

How European Capitals of Culture attempt to stimulate growth

Home > Impacts of arts and culture > Economic impacts of arts and culture

This research was conducted by **Greg Richards** at **Tilburg University, The Netherlands**.

Summary

Event-led regeneration policies – and in particular the European Capital of Culture programme – have become popular elements of urban and economic policy. The paper reviews the history and development of the European Cultural Capital event, and analyses the extent to which the cultural event has been successful in stimulating economic development. Since its start in 1985, the focus of the Cultural Capital initiative has changed from established cultural cities to smaller, de-industrialising cities in Europe. Along with it, its aims have changed from showcasing existing culture to attracting tourism and investments and thereby creating new economic growth.

Host cities target ‘mobile consumers’ and ‘cultural producers’

In the current ‘age of city marketing’ host cities target increasingly mobile consumers, attracting them to their cities with cheap flights and accommodation offers. A prioritised section of this audience group is called ‘cultural producers’: tourists who often work in the creative industries and use their cultural travels and consumption as the basis for their own cultural products. Their investments are more significant and put the city on the map.

City marketing strategies like the Capital of Culture programme often only have an impact in the short term

Cultural investments only work if they are embedded in an environment where culture is continually produced and embraced, and if they promote a varied offer. The presence of local cultural creativity is crucial for growing a city's cultural economy and not the other way around.

This summary is by **Stella Toonen** from the **Cultural Institute at King's**

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