented the city in the promotional material, policies, and the official cultural programme. I will analyse alternative representations proposed by the counter-movement and focus on the particular sites where they were produced. The protest of the counter-movement was expressed through a number of self-organised cultural events and interventions. However, contestation also found its way to the arenas of cyberspace. The Internet and social media functioned as a public space in which ECOC’s official discourse and city branding practices could be discussed, questioned and subverted.

## **2. Case Study: Turku—European Capital of Subculture 2011**

In Turku, the ECOC designation and city branding strategies generated a high degree of dissatisfaction among the population regarding the city’s current policies.

In addition, several political decisions that led to budget cuts and that affected mainly local cultural operators and institutions were criticised by the residents of the city. As in other cities, the preparations for the ECOC year in Turku triggered debates in which citizens, local interest groups and cultural associations expressed their objection to the management and financing policy of ECOC organisers. A variety of interest groups and individuals formed both loose and more organised networks through which to participate in the cultural and political life of the city. A part of these activities were coordinated by a project titled Turku—European Capital of Subculture 2011.

Turku—European Capital of Subculture 2011 was launched by a network of local urban activists. A group of art students, artists, and other like-minded local people, including youth, had already organised and set up an association in Turku in 2006 with the intention to establish a new type of cultural centre based on voluntary and independent cultural production. The association had suggested that the city would assign them an empty estate for this purpose. To speed up the process and publicly contest the city's current estate policy, a group of people occupied empty city-owned buildings, where they hosted cultural activities. As a reaction to this action, the city adopted a zero tolerance policy on squatting.

The same local people launched the Capital of Subculture project after Turku won the ECOC designation and as a response to the 'culture-hostile attitude' of the city and 'the unwillingness'<sup>12</sup> of the Turku 2011 Foundation to support the local cultural scene. The high budget of the ECOC programme and the plans for using the money to invite foreign artists to perform during the cultural year were also condemned. The budget amounted to 55 million Euros plus 145 million Euros allocated for capital investments in various infrastructural projects. The activists emphasised the importance of supporting local artists, local cultural operators and small-scale cultural activities. Their criticism also focused on the concept of culture and the audience-participant-artist relation promoted by ECOC. They claimed that the official programme mainly represented a high-cultural understanding of art and supported institutionalised culture. Moreover, the citizens of Turku were only seen as a passive audience. The activists, thus, wanted to activate the population and encourage them to organise cultural events in city-owned spaces. The core group of the Capital of Subculture project comprised approximately a dozen activists. However, the organisation of festivals and other cultural events as well as co-operation with other activist networks multiplied the number of people involved in the project. The events often attracted over one hundred people.

The activists of the Capital of Subculture project used various means to manifest their criticism. On the one hand, they 'occupied' urban space by collectively organising cultural events and festivals in the city centre or in the squatted city-owned estates. Some of the largest events happened once a year, such as the 'Protest Camp Festival' called Art Slum which was set up to 'comment on

the long continued lack of work space for artists in 'Turku,' because 'the indefensible cultural policy of Turku has chased the artists and the receivers of art into a slum.'<sup>13</sup> The Art Slums were built from waste material and used as venues for various cultural activities, such as concerts, performances, poetry readings, exhibitions, workshops, and discussions. On the other hand, the Capital of Subculture project made ample use of the Internet, including various forums in the social media. The activists' online and offline activities were thus closely intertwined.

### 3. Data and Methods: 'Reading' Representations of the City

In her study on Sibiu as ECOC, Ana-Karina Schneider compares urban space to a palimpsest.<sup>14</sup> She argues that during the ECOC year the city's public spaces are turned into stages for diverse sociocultural events and inscribed with new layers of meanings producing the palimpsest nature of the city. The urban palimpsest is not only limited to the physical or material environment since new layers of meanings can also be created through linguistic and visual representations, i.e. in the virtual world.

As Michel Maffesoli notes, diverse collective representations form the milieu in which we live with others.<sup>15</sup> Scholars in sociology and human geography have especially stressed the role of language in the production of space and place.<sup>16</sup> Space as known, interpreted, depicted, and theorised space is always related to linguistic practices.<sup>17</sup> It is saturated by language, formed by language-based concepts, stories, descriptions, memories, and associations.<sup>18</sup>

Scholars have often used the metaphor of a text when discussing space because it contains encoded meanings that have to be 'read' and decoded by its inhabitants.<sup>19</sup> These codes have been established at specific historical periods and vary in their effects.<sup>20</sup> If we follow this idea, a city can also be approached as a multi-layered text because it can be both 'written' and 'read' in several ways. As discussed by Michel de Certeau, the city, on the one hand, constitutes a 'planned text' generated by strategies of official and institutional entities aiming to structure and represent the city as an objective functional entity. On the other hand, it appears as a 'readable text' that enables a variety of subjective interpretations by its users.<sup>21</sup>

The counter-movements in the ECOCs can be analysed in light of these theorisations of urban space as a palimpsest or multi-layered text. In Turku, the 'planned text'—which also included cues of how to 'properly read' it—was created by the Turku 2011 Foundation and city authorities. The activists of the Capital of Subculture project, however, 'read' the spatial text in an unexpected way producing diverging interpretations and meanings. The palimpsest and multi-layered nature of urban space can be linked to Bakhtin's concept of '*raznorezie*,' or polyphony.<sup>22</sup> He argues that each society, group, generation, etc., has its own language, which may either generate dialogue or lead to a cacophony. Ulla

Pohjamo refers to Bakhtin's concept of polyphony to explain how different interest groups in the city may use their own language in order to make sense of urban space and thus create their own city in the same geographical location.<sup>23</sup> Space is always in the process of being made—in a state of being perceived and signified from distinct points of view.<sup>24</sup>

In order to investigate the contesting representations of the city by the Turku—European Capital of Subculture project in relation to the 'planned text' of the Turku 2011 Foundation my analysis relies on documents produced by both parties. In addition to the official promotional material, I examined various texts, images, and videos available on the website of the Capital of Subculture project, but also open blogs supporting the project, open discussion forums, the project's Facebook page, flyers, posters, YouTube videos filmed by the activists, as well as TV programmes. My methodological approach is that of virtual ethnography.<sup>25</sup> The (non-participatory) observation took place on the aforementioned Internet sites.

My analysis of the data is based on the qualitative method of close reading. Close reading can be defined as a broad category of interpretative explorations, which enable the researcher to carry out a detailed analysis of phenomena on semantic, structural, and cultural levels. It is associated with New Criticism in literary studies<sup>26</sup> aiming at a 'mindful, disciplined reading of an object with a view to deeper understanding of its meanings.'<sup>27</sup> Close reading refers conceptually to the analysis of words and interpretations of a text. However, researchers have applied close reading to various other phenomena, such as media texts, images, films, games, and environments.<sup>28</sup> The starting point for my 'reading' is the assumption that all physical, visual, and textual expressions of the city resonate with each other and participate together in the production of meaning.

#### **4. Contesting Representations of Turku**

The ownership and use of the city and its public spaces was one of the main interests of the Capital of Subculture project. In this section of this chapter I will discuss in greater detail how the communication strategies as well as the textual and visual material produced by the Capital of Subculture project generated different meanings of the city and its spaces. For the activists, the idea of the city was inseparably intertwined with its citizens. On their website, blogs, and in social media discussions, the city was represented as a community of people. The activists published an online 'Manifesto of the Capital of Subculture' according to which 'the city is no more than its citizens, and culture is nothing more spectacular than our every-day life and words and deeds.'<sup>29</sup> It was emphasised that the city's public spaces should be invested by its citizens in a free, non-hierarchical, and non-consumerist way. Thus, the activists encouraged everybody to participate in their project in order to create independent cultural products that were not regulated by the official cultural institutions of the city and the ECOC programme. The project promoted itself as enabling a 'free,' 'alternative,' and 'autonomous' cultural

production in the city and as supporting a diversity of cultural expressions, unlike the ‘official’ cultural scene of Turku. The following quotation from the project’s Facebook site illustrates their goal and motivation.

The project Turku—European Capital of Subculture 2011 aims to gather up creators, advocates and spectators of free and autonomous culture. We don’t actually seek for a confrontation with the official European Capital of Culture project, but to get people to realize, that alternative culture can exist in parallel with the mainstream culture. However, we manifest our dissenting opinion on the capitalist politics of the project European Capital of Culture. Capital of culture, or culture of capital?

The initiative ‘Capital of Subculture 2011’ strongly express its concern on the unintelligible politics regarding artists and (public) space. We seek to impugn the customary forms of behaviour and to find new approaches towards grass roots culture. Everyone is an artist and people should be encouraged to make culture that suits their own needs, opposed to only being a spectator in massive, alienating operas.<sup>30</sup>

The activists involved in the project often positioned themselves as ‘the citizens,’ or simply as ‘we,’ in order to demonstrate their unanimity, as the previous quotation indicates. In addition, the activists called themselves ‘artists,’ ‘street artists,’ or ‘makers and friends of art,’ thus emphasising the creative potential of the citizens. The rhetoric deployed by the activists produced a unified and culturally oriented image of the Capital of Subculture project. Even though the project encouraged ‘everyone’ to contribute to the independent and spontaneous cultural production in the city, their unspoken expectation was that the people would share the same critical view. As one of the activists stated in an interview with a local student journal, ‘[o]n our website, one can get acquainted with our main principles and our manifesto. By understanding our course of action anyone can join and bring along something new.’<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, the open invitation did not necessarily mean that everyone was accepted.

The rhetoric of the activists also produced a unified and singularised ‘opponent,’ namely ‘high culture,’ ‘Turku,’ ‘Capital of Culture,’ or ‘the bureaucrats.’ As the quote, immediately above, indicates, the high-cultural institutions and modes of art were targeted in particular. The cultural scene in the city was described as ‘alienating’ for the ‘common’ citizen because it offered only expensive, exclusive, and pompous shows for a small portion of the population. The group’s rhetoric reveals, on the one hand, that they did not consider all inhabitants as ‘the citizens’ of the city, and, on the other hand, that even ‘the city’ had a double signification. Although the activists defined the citizens as ‘being the



city,' their discourse often referred to 'the city' as their opponent. In these instances, 'the city' was a collective term not for the 'common' citizens but for city authorities, the established cultural institutions of the city, and those inhabitants who were considered as privileged consumers of high-cultural products.

Moreover, Turku's urban space was characterised as dominated, bureaucratic, and commercial. From the activists' point of view, these aspects did not foster spontaneous creativity and independent agency on the part of the citizens in order to shape their everyday environment. Urban space needed to be given 'back' to its citizens for their free use. Thus, the Capital of Subculture project cooperated with like-minded squatters and ran cultural activities and alternative festivals in squatted buildings and public spaces, such as parks. The activists considered that these events brought the otherwise little used or abandoned city space to life. One of the cultural events organised annually by the Capital of Subculture project was the Festival of Free Culture. It drew a generally younger audience that produced and participated in performances and workshops ranging from puppet theatre to punk concerts. The events were planned, discussed and advertised on the project's website, blogs, Facebook page, and certain online forums.

The Capital of Subculture project represented the city as a battlefield of opposing views on how to use Turku's urban space. The following quotation from a blog entry by one of the activists illustrates the notion of the city as a space of colliding standpoints. As the excerpt indicates, the Capital of Subculture project mobilised anti-neo-liberalist vocabulary often used by leftist or anarchist movements.

The Festival of Free Culture has originated from the need to make the urban space look like people, like us. In public space, usually only those who are able to pay for publicity and those who are promoted by advertising companies can be seen. We think that the city belongs to the citizens, and they have the right to be seen and heard in urban space. The Festival of Free Culture is a part of the global fight for free urban space. We have used culture as an important weapon in this fight. We do not find the cultural offerings of Turku—the Capital of Culture—satisfying: art museums, the city theatre, and operas are fine, but not what we want. Culture does not consist merely of the things listed in cultural programs. We consider it important to increase the appreciation of subcultures by organising events of our size that look like us and we want them without boring bureaucracy and a million euro budget provided by large foundations. We want to free the culture from institutions and foundations and give it back to the people, and declare everyone a part of the urban culture—

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not only as a passive consumer and a receiver but as a producer and an agent. Everyone is an artist; culture belongs to all!<sup>32</sup>

The cultural events of the project were promoted in blog entries and social media discussions as fostering and disseminating cultural diversity and polyphony in the city. This is how one of the activists commented on the squatting of an empty building where several cultural activities took place in 2010:

This time one of the motives [for the squat] was the year 2011, when Turku, the Cultural Capital of Europe, is expected to deliver the goods regarding the polyphony of culture, which at this point seems to be realised only in brochures and advertisement on local busses.<sup>33</sup>

During the past decades, urban policies have intimately connected creativity and culture to economics and industry. The concepts of creative economy and cultural economy—currently used in Western urban policy and management rhetoric—are based on the idea of a correlation between cultural and economic development. Thus, culture has become an economic keyword.<sup>34</sup> The economic dimension of culture and creativity is intertwined with urbanism because cities and their urban environment are considered to drive economic growth.<sup>35</sup> Charles Landry's writings on the 'creative city',<sup>36</sup> and Richard Florida's thoughts on the 'creative class',<sup>37</sup> in an urban environment have lead many cities—including the ECOCs—to gain value from culture and creativity.<sup>38</sup> In Turku, the official promotion and policy rhetoric brought the economic and social dimensions of the ECOC designation to the fore. The designation, the cultural programme for the ECOC year, and the cultural regeneration of the city were expected to increase tourism, employment in the cultural sector, and cultural consumption in the city.

The economic dimension of the ECOC designation was severely criticised and mocked by the Capital of Subculture rhetoric. The project represented the city and its public spaces as commercialised and subjected to purely economic interests. The activists, however, claimed that culture should remain independent from economical motives and the logic of the market economy. They addressed this issue on their website in the following fashion:

We want to take over the production-based cultural sector and bring some variety into it, thus offering non-commercial experiences. 'Creative economy' rarely serves individuals. It is centred on consumption and profits that are financially measurable. We resign from creative economy. The value of culture is not the pile of Euros it produces. If culture can touch—really, deeply—even one person, it has earned its place.

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It should be possible to create culture out of pure joy! By freeing the cultural sector from professionalism, we want everyone to have the possibility to build Turku as the Capital of Subculture 2011 that would look like them and be on their scale.<sup>39</sup>

The project was intended to be a grass-roots cultural agent with the goal to increase 'real' creativity and promote 'true' urban culture in the city. Cultural events, such as the Art Slum and the Festival of Free Culture, were meant to diversify cultural genres, to implement a bottom-up approach to creativity, and to be free for everyone. As such, they wanted to offer an alternative to the expensive cultural shows imported by the Turku 2011 Foundation, as the following quote indicates:

Even in 2011 the commercial Capital of Culture project is unwilling to support the aims of the citizens of Turku to express themselves. This year the Art Slum is thus the true Capital of Subculture in the heart of Turku! There will be concerts, workshops, visual art, hanging around, food, drinks, poetry, beauty, ugliness, and everything that looks like us—to counterbalance the spectacles ordered from abroad.<sup>40</sup>

Instead of foreign artists, performers and big production teams, the Capital of Subculture project insisted on small-scale cultural production and locality as a starting point for creative action. On the one hand, this kind of rhetoric positioned the project as a counterforce to the practices and policies of the Turku 2011 Foundation, and, on the other hand, reinforced its core idea of the city as being constituted by its citizens:

The event [The Festival of Free Culture] is free with no age limit, so it is open to everyone who is interested. All performers participate without compensation just to show support to the idea of free culture. The whole programme is produced by the citizens of Turku; and this year the organisers especially want to emphasise local know-how. Go Turku!<sup>41</sup>

The co-operative, communal and grass-roots approach of the project is echoed in its visual material, such as its posters and flyers. The activists documented the activities by photographing and filming them. The material was uploaded to the Internet and shared over social media. The activists also documented their disputes and conflicts with city authorities and the police. The latter intervened several times to stop events and unauthorised demonstrations. Photos and videos of these

interventions, uploaded to the project's website or on YouTube, were used to portray the activists as victims and city authorities as hostile to 'culture' and 'creativity'—at least as these were defined by the Capital of Subculture project.

The project also drew attention to places in the city that were both significant and useful for supporting its view of culture. These included closed down venues (such as a rock club, a building housing artists' ateliers, a book café, local libraries, a movie theatre, and a former bar for reggae, hip hop, and electro music) and old wooden buildings in the city centre damaged by fire. These places were integrated into an 'ironic' map of the city which featured small-scale cultural venues and mocked the official ECOC events. The Capital of Subculture project's website mimicked several thematic maps of the official ECOC programme in order to show the city from a different perspective. One example of this is the 'Bongaa Turkun mulkut!' (Spot the pricks of Turku!), with reference to an official ECOC event 'Bongaa Turun murkut!' (Spot the ants of Turku!). This online map of Turku contained small flame symbols locating cultural venues that were threatened with closure, or already destroyed, despite their importance for the subcultural or alternative cultural scene. One of the flames on the map marked the location of the Turku Municipal Facilities Corporation, which administrates the estates of the city. According to the activists' website, the corporation had 'hounded the local culture for decades.'<sup>42</sup>

Even though the Capital of Subculture project intended to deconstruct cultural hierarchies, its language and many of its promotional activities on the Internet and in the social media created dichotomies between 'high' culture and subculture. The project's efforts to encourage and foster alternative cultural activities as well as a non-commercial and communal use of urban space was based on a discourse of victimisation, opposition, and hostility.

## 5. Intersections of Urban Space, Public Space, and Virtual Space

The idea of space being produced by social relations was introduced by Henry Lefebvre in his seminal book, *La production de l'espace*, published in 1974.<sup>43</sup> He defined space as both produced by, and productive of, social relations. In Lefebvre's thought, the conceptual aspect of space is intertwined with subjective experiences and practices as well as linguistic and symbolic representations. Lefebvre has identified these three different dimensions as conceived (*le conçu*), perceived (*le perçu*), and lived (*le vécu*) space.<sup>44</sup> In his theory a materialised, socially produced, empirical space, which is open to concrete measurement and description is called perceived space. Conceived space is the work of planners, engineers, urbanists, technocrats, and others. It is tied to the order of design and to the control over the production of space. Lived space is a directly experienced space of everyday life. For Lefebvre, lived space is teeming with intimate sensations and imagination, offering a terrain for the production of counter-

spaces—‘spaces of resistance to the dominant order arising from their subordinates, peripheral or marginalized positioning.’<sup>45</sup>

The contesting meanings and uses of urban space in Turku can be discussed in light of Lefebvre’s theories. The Turku 2011 Foundation and city authorities conceived of space through their ideas, concepts, and a vocabulary strongly influenced by management and policy discourse. These abstract and conceptual discourses then materialised in the form of spatial and cultural practices implemented by the ECOC programme and by the restoration or repair of some of the city’s public spaces. In reality, the conceived space was used and represented differently by the activists, thus engendering a (or their) lived space.

According to Lefebvre, conceived space shapes or even dominates everyday life and the understanding of space (i.e. lived space) in the modern world.<sup>46</sup> In this vein, the idea of public space can be understood as being determined by hegemonic conceptualisations and discourses, even though, in the Western world, public space originally stands for openness and democracy. Several scholars, including Michel Foucault, have argued that public space in modern societies is inherently hierarchical and subject to control.<sup>47</sup> Instead of being open, free, and equal, public space is accessible only to some citizens while excluding others.<sup>48</sup> It is regulated by official and institutional bodies to serve their own policies and agendas. Thus, the egalitarian notion of public space is often dissimulated by the reality of power relations. As the example of Turku has shown, the meaning and functions conferred to public space as it becomes lived space, that is space constituted by subjectivities, experiences, memories, emotions, and images, may drastically differ from those of institutionalised public space.<sup>49</sup>

But where is public space actually located? Does it have to be physical, material? Can public space be virtual as well? In today’s digitalised world, determined by virtual information and practices as well as the use of social media, the ‘virtual’ and the ‘real’ are interwoven. Consequently, the idea of public space can be extended to the virtual dimension. On the one hand, public spaces ‘virtually’ exist on interactive websites or in live webcam images. On the other hand, the Internet itself could be perceived as a virtual public space for social, cultural, commercial, and political use.

Scholars who are particularly interested in contemporary social movements and activism consider the Internet as a ‘relatively open public sphere.’<sup>50</sup> In general, the spread of the Internet and the development of social media have had a major impact on the organisation of social movements and the intensification of activism. As Thomas Arnold discusses in his chapter, cyberspace has often been connected to idealist and utopian ideas about the possibilities of creating new forms of political engagements, managing knowledge and communication in a new way, and enabling new forms of personal identities.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, virtual space first has to be invested by committed individuals or groups in order to serve as an instrument for collective action. As the Capital of Subculture project demonstrates,

social media offers both a platform for networking, communication, and organisation, as well as a virtual space in which activism itself may take place. Thus, the project's strategies were both Internet-enhanced and Internet-based.<sup>52</sup>

Martha McCaughey and Michael D. Ayers have pointed out that the Internet has substantially changed our understanding of activism, community, collective identity, democratic space, and political strategy.<sup>53</sup> The Internet and social media as immediate, interactive, increasingly accessible, and multilateral space empower individuals to initiate, participate in, and influence discussions on communality, identity, space, and politics. In this book Omar Basalamah and Elyas Tariq argue that virtual space disrupts traditional power relations between the 'dominant' and 'dominated.' The possibilities of virtual space may actually help to re-position the 'dominated' subject as an invisible observer of the authorities and their actions.<sup>54</sup> One of the major advantages of social media is their potential to facilitate anonymous, decentralised, and leaderless social communication. The Capital of Subculture project used this tool in its favour in order to demonstrate its anti-hierarchical and democratic structure. Even though the activists emphasised openness and equality as their guiding principles, they also created their own structure of power based on friendships and alternative interests in implementing the aims of the project, links to other activist networks, and activity to participate in the project. The project had its spokesmen whose interests determined the content and articulation of its discourse.

Many activist groups and social movements have criticised the existence of power hierarchies and their influence on the public sphere in contemporary societies. According to them, it is especially difficult to challenge or reduce the power of mass media. On the one hand the press and mass media seem to be interested in controversial issues and confrontations. It is not only important for society to make controversies public; it is often also a lucrative business because these stories 'sell'. On the other hand, however, they tend to silence or criminalise protest behaviour.<sup>55</sup> Although it is easy for activists to create and publish statements, manifestoes and alternative agendas on the Internet and in the social media in order to try to challenge the silence of the mass media regarding controversial issues, it is much more difficult for these statements to be actually acknowledged and to receive a response, because the Internet is profoundly fragmentary. While activism on the Internet is 'public' and generally accessible to all Internet users, it may not generate any reactions in the public sphere or in the mass media. In the case of the Capital of Subculture project, the activists did indeed succeed in raising some interest in their activities in the local and national media, but they were not able to spark a public discussion, engagement or movement on a larger scale which would seriously challenge or even change the 'official' use, representation and notion of public space, city, culture, or cultural participation.

## 6. Conclusions

The ECOC designation is a city brand that influences meaning and use of urban space in the selected cities. When we refer to the meaning of a city, it does not only include its physical environment but also a variety of textual and visual representations. Therefore, the city can be considered as a text, which is both 'written' and 'read' in many ways. It is inherently polyphonic, giving voice to a variety of different ideas, patterns and interpretations. In Turku, the promotional material and policy rhetoric of the Turku 2011 Foundation and city authorities produced the official and institutionalised representation of the city which corresponds to de Certeau's 'planned text' or, to use Lefebvre's term, 'conceived' space. However, space is neither absolute nor univocal. It may change or consist of several intertwining layers. The Turku—European Capital of Subculture 2011 project shows how urban space can be charged with new meanings and practiced in different ways than those prescribed by planners, authorities, and institutions.

The ECOC initiative pursues diverse ideological and political goals: it intends to develop and foster social well-being, communality, cultural industries, tourism, intercultural dialogue, etc. in the designated cities.<sup>56</sup> In general, the initiative focuses on increasing 'mutual acquaintance'<sup>57</sup> and 'mutual understanding',<sup>58</sup> and on creating a positive feeling of belonging. Nevertheless, in various cities the ECOC designation has caused confrontations and disputes over cultural production, economics, communality, and meaning of urban space. These disputes revealed the existence of deeply rooted power hierarchies and dichotomies opposing authorities and alternative movements. The Capital of Subculture project brought to the fore the mechanisms involved in the use of urban space as well as the possibilities of grass-root level activism.

The Capital of Subculture project attracted local and national media attention from its very beginning. From a journalistic point of view, the project raised an interesting and controversial subject. The activists were contacted by journalists and editors in search for a good story or interested in giving a voice to the activists. The media often referred to the members of the Capital of Subculture project as 'activists' or 'cultural activists', explaining their views and objectives to the readers. Some of the media reports on festivals and events organised in squatted buildings also had a critical tone to them, e.g. when stories focused more on police interventions or disturbance to neighbours. The discussion forums of local newspapers sometimes spoke of the activists as 'teenagers' and 'youth', or as 'criminals', 'hooligans', 'hippies', 'drunks', or 'kooks', although in many cases the writers shared criticism of Turku2011's cultural management, decision-making, and use of money. The rhetoric of the Capital of Subculture activists may be considered by some as idealistic or naïve, but the project managed to offer an alternative to the official representation of the city. Its activities produced an imagined city within the city.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Henry Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace. Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996); Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> David Summers, 'Representation', *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Craig Owens, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Stuart Hall, 'The Work of Representation', *Representation. Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 1997), 13-74; Leena-Maija Rossi, 'Esityksiä, edustamista ja eroja: Representaatio on politiikkaa [Performances, Representation, and Differences: Representation is Politics]', *Representaatio [Representation]*, ed. Tarja Knuuttila and Aki Petteri Lehtinen (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2010), 261-275.

<sup>4</sup> Rossi, 'Esityksiä, edustamista ja eroja', 261.

<sup>5</sup> Steve Millington, Craig Young and Jonathan Lever, 'A Bibliography of City Marketing', *Journal of Local and Regional Studies* 17.2 (1997): 16-42.

<sup>6</sup> Krister Olsson, 'Cultural Heritage as a Resource in Place Marketing', *Integrating Aims—Built heritage in Social and Economic Development*, ed. Mikko Mälkki and Kaisa Schmidt-Thomé (Espoo: Aalto University, 2010), 253-254.

<sup>7</sup> Demet Mutman, 'Urban Regenerations: Tool, Catalyzors and the Outcomes', *Regenerating Urban Core*, ed. Tuomas Ilmavirta (Espoo: Helsinki University of Technology, 2009), 26-43.

<sup>8</sup> Donald Getz, *Festivals, Special Events, and Tourism* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1991); Beatriz García, 'Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration in Western European Cities: Lessons from Experience, Prospects for the Future', *Local Economy* 19.4 (2004): 312-326; John R. Gold and Margaret M. Gold, *Cities of Culture: Stating International Festivals and the Urban Agenda 1851-2000* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Greg Richards and Robert Palmer, *Eventful Cities: Cultural Management and Urban Revitalisation* (London: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> 'Decision 1622/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 2006', *Official Journal of the European Union* L304, 3 Nov (2006): 1-6.

<sup>10</sup> See Farquhar McLay, *The Reckoning: Public Loss, Private Gain (Beyond the Culture City Rip Off)* (Glasgow: Clydeside Press, 1990); Ron Griffiths, 'City/Culture Discourses: Evidence from the Competition to Select the European Capital of Culture 2008', *European Planning Studies* 14.4 (2006): 415-430; Zeynep Gunay, 'Conservation versus Regeneration?: Case of European Capital of Culture 2010 Istanbul', *European Planning Studies* 18.8 (2010): 1173-1186; Ciam



O'Callaghan, 'Urban Anxieties and Creative Tensions in the European Capital of Culture 2005: "It Couldn't Just Be about Cork, Like"', *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 18.2 (2011): 185-204.

<sup>11</sup> O'Callaghan, 'Urban Anxieties and Creative Tensions', 186.

<sup>12</sup> Flyer of the Art Slum (2011). The quotation is translated from Finnish by the author.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ana-Karina Schneider, 'Minorities, Margins, Peripheries and the Discourse of Cultural Capital', *Whose Culture(s)? Second Annual Conference of the University Network of European Capitals of Culture Held in Liverpool 16-17 October 2008*, ed. Wim Coudenys (Pécs: The University Network of European Capitals of Culture, 2008), 33.

<sup>15</sup> Michel Maffesoli, *La Contemplation du monde* (Paris: Grasset, 1993).

<sup>16</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*; Soja, *Thirdspace. Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*; Anssi Paasi, *Territories, Boundaries and Consciousness. The Changing Geographies of the Finnish-Russian Border* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 1996).

<sup>17</sup> Pauli Tapani Karjalainen, 'Ympäristö ulkoa ja sisältä: Geografiasta geobiografiaan [Environment from Outside and Inside: From Geography to Geobiography]', *Paikan heijastuksia. Ihmisen ympäristösuhteen tutkimus ja representaation käsite [Reflections of Place. Research of the Relation between Man and Environment and the Concept of Representation]*, ed. Raine Mäntysalo (Jyväskylä: Atena Kustannus, 2004), 49.

<sup>18</sup> Kai Nyman, 'Arkkitehtuuri ruumiillisuutena ja representaationa [Architecture as Corporeality and Representation]', *Paikan heijastuksia. Ihmisen ympäristösuhteen tutkimus ja representaation käsite [Reflections of Place. Research of the Relation between Man and Environment and the Concept of Representation]*, ed. Raine Mäntysalo (Jyväskylä: Atena Kustannus, 2004), 129.

<sup>19</sup> James Duncan and Nancy Duncan, 'Re-reading the Landscape', *Environment and Planning D: Society & Space* 6.2 (1988): 117-126; Anja Kervanto Nevanlinna, 'Cities as Texts: Urban Practices Represented or Forgotten in Art History', *Memory & Oblivion. Proceedings of the XXIXth International Congress of the History of Art held in Amsterdam, 1-7 September 1996*, ed. Wessel Reinik and Jeroen Stumpel (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), 373.

<sup>20</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 17; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin Books, 1977); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge* (London: Penguin Books, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 92-93.

<sup>22</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

<sup>23</sup> Ulla Pohjamo, *Esikaupunki moniäänisenä kulttuuriperintönä—Oulun Hietasaari [Suburb as a Polyphonic Cultural Heritage—Hietasaari in Oulu]* (Helsinki: The Society for Art History in Finland, 2011).

<sup>24</sup> Doreen Massey, 'A Global Sense of Place', *Marxism Today* June 15.6 (1991): 24-29; Massey, *For Space*, 9.

<sup>25</sup> See Christine Hine, *Virtual Ethnography* (London: Sage, 2000); Daniel Domínguez, et al., ed. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research. Virtual Ethnography* 8.3 (2007); Robert V. Kozinets, *Netnography. Doing Ethnographic Research Online* (London: Sage, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> Andrew Dubois, 'Close Reading: An Introduction', *Close Reading. The Reader*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Andrew Dubois (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>27</sup> Barry Brummet, *Techniques of Close Reading* (London: Sage, 2010), 3.

<sup>28</sup> Barry K. Grant, Jeannette Sloniowski and Bill Nichols, eds., *Documenting the Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film and Video* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1998); Jim Bizzocchi and Joshua Tanenbaum, 'Well Read: Applying Close Reading Techniques to Gameplay Experiences', *Well Played 3.0: Video Games, Value and Meaning*, ed. Drew Davidson (Pittsburgh: ETC Press, 2011): 262-290; Andrew Stables, 'Reading the Environment as Text: Literary Theory and Environmental Education', *Environmental Education Research* 2.2 (2006): 189-195.

<sup>29</sup> 'Alakulttuuripääkaupunkimanifesti [Manifesto of the Capital of Subculture]', *Turku Euroopan Alakulttuuripääkaupunki 2011 hanke [Turku – European Capital of Subculture 2011 project]*, website (2007), viewed 1 March 2012, <http://www.turku2011.info/kuvapankki/>. The quotation is translated from Finnish by the author.

<sup>30</sup> 'Turku Euroopan Alakulttuuripääkaupunki 2011 [Turku the European Capital of Subculture 2011]', *Facebook*, group description, posting date unknown, viewed 7 August 2012, <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Turku-Euroopan-Alakulttuurip%C3%A4%C3%A4kaupunki-2011/123750221028179#!/pages/Turku-Euroopan-Alakulttuurip%C3%A4%C3%A4kaupunki-2011/123750221028179?sk=info>. The original text is in English.

<sup>31</sup> Joonas Tuomi, 'Jäsenet eivät luo alakulttuuria [Members do not create a subculture]', *Tutka* 25 Jan (2011), viewed 19 June 2011, [http://www.tutkamedia.fi/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=896:alakulttuuri-ei-halua-olla-aktivismia&catid=137:alan-ilmioet&Itemid=563](http://www.tutkamedia.fi/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=896:alakulttuuri-ei-halua-olla-aktivismia&catid=137:alan-ilmioet&Itemid=563). The quotation is translated from Finnish by the author.

<sup>32</sup> 'Mikä Vapaan kulttuurin festivaali? [What Festival of Free Culture?]', *Vapaa kulttuuri Turussa [Free Culture in Turku]* blog, posted 7 May 2009, viewed 1 June

2012, <http://vapaakulttuuri.blogspot.com/search?updated-min=2009-01-01T00:00:00-08:00&updated-max=2010-01-01T00:00:00-08:00&max-results=40>.

The quotation is translated from Finnish by the author.

<sup>33</sup> Squat Tommila purjeet pulleina myötätuuleen [Squat Tommila sails in tailwind], *Vapaa kulttuuri Turussa* [Free Culture in Turku] blog, posted August 14 2010, viewed 10 March 2013, <http://vapaakulttuuri.blogspot.com/search?updated-min=2010-01-01T00:00:00-08:00&updated-max=2011-01-01T00:00:00-08:00&max-results=50>. The quotation is translated from Finnish by the author.

<sup>34</sup> Hans Näss, 'The Ambiguities of Intercultural Dialogue: Critical Perspectives on the European Union's New Agenda for Culture', *Journal of Intercultural Communication* 23 (2010), viewed 10 March 2013, <http://www.immi.se/intercultural/>.

<sup>35</sup> Karin Taipale, *Cities for Sale. How Economic Globalization Transforms the Local Public Sphere* (Espoo: Helsinki University of Technology, 2009), 42.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Landry, *The Creative City. A Toolkit for Urban Innovators* (London: Demos, 2000).

<sup>37</sup> Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class and How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

<sup>38</sup> Jamie Peck, 'Struggling with the Creative Class', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29.4 (2005): 740-770; Peter Campbell, 'Creative Industries in a European Capital of Culture', *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 17.5 (2011): 510-522.

<sup>39</sup> 'Visio' [Vision], *Turku Euroopan Alakulttuuripääkaupunki 2011 hanke* [Turku – European Capital of Subculture 2011 project], website (2007), viewed 1 March 2012, <http://www.turku2011info/>. The quotation is translated from Finnish by the author.

<sup>40</sup> 'Taideslummi 2011: Alakulttuuripääkaupunki [Art Slum 2011: Capital of Subculture]', *DIYTurku.net*, discussion forum, posted Jul 1 2011, viewed 7 August 2012, <http://diyturku.net/forum/index.php/topic,215.0.html>. The quotation is translated from Finnish by the author.

<sup>41</sup> Mikä Vapaan kulttuurin festivaali? [What Festival of Free Culture?], *Vapaa kulttuuri Turussa* [Free Culture in Turku] blog. The quotation is translated from Finnish by the author.

<sup>42</sup> 'Bongaa Turkun mulkut! [Spot the pricks of Turku!]', web page, created by Suvi, last updated 16 Jan 2011, viewed 10 March 2013. <https://maps.google.com/maps/ms?f=q&source=embed&hl=fi&geocode=&ie=UTF8&hq=&hnear=It%C3%A4inen+Pitk%C3%A4katu+47,+20810+Turku,+Suomi&oe=UTF8&msa=0&msid=208873271097650671505.000499cf547bb5a50b983>.

The quotation is translated from Finnish by the author.

<sup>43</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace* (Paris: Anthropos, 1974)

- <sup>44</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 38-41.
- <sup>45</sup> Soja, *Thirdspace*, 68.
- <sup>46</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 40-46.
- <sup>47</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 195-228.
- <sup>48</sup> E.g. Thomas W. J. Mitchell, *Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 379; Lucy R. Lippard, *The Lure of the Local. Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (The New Press, New York, 1997), 244.
- <sup>49</sup> Panu Lehtovuori, 'Paikka on merkityksenannon hetki. Kaupunkisuunnittelun kokemuksellisen lähestymistavan teoriaa [Place is the Moment of Meaning-Making. Theory of Experiential Approach to Urban Planning]', *Urban Adventures, Urbaanit elämysten paikat [Urban Adventures. Places of Urban Experiences]*, ed. Anna-Maija Ylimaula (Helsinki: Design University, 2002), 68.
- <sup>50</sup> Lance W. Bennett, 'New Media Power. The Internet and Global Activism', *Contesting Media Power. Alternative Media in a Networked World*, ed. Nick Couldry and James Curran (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 20.
- <sup>51</sup> Thomas Arnold, 'Movement and Involvement: Phenomenological Adventures in Cyberspace', *Beyond the Postmodern: Reconceptualisations of Space and Place for the Early 21st Century*, ed. Harris Breslow and Antje Ziethen (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2014), XX.
- <sup>52</sup> Sandor Vegh, 'Classifying Forms of Online Activism. The Case of Cyberprotests against the World Bank', *Cyberactivism. Online Activism in Theory and Practice*, ed. Martha McCaughey and Michael D. Ayers (London: Routledge, 2003), 71-72.
- <sup>53</sup> Martha McCaughey and Michael D. Ayers, Introduction to *Cyberactivism. Online Activism in Theory and Practice*, ed. Martha McCaughey and Michael D. Ayers (London: Routledge, 2003), 1-2.
- <sup>54</sup> Omar Basalamah and Tariq Elias, 'Conceptualising Virtual Learning Space(s) in Saudi Arabia: A Foucauldian Panoptic Approach', *Beyond the Postmodern: Reconceptualisations of Space and Place for the Early 21st Century*, ed. Harris Breslow and Antje Ziethen (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2014), XX.
- <sup>55</sup> Lance W. Bennett, 'New Media Power', 18.
- <sup>56</sup> *Guide for Cities Applying for the Title of European Capital of Culture* (European Commission, Brussels, 2009), viewed 6 November 2012, [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/pdf/doc633\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/pdf/doc633_en.pdf).
- <sup>57</sup> 'Decision 1419/1999/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 May 1999', *Official Journal of the European Union* L166/6, 1 Jul (1999): 1-5.
- <sup>58</sup> 'Decision 1622/2006/EC'.

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