

# **Local-Roots for a Universal Event?**

## **Exploring the Value of City-Specific Cultural Policies in the Context of the Forum Barcelona 2004**

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### **Abstract**

For the last twenty years, the effort towards transforming industrial cities into post-industrial economies has been accompanied by a growing interest in cultural policy as a factor of urban governance. Culture and the arts have been used as a critical tool for urban regeneration, an approach refined in the US over the 1970s and early 1980s (see Porter, 1980) and consequently developed in Europe in cities such as Glasgow - European City of Culture in 1990 - and Bilbao - opening of the Guggenheim Museum in 1997. Nevertheless, despite the generalised use of cultural initiatives as catalysts for urban regeneration, it is not frequent to find parallel developments of city-specific cultural policies. This has often meant that the high levels of investment required to produce hallmark cultural events and infrastructures are not accompanied by long-term legacy planning nor by coherent strategies to secure a balanced spatial and social distribution of benefits.

It is only in the last 3 to 5 years that cities have started to develop place specific cultural policies. This has been the case in Edinburgh, Barcelona and most recently Montreal among many others. This is a fairly recent practice and, as such, no definite models have been established as yet. Different cities use different terminology, ranging from 'Cultural Policy for the City' in Edinburgh and Montreal to 'Strategic Plan for the Cultural Sector' in Barcelona. However, a point in common for most if not all of these initiatives is the dedication to establishing a working framework for culture in the city that assists informing policy and guiding action. This typically involves an effort towards defining and justifying cultural priorities in the city and the publication of one or several documents explaining the process to reach certain definitions and prioritise certain practices over others.

This paper explores the experience of Barcelona and looks at the design, production and promotion of the latest hallmark event in the city – the Forum Barcelona 2004. The main aim is to examine whether the official cultural strategy has had any impact or relevance in the definition, production and long-term viability of such a large-scale event.

### **Keywords**

Forum Barcelona 2004, cultural policy, city, event.