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Reading Relationally. A Proposal for Relational-Comparative Research Concerning City/Capital of Culture Events

Abstract

García and Cox (2013) have clarified that there is an urgent need for comparative studies of *City/Capital of Culture* events. With the ambition to foster exchange and learning, knowledge production concerning cultural initiatives requires to think beyond the individual case study of a singular event. Simultaneously, the two scholars observe comparability and context-sensitivity between events as a major issue in these particular canons of research. Drawing upon the research experience of the project >>deleted for purposes of anonymity<<, this article experiments with a novel reading of *City/Capital of Culture* events. Beyond the singularity of a case study but with attention to context-sensitivities, the article proposes a relational reading practice to study the culture-led event framework. The author illustrates the proposed approach with material collected in ethnographic fieldwork in the cities of Donostia/San Sebastián, *European Capital of Culture 2016*, and Hull, *UK City of Culture 2017*. By using one case study as a metaphorical pair of glasses framing the investigative perspective on the other, an analytical relationship between two COC events is established, fostering a broader prism of analysis and connected learning.

Keywords

Relational Comparison; City/Capital of Culture; Ethnography; Gender; Comparative Studies.

Introducing the Dilemma of Context-Sensitivity

In 2013, García and Cox's (2013) report, *European Capitals of Culture: Success Strategies and Long-Term Effects*, announced an urgent need for knowledge exchange between *City/Capital of Culture* (COC) host cities. The scholars suggested comparative approaches as a potential way to fulfil this requirement. This call for comparative research strongly inspired my research project >>deleted for purposes of anonymity<<. Eager to achieve this knowledge exchange, I planned to include a comparative perspective into my research design investigating sociocultural value negotiations in the celebrations of *Donostia/San Sebastián European Capital of Culture 2016* (DSS2016) and *Hull UK City of Culture 2017* (Hull2017). Through an ethnographic approach working with participative observation, semi-structured interviews as well as craft-supported focus groups with decision makers, cultural actors and residents, I explored in what ways cultures of gender equality are produced in the politics, practices and perceptions of the analysed events.

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3 While inspired by the García and Cox's (2013) call and eager to design a comparative
4 project, context-sensitivities and -specificities related to the studied subject matter highly
5 challenged my ambitions. In my fieldwork, I quickly came to realise that 'differences in
6 language' rendered a comparative approach nearly impossible. Obviously, I am not referring
7 of the actual languages spoken in the two field sites but refer to the various interpretations that
8 the notion of 'gender equality' provoked. Briefly summarised: when discussing the term
9 'gender equality', conversations in Hull2017 mainly referred to an understanding of equity.
10 Contrary to these readings, discussions in the context of DSS2016 highlighted feminism as the
11 main interpretation. Even though generalised for illustrative purposes, these interpretative
12 differences created a massive challenge and barrier for comparative analysis. In my interest
13 and eagerness to respond to García and Cox's (2013) recommendation, I explored different
14 comparative approaches. As a possible solution, I established an analytical relationship
15 considering a relational-comparative perspective. The methodological conviction is expressed
16 in the proposed analytical framework of the relational reading practice.
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19 This article presents the methodological proposal of a relational reading of COC host
20 cities. This proposal is based on my research experience of studying highly context-sensitive
21 value negotiations in DSS2016 and Hull2017. In order to outline my approach for the relational
22 reading of COC events, I draw upon existing literature regarding comparative and relational-
23 comparative studies. My ambition embraces the need, call and interest for knowledge exchange
24 through comparative studies while simultaneously paying close attention to the context-
25 sensitivities of a given subject matter. At its core, the proposal for relational reading seeks to
26 establish analytical relationships based on the organisational matter of time and learning
27 processes due to research priorities.
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30 In order to provide a suitable argumentative line, my proposal unfolds in two sections.
31 Firstly, I give a brief overview of the sources, contents and conditions of research regarding
32 COC events. The where, what and how of knowledge production concerning COC initiatives
33 explains the demand for comparative research while recognising the challenges of
34 comparability at the same time. Secondly, I unfold my proposal for a relational reading practice
35 in the study of COC events. I showcase its potential in respect to material collected as part of
36 my ethnographic fieldwork. In reference to the empirical material, I clarify the need for a
37 relational-comparative approach and a relational reading practice in order to foster an in-depth
38 analysis in the light of concerns over comparability and context-sensitivity. I close the article
39 with a conclusion discussing the limitations and implications of the proposed methodology.
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The Where, What and How of Knowledge Production in COC Initiatives

At the point of writing, COC titles have existed for over 35 years. Inaugurated in 1983 and first celebrated in 1985, the event framework was initiated through the European COC title (ECOC). Until now, the ECOC has been hosted by over 60 cities across the European continent (European Commission, 2015) and has created significant attention worldwide, with multiple spin-off initiatives such as the UK City of Culture title (UKCOC) (Green, 2017). The British interpretation of a COC award was launched in 2009 and first celebrated in 2013 (Department for Culture Media and Sports, 2013). While the initiatives differ in administrative details, they share crucial elements regarding the event framework, which allows them to be compared (relationally).

With highly interdisciplinary research and evaluation agendas, the amount and variety of knowledge production concerning COC initiatives, host cities and their events is extensive [1]. Independent academic research, case-specific evaluation studies [2], as well as three large-scale, commissioned reports [3] document the developments of the event frameworks. Here, common trends and tendencies are characteristic to COC knowledge production [4]. The first research focus lies on the economic impact of COC events: with the ambition to justify the spending of public funds, indicators in respect to direct and indirect expenses and revenue are frequently investigated [5]. Secondly, since the early 2000s, social impact has become of great importance to the event framework and is therefore often subject to research [6]. Thirdly, and highly discussed as a factor of success and failure, an increasing number of studies address questions of governance and management structures of COC events and associated regeneration ambitions [7]. The fourth aspect of research concerns the cultural dimension of COC events. This aspect can be understood in two ways: on the one hand, research and evaluative attention is devoted to the development and prosperity of the artistic/cultural/creative sector engaged with COC events [8]. On the other hand, the cultural research interest in COC events also describes the sociocultural value productions and negotiations that take place in the celebration of COC titles. According to Immler and Sackers (2014), examples such as Liverpool, Linz, Marseille, Turku, Riga, Essen for the Ruhr, Istanbul, Umeå and Donostia/San Sebastián show in what way COC events become laboratories to address, discuss and explore value discourses and therefore embrace the political potential of event settings [9].

Next to the contents of produced knowledge regarding COC events, the conditions of set knowledge production also show certain trends and tendencies. Since a comprehensive

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3 analysis of the methodological approaches in COC research would exceed this paper, I
4 highlight two issues relevant to the here presented methodological proposal: the dominance of
5 single case studies and the persistent hesitation vis-à-vis comparability. Generally speaking,
6 contemporary COC research canons are strongly characterised by a single case study approach
7 (García and Cox, 2013). Noteworthy exceptions include the publications by Ooi et al. (2014),
8 Lähdesmäki (2013, 2014) and Jones (2020). However, the majority of studies focus on single
9 case studies. While such an approach provides great analytical depth on one particular COC
10 event, this dominance of the singular research focus runs the risk of the territorialisation and
11 essentialising of selected COC events. The choice for singularity is often influenced by
12 reported difficulties and even hesitations regarding comparability. As illustrated in the
13 introduction through the dilemma of context-sensitivities, I fully support García and Cox's
14 (2013: 34) acknowledgement concerning comparability in the COC context: 'It is not
15 straightforward to compare data from different [COCs]. [Various] cities have been hosting
16 [COC] events [...], and [the] dynamic variables of time and location naturally make like-for-
17 like comparisons between host cities difficult.' While calling for comparative research,
18 context-sensitivities and concerns regarding comparability require further attention. A like-for-
19 like comparison might not be possible, but the interest in knowledge exchange through
20 comparative studies continues to be crucial. Therefore, I advocate for a comparative lens that
21 is not hung up on concerns about comparability or bound to single case studies but builds upon
22 analytical relationships, enabling learning and exchange. In order to expand the current canons
23 regarding the where, what and how of COC research, I propose the practice of relational
24 reading.

25 **Reading in Relation – A Methodological Proposal**

26 The methodological proposal of relational reading is situated within the wider debate of
27 comparative and relational-comparative studies. Here, the notion of comparison is understood
28 not only as a method but as a way of thinking (McFarlane, 2010). In the simplest terms,
29 comparative research might be understood as the investigation of two or more cases. However,
30 I agree with Ward (2010: 473), who points out that the simple adding of 'more than one event,
31 object, outcome or process' does not do justice to the strategic analytical process that underlines
32 comparative research. Rather, my approach relies on what McFarlane (2010: 726) addresses as
33 'comparative thinking':

34 Comparative thinking can be a strategy firstly for revealing the assumptions, limits
35 and distinctiveness of particular theoretical or empirical claims, and secondly for
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3 formulating new lines of inquiry and more situated accounts. As a strategy of
4 critique and alterity, comparativism depends, in part, on a continuous process of
5 criticism and self-criticism.
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8 As a result of this strategic thinking, comparative research creates awareness regarding the
9 diverse approaches to researched social conditions.
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11 Classical comparative approaches can be summarised as ‘single model, linked
12 submodels or diverse models’, as coined by Pickvance (1986: 165), or as non-comparative,
13 individualising, encompassing and variation-finding strategies of comparison, according to
14 Robinson’s (2011) translations and elaborations. These conceptions of comparative research
15 serve as important references to orientate my investigation of value negotiations in DSS2016
16 and Hull2017. However, I had to realise that even the more generous models or strategies of
17 classical comparative tactics do not allow enough flexibility to accommodate the complexities
18 of context-sensitivities encountered in my ethnographic fieldwork.
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25 Therefore, I appreciate Nijman’s (2007) explanation that ‘there is no single comparative
26 method but rather a plurality of comparative approaches’. This plurality finds resonance in
27 Robinson’s (2016: 6) invitation for ‘comparative imaginations’. Her summary of ‘thinking
28 cities through elsewhere’ became the crucial driver in my reconceptualisation of comparative
29 research in the context of COC research. Imagining new comparative relationships enables me
30 to focus on the relational interests that ground my intended comparison. Robinson (2016: 18)
31 points out, by imagining, exploring and experimenting with forms of comparison, that the doors
32 are opened to ‘recast [...] how [to] think about the relationships [between case studies]’.
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39 Concentrating on relationships as a framing feature of my comparative thinking, the
40 ‘chaotic concept’ (Ward, 2010: 476) of comparative research offers me the perspective of a
41 relational-comparative practice. Accommodating my research interests between comparability
42 and context-sensitivity, I found my own research interest and devotion to study COC events
43 through each other in Hard’s (2002: 14–15 cit. in Ward, 2010: 480) explanation:
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48 A relational concept of comparison [...] refuses to measure ‘cases’ against a
49 universal yardstick. Instead of taking as pre-given objects, events, places and
50 identities, [relational comparison] start[s] with the question of how [these
51 investigated objects] are formed in relation [with] one another. In this conception,
52 particularities or specificities arise through interrelations between objects, events,
53 places and identities; and it is through clarifying how these relations are produced
54 and changed in practice that close study of a particular part can illuminate the whole.
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3 Hart's consideration allows me to look "beyond comparative approaches" in the traditional
4 sense' (Ward, 2010: 481). Rather than stressing the search for similarities and differences in
5 order to justify a comparative perspective, Hart's (2002 cit. in Ward, 2010) understanding of
6 relational-comparative approaches foregrounds the analytical relationship. 'Thinking cities
7 through elsewhere' is here not defined by a consistent focus on the city as the central entity; on
8 the contrary, 'thinking cities through elsewhere' allows me to focus on the question – studied
9 subject matter – as the relational link relevant to the comparison. Hence, my methodological
10 proposal of a relational reading of COC events is based on the relational-comparative interest
11 to '[use] different cities to pose questions of one another' (Ward, 2010: 480).

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19 In a simplified – maybe playful – manner, the metaphor of a pair of glasses illustrates
20 the relational reading practice I intend to use. Glasses have the possibility to enhance one's
21 vision and hereby direct one's attention to details that might otherwise not be visible; they have
22 the possibility to sharpen focal points as they frame perspectives. In reading COC events
23 relationally, I experience a similar effect: by engaging with one field site, a certain vision is
24 established, which most likely affects how another field site is approached. As context-
25 specificities generate particular viewpoints, the research attention might be twisted. However,
26 in this – intentional or unintentional – distortion, new perspectives, different focal points and
27 innovative conceptions are being put into the spotlight: In the project >>*deleted for purposes*
28 *of anonymity*<<, DSS2016 served as a departure point. The city and its considerations
29 established a lens, framing my research perspective. I intentionally translated the focal points
30 of DSS2016 to my interrogations of Hull2017 to create an analytical relationship. This allowed
31 me to read the two cities with their context-specificities through each other.

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41 Organisational issues as well as analytical interests frame my practice of relational
42 reading. Regarding organisational matters, time has been a great influence in this
43 methodological approach. While timing is generally an important issue in the research on
44 events, festivals and celebrations (Getz, 2007), I would even go as far as to claim time is one
45 of the central factors determining the relational-comparative research perspective in my reading
46 of DSS2016 and Hull2017. The event of DSS2016 took place from January to December 2016.
47 With several preparatory events held in late 2016, Hull2017's celebratory cycle spanned from
48 January to December 2017. Due to this cyclical progression of the two investigated COC events,
49 the fieldwork in the two field sites was phased: I, firstly, engaged with the celebrations of
50 DSS2016 in the months March, November and December throughout the celebratory year.
51 Secondly, fieldwork in Hull2017 allowed me to immersed myself in the celebrations of
52 Hull2017 from January 2017 onwards. As an effect of timing and the temporal progression of

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3 the investigated events, the collected data concerning one field site informed my perspectives
4 regarding the other. Therefore, the organisational issue of time connects with the framing of
5 analytical interests as well. As mentioned previously through the metaphor of glasses,
6 DSS2016 shaped my vision and perspective on Hull2017. The temporal progression of
7 fieldwork affected a process of formulating analytical priorities: rather than declaring fixed
8 categories of comparison, I allowed myself to learn between the two field sites. Guided by the
9 overall interest in sociocultural value discourses and cultures of gender equality, the relational
10 reading practice informed my thinking from one place to the other. If I discovered a crucial
11 entanglement in DSS2016, I sought out the issue and the surrounding debates in Hull2017 as
12 well. If I was given explicit information on relevant planning, management or policy
13 procedures in one field site, I explicitly questioned the circumstances in the other site. Contrary
14 to the assumption of a distorted or biased analysis, this learning process was intentional. The
15 organisational factor of time and the analytical shifts in priorities constructed a fruitful
16 relationship of knowledge exchange between DSS2016 and Hull2017 and therefore enabled a
17 ‘thinking [of] cities through elsewhere’ (Robinson, 2016).
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29 In order to illustrate the conceptual, metaphorical and practical debates of what
30 relational reading as a methodological proposal entails, I further outline the approach and its
31 relevance through illustrative, ethnographic materials in the following section.
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35 **Reading ‘Culture’ Relationally Between DSS2016 and Hull2017**

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37 The projects of DSS2016 and Hull2017 share the common denominator of celebrating a COC
38 title but present very different approaches to the tenure. In the case of Donostia/San Sebastián,
39 the selection panel (2011) explained its choice to award the city the ECO title in respect to
40 the project’s ambition to tackle sensitive topics of peace reconciliation and conflict
41 management. In its artistic programme, DSS2016 strongly engaged with value discourses in
42 order to challenge the status quo and existing parameters. Hull, short for Kingston upon Hull,
43 framed its application as a way for the city to come ‘out of its shadows’ (Hull City Council,
44 2013: 4) and focused its celebration strongly on socio-economic regeneration. The selection
45 committee chose Hull as the second tenure for the UKCOC title due to its efforts concerning
46 community engagement, artistic content and legacy planning (Culture Place and Policy
47 Institute, 2018). While not explicitly addressed in the outline of the project, I noted an implicit
48 interest in value production in the artistic programme. Through the curation of individual
49 events, festivals and celebrations, negotiations of value discourses became prevalent during the
50 celebrations of 2017 (>>deleted for purposes of anonymity<<). While DSS2016 highlighted
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3 a clear interest in value production, Hull2017 summarises through the ambition to create
4 change in respect to socio-economic regeneration. Even though the cities shared the common
5 denominator to celebrate a COC title, the two cities' basic conceptions and further trajectories
6 seem far apart.
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10 In order to showcase the proposed methodology of relational reading, I exemplify its
11 analytical potential through the notion of 'culture' as employed by the two investigated COC
12 celebrations [10]. Due to its omnipresence, 'culture' serves as an interesting reference point in
13 COC initiatives. Already ingrained in the title of the programmes, DSS2016 and Hull2017 were
14 required to engage closely with the notion and its conception. With its self-description of '365
15 days of transformative culture' (Hull 2017 Ltd, 2015: 14), the project of Hull2017 clarified its
16 focus for the designated year as UKCOC. While declaring its aim, Hull2017's reference to the
17 notion of 'culture' gives very little indication of what the term might mean. In programme
18 booklets, evaluation reports and descriptions by research participants, the term 'culture' is
19 mostly described as a set of categories of artistic practices. Descriptors such as 'exhibition',
20 'festival' or 'circus', among others (Hull 2017 Ltd, 2017a; 2017b; 2017c), highlight that
21 'culture' in the context of Hull2017 refers predominantly to artistic genres. Hence, there are
22 hardly any clues as to which political, or value-political, effects might be addressed through
23 the aimed '365 days of transformative culture'. Contrary to such a limited conceptualisation,
24 DSS2016 embraced the notion of 'culture' prominently in the project's slogan: Cultures of Co-
25 Existence. While Hull2017 reduced its interpretation of culture to artistic disciplines, Ane, a
26 cultural producer within the DSS2016 foundation, addressed the artistic disciplines as
27 'instruments, which help us to understand that there are different ways to express yourself,
28 different voices, different forms of communication. They are an instrument, through which we
29 can get a collective understanding' [11] (Ane, Political Actor, DSS2016, Interview, December
30 2016). The understanding of artistic genres as instruments allows for a much wider
31 interpretation of culture, which Kepa, another cultural producer within the foundation,
32 described for DSS2016 as follows:
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50 DSS2016 does not intend to just use [...] the [traditional] term of 'culture' but
51 rather wants to re-enforce a 'culture' which is way more extensive, much more
52 diverse, and much richer. It is not only the artistic disciplines but [...] the
53 continuous [process, in which] [...] people [are] conscious that we are all part of
54 many things and that this is what makes us culturally so rich. I don't know if I am
55 simplifying [it] too much but [this is what 'culture' means in the project of
56 DSS2016]. (Kepa, Political Actor, DSS2016, Interview, December 2016) [12]
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3 In DSS2016, 'culture' is not merely reduced to categories but seen as a process to which all
4 citizens contribute. Therefore, 'culture' becomes an instrument that fosters, negotiates and
5 produces value discourses.
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8 Hull2017's interpretation of culture as mostly, if not only, related to artistic disciplines
9 leaves very little room to think through the entanglements between culture and value discourses.
10 If a single case study approach had been chosen for this research project, this limited account
11 would have made an analysis of the production of sociocultural values highly difficult – maybe
12 even doubtful. DSS2016's engagements with the notion of 'culture' provide a much more
13 extensive interpretative framework. Through the relational reading practice, the notion of
14 'culture' in the context of DSS2016 informs interpretations of Hull2017. The relational reading
15 approach of the two field sites therefore serves as an important prism expanding research
16 priorities. Here, the methodological proposal of the relational reading practice of COC events
17 does not aim to judge one event as better or worse than the other; rather, the practice creates
18 new perspectives through the analytical relationships between field sites. As such, the
19 conceptualisation of 'culture' serves illustrative purposes, as it shows how DSS2016 can
20 formulate a new framework for analysis for the concept of culture in Hull2017.
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30 **Concluding Relational Reading Practices Through the Ambition of Knowledge** 31 **Exchange** 32

33 Eager to fulfil the call for knowledge exchange and inspired by the potential of comparative
34 research (García and Cox, 2013), I initiated this paper with the dilemma of context-sensitivities
35 encountered in my research on sociocultural value negotiations of cultures of gender equality
36 between DSS2016 and Hull2017. Beyond prominent single case study approaches and
37 associated concerns over comparability, I formulated this methodological proposal for
38 relational-comparative research on COC events. The practice of relational reading enables to
39 question, think and learn through field sites in relation to each other. I used the metaphor of
40 glasses to explain the analytical relationship established between field sites: just like a pair of
41 glasses, the relations between COC events can sharpen one's vision, direct focal points and
42 frame perspectives. With reference to the interpretations of 'culture', I outlined how this playful
43 metaphor can be put into action: being informed through DSS2016's conceptualisation of
44 'culture', my research perspectives allowed me to incorporate this interpretation in the context
45 of Hull2017. Embedded within debates on relational-comparative research approaches, the
46 methodological proposal is guided by the question of analysis rather than the units of research
47 (Ward, 2010). Therefore, relational reading puts (relational-)comparative research into practice
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3 not as a method but ‘as a way of thinking’ (McFarlane, 2010). ‘Thinking cities through
4 elsewhere’, as Robinson (2016) explains, becomes the frame in which learning is fostered. As
5 perspectives and priorities are continuously challenged and changed, new prisms of analysis
6 are constructed.
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10 Concluding this article, I am further attentive to the limitations and implications that
11 this approach entails. Here, I will highlight two crucial limitations, which challenges the
12 conception and practice of the methodological strategy. The implication expands the
13 perspective beyond COC research as the immediate addressee of this discussion. Through
14 exemplary questions, I raise awareness in what way the wider field of event studies might
15 benefit from a relational-comparative methodological approach.
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20 As already addressed in the section ‘Reading in Relation – A Methodological Proposal’
21 organisational issues and analytical focus influenced the relational reading of the two events of
22 Donostia/ San Sebastián 2016 and Hull 2017. The temporalities are generally a highly
23 determining factor in the study of events. These temporal influence are becoming even more
24 explicit in the relational reading of two or more event case studies. While time and timeliness
25 is highly influential in the methodological proposal, such temporalities does not prescribe a
26 reading direction from an earlier event to a later event. In the project >>*deleted for purposes*
27 *of anonymity*<<, the relational reading was applied from the case study of Donostia/ San
28 Sebastian 2016 to Hull 2017. Determined by various organizational challenges, this analytical
29 decision was taken. However, there would have been also potential to turn the analytical
30 perspective. Due to the research attention and related decisions, I was not able to incorporate a
31 reciprocal relational direction in the project, but I encourage future research to experiment with
32 shared analytical relationships in order to advance the study of events in relation with each
33 other. Another limitation has already been discussed in the section ‘Reading “Culture”
34 Relationally Between DSS2016 and Hull2017’: At this point, I want to clarify again that the
35 relational reading practice is not intended to be a judgemental endeavour. As different units are
36 put in relationship with each other, assumptions concerning hierarchical interpretations are
37 connected to the interpretative regards; however, valorisation is not the objective of
38 comparative strategies. In the context of my relational-comparative practice, I frequently had
39 to be cautious of such interpretations. As pointed out before, I do not aim to judge one COC
40 event over the other. My empirical illustrations made clear that the analytical relationships do
41 not declare one site as better or worse than the other; instead, the relationship holds great benefit
42 as it expands analytical prisms beyond the boundaries of an individual field. Contrary to
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3 supposed distortions or distractions, I want to highlight this benefit and call for precaution in
4 response to this suspected limitation of the proposed methodological approach.
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7 The key phrase 'knowledge exchange' opened this article and I want to use it as the
8 closing point regarding this methodological proposal as well. Discussing the implication of the
9 relational reading practice in COC events, I refer back to the obvious but highly relevant call
10 by García and Cox (2013): the cited report very explicitly addressed COC event developments
11 and its need for knowledge exchange through comparative interests. A proposal for a relational-
12 comparative methodology helps to overcome barriers in set knowledge production by
13 establishing exchange not only on the level of research output but by incorporating such
14 learning already into the research process. While I focused explicitly on COC events in this
15 discussion of the methodological research, I see great potential to expand beyond this particular
16 event framework. The question arises: What if other event settings were looked at through a
17 relational-comparative lens? What concerns regarding human rights monitoring can be
18 incorporated from the FIFA World Cup in Brazil 2014 to the event in Qatar 2022? **Could the**
19 **Formula 1 races in various locations share learning and knowledge exchange concerning**
20 **environmental sustainability with each other?** Without enough space to dwell on these
21 questions further, I highly encourage further research on ways a relational-comparative
22 perspective and the **methodological** proposal of relational reading can serve the wider field of
23 event studies. This methodological proposal aims to create an analytical linkage by relating
24 entities of comparison not through their factorial characteristics but by the analytical questions.
25 In doing so, not only context-sensitive knowledge production can be achieved but exchanges
26 of integral learning as well.
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Endnotes

¹ The variety of different COC initiatives strongly influences knowledge production of COC events: As the longest running programme with substantial amounts of research and evaluation interests, the ECOC programme dominates the canons of knowledge production and serves as a continuous point of reference in the literature.

² In reaction to suggestions by the commissioned reports, the European Parliament and Council of the European Union (2006) decided upon monitoring and evaluation procedures in the legislative changes of 2006. This decision was first put into action in 2007. According to the legal documents, an 'external and independent evaluation of the results of the European Capital of Culture event' (The European Parliament and the Council of the European Union 2006: 304/4) needs to be provided to the European Parliament, the Council and the Committee of the Regions. These ex post evaluations are made available to the public through the website of the European Commission. This approach to evaluation and consequential knowledge production has been further developed in the most recent legislative change published in the Decision No 445/2014/EU in 2014 and comes in action for the period of 2020 to 2033. Here, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union (2014: 132/3) explain: 'The Commission's evaluations of the past [ECOC], which are based on data collected at a local level, have not been able to provide primary data on the impact of the title. Therefore, the cities themselves should be the key players in the evaluation process.' This reconsideration stands in line with the practice of several ECOC host cities, who invest greatly into the evaluation of their event and its expected urban regenerative interests. Beyond the required ex post evaluation reports, the host cities Lille (ECOC 2004), Liverpool (ECOC 2008) and Essen for the Ruhr (ECOC 2010) have invested strongly in their evaluation procedures and published extensively on their tenure as ECOC. See Impactso8 (2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b,

2010c), Impactso8 et al. (2008, 2009), McEvoy and Impactso8 (2010), O'Brien and Impactso8 (2010) and Zentrum für Kulturforschung (2011).

In the case of the later inaugurated UKCOC title, plans for independent evaluation are a requirement in the selection process and detailed reports have therefore been published on Derry/Londonderry as the first UKCOC in 2013 (Derry City and Strabane District Council, 2016) and Hull2017 (Culture Place and Policy Institute, 2018; 2019).

³ See García & Cox (2013), Myerscough (1994), Palmer/Rae Associates (2004b, 2004a).

⁴ These four key issues are strongly orientated along the predefined impact areas of COC events. Even though host cities might add, split or name their impact areas differently in their independent evaluations, the three thematic lines continuously appear in the canons of COC research and evaluation.

⁵ See Åkerlund and Müller (2012), Andriopoulos (2009), Aquilino et al. (2019), Falk and Hagsten (2017), Gehrels and Landen (2015), Gomes and Librero-Cano (2018), Herrero et al. (2006), Hughes et al. (2003), O'Callaghan and Linehan (2007), Richards and Wilson (2006), Tucker (2008), Vareiro et al. (2016) and Vasiliu and Dragoman (2009).

⁶ See Boland (2010), Boland et al. (2018), Dragičević et al. (2015), Fitjar et al. (2013), Giovanangeli (2015), Hudec and Džupka (2016), Hunter-Jones and Warnaby (2009), Moulaert et al. (2004), Ploner and Jones (2019) and West and Scott-Samuel (2010).

⁷ See Cox and O'Brien (2012), Crepaz et al. (2014), Cunningham and Platt (2018), Hansen and Laursen (2015), Hudson et al. (2017), O'Brien (2011), O'Brien and Impactso8 (2010) and Wahlin et al. (2016).

⁸ See Bergsgard and Vassenden (2011), Campbell (2011), Cohen (2013), Griffiths (2006), Quinn (2009) and Umney and Symon (2019).

⁹ See Boland et al. (2016), >>deleted for purposes of anonymity<< and Lähdesmäki (2012, 2013, 2014a).

¹⁰ Obviously, the notion of 'culture' provokes a plurality of interpretation. In the context of this article, I do not have the spatial capacities to go into further debate regarding the notion itself or its developments in the context of national and international cultural policy as this is not the ambition of this paper.

¹¹ Statement translated by the Author from Spanish.

¹² Statement translated by the Author from Spanish.