

THE ROLE OF CULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

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Culture has a critical role in transforming localities into more attractive places to work and invest. Cultural activities and facilities significantly affect the development of the physical environment of cities. But what does it all mean for the local residents of the neighbourhoods? How do they feel or participate in cultural activities organized for them?

The overall aim of this study has been to evaluate participation effect on the development of Riga's neighbourhoods during the year of The European Capital of Culture.

During the research, the authors have used the mixed research methodology. The qualitative analysis of the Riga 2014 programme has been done based on the qualitative interviews with the artistic team, project managers and entrepreneurs from Riga's neighbourhoods; besides, a detailed analysis of Riga 2014 programme events has been performed.

The main findings show that cultural life in the neighbourhoods is among the most important factors determining the satisfaction with life by the neighbourhoods' inhabitants. Personalities, not infrastructure have a crucial importance in the development of neighbourhood cultural life. Cultural activities in neighbourhood should be carried out in close cooperation with the stakeholders from different sectors. This can bring to sustainable and long-term effects.

Keywords: urban regeneration, development of neighbourhoods, cultural participation

INTRODUCTION

The city nomination for the title of European Capital of Culture is often perceived as a challenge and opportunity to raise the international profile of the city, to run a programme of cultural activities and arts events, to attract visitors and to enhance pride and self-confidence. Very often it is used as an argument to raise money for cultural infrastructure (Palmer-Rae, 2004, 14). Riga, the capital city of Latvia, was nominated to be European Capital of Culture in 2014. The development of the proposal for the bid and the programme was started in 2008, the year when Latvia entered the phase of severe economic recession. That was one of the reasons why Riga did not plan to make significant investments neither in general city infrastructure, nor in cultural buildings. According to the artistic team of Riga 2014, it was decided to focus on artistic developments, artists and local inhabitants. The organisers wanted to broaden the understanding of culture and also

to involve inhabitants as participants aiming "to deepen the concept of development in the city administration context, supplementing it with a cultural dimension and underlining the fact that cultural development and creative activity are significant factors that influence the quality of life, welfare and sustainability of cities" (Force Majeure, 2008, 17). The artistic programme of Riga 2014 was developed in six thematic lines. One of them, the so called *Road Map*, was particularly focused on the development of Riga's neighbourhoods and participation of the local inhabitants in socio-cultural activities. Findings show that this thematic line, represented by a large number of small initiatives with limited funding, might be among one of the most sustainable results with significant influence on the local development of the city. According to the Latvian inhabitant survey performed after 2014, the majority of Riga's inhabitants (80 % of the respondents living in Riga)

consider Riga as the best place to live (source: Riga Inhabitant Survey, SKDS, 2015).

Our study is focusing on evaluating and measuring the effects of the neighbourhood activities on the programme of Riga 2014. The particular aim is to evaluate cultural consumption and participation effect on the development of Riga's neighbourhoods during the year of The European Capital of Culture.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

As cultural activities can generate a hugely broad range of economic, social and environmental benefits, we have investigated the role of culture in the local development and potential of cultural services in the development of local communities and urban regeneration. The benefits attributed to cultural activities can be classified into the following categories, as depicted in the Tab. I.

According to cultural policy researchers Charles Landry and Franco Bianchini, culture and creativity should be a long-term goal for the society. Movement towards a more imaginative city requires thousands of changes in mindset, creating the conditions for people to become agents of change rather than being passive recipients or victims of change. Therefore people should acquire higher-order thinking skills, such as learning how to learn, create, discover, innovate, solve problems and self-assessment (Landry, Bianchini, 2000). The creative city concept has to do with wider changes in economy and society, in which human creativity has become a key factor (Florida, 2002, 258).

If a city wants to be considered as a friendly area for its inhabitants, it should develop places where people can meet. People need 'third spaces', which are neither home nor work where people can be together (Landry, 2008, 120–121). In other words, cities should reassess their *soft infrastructure*. It includes not only cafes, parks and accessible

wireless internet; the city should also think about creating nice atmosphere and good image, not only by developing new venues, but also by reinventing the existing infrastructure (abandoned houses, old factories). Atmosphere is even better in the old buildings, because they have their special history and stories. Especially the mix of old and new buildings is important for creativity. Place has to nurture creativity, that is the ability to do new things with the existing knowledge. The cities having a lot of creative and talented people or the so called creative class (Florida, 2002, 69) are more capable to initiate changes. The attributes and qualities of being creative are the ability to think afresh; to be inquiring and flexible; to see unusual connections; not being frightened by ambiguity, paradox or contradictions; and being original (Landry, 2008, 54–55).

Apart from individualism which is the present characteristics of contemporary city inhabitants, people also value social relationships and develop the so called 'network family' (Jacobs, 2005, 35). This means they sometimes appreciate relationships among neighbours and acquaintances in addition to friends even more than their real family. Therefore neighbourhoods being a place where people live in a relatively close proximity to each other (Bianchini, Torrigiani, 1995, 17) play a crucial role in improving the quality of life of the local inhabitants. Neighbourhoods often face big economic, social and environmental challenges. During the last decades in Europe, culture is playing more and more significant role in the regeneration processes of the neighbourhoods. From the cultural policy perspective, there are two approaches and two types of instruments for using culture in the development of neighbourhoods. One way is to approach the spatial distribution of cultural provision and most often it means to develop neighbourhood based arts facilities. Another kind of intervention

I: Benefits from Cultural Activities

Economic	Environmental	Social
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● direct and indirect employment; ● inward investment and business location; ● attraction of educated workforce; ● property value; ● visitor and resident spending; ● economic diversification; ● flexible, responsible and cost-effective part of community development; ● branding for a city, associating it with the desirable 'goods'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● re-use of redundant buildings or open space; ● improved public realm, increasing use and sense of safety and reducing vandalism; ● pride in place; ● openness and the courage to change on the part of citizens and institutions; ● environmental renewal and health promotion; ● creating attractive environment for people to live in and visit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● confidence and change in perception of area and person; ● volunteering and social capital; ● community cohesion; ● education and learning new skills; ● health and wellbeing; ● crime reduction, including truancy; ● new solutions to everyday problems; ● developing valuable social networks; ● development of community pride; ● understanding and helping communities organize themselves; ● adds creativity to organizational planning; ● produces social change that can be seen, evaluated and broadly planned.

Source: Barker, 2012, Bianchini, 1993, Ennis and Douglass, 2011, Landry, 2008, Matarasso, 1997, Estonian Ministry of Culture, 2010

is to provide support to cultural projects initiated and run by grassroots groups (Bianchini, Torrighiani, 1995, 37–38).

To sum up, there are three main sections of culture at the heart of regeneration: covering cultural icons and landmarks, place-making and urban identity and community consolidation (Vickery, 2007, 53) and four distinct categories of culture-led regeneration:

Urban design-led reconfiguration of an urban centre: this creates physical change with some degree of permanence in the form of landmark buildings, facilities and new public spaces. The cultural content of this regeneration is primarily visual (good design), which in turn facilitates socio-cultural development (the development of new retail cultures, business or organizational cultures around new urban spatial formations) (Vickery, 2007, 71–72), which we call – creative cities. Creative cities are the engine of creative economy (Howkins, 2001). Growth in the creative city concept is therefore put into an economic context, a context that sees the well-being of a city or society in solely economic terms (Hahn, 2010, 17). City boosters increasingly compete for tourist dollars and financial investments by bolstering the city's image as a centre of cultural innovation (Zukin 2005, 282).

Creativity-led social renewal: this is community based activity with various social groupings, minorities, with the intent of integrating 'creativity' into various public sectors: education, training, health and other services; creativity is conceived as a means of developing social interaction, social identities, communications skills and the skills of individual expression (does not necessarily take the form of fine art practice) (Vickery, 2007, 71–72).

Arts-led community development: this involves the activity of professional or semi-professional artists, and can take the form of artist participation in a leadership role in a regeneration scheme, or an artist's work playing a generative and symbolic role motivating further regeneration initiatives; arts-led community development could also take the form of artists renovating or reinvigorating an urban area (Vickery, 2007, 71–72). Arts and culture in cities can encourage their residents to think more innovatively. What is more, cultural heritage and cultural traditions awaken history and memory of the city in people, which usually unites them and heightens insight into the future (Landry, 2008). Unplanned chaos of the urban environment is the driving force behind our welfare and well-being (Hospers, Van Dam, 2005, 9).

Arts-led civic development: this involves the cultural infrastructure (both services and facilities) of a civic centre, and largely the 'arts' constituency (arts stakeholders), although also stimulates the expansion of that constituency, as well as encouraging visitors; arts organizations or institutions maintain a central role in this process, whether symbolic or simply in terms of facilities provided, increasing performance or arts

production capacity of the area; regeneration is often the policy context for arts-led civic development, but for the organizations concerned the motive an extended cultural infrastructure and institutional profile within the art-world network (Vickery, 2007, 71–72). Creativity in the city must be innovative and directly connected to its citizens, important is the ability to think flexibly and approach problems openly (Landry, 2008, 14).

There are widespread benefits of the events as cultural activities in cities. Events are more flexible than certain types of fixed infrastructure, and they can help to differentiate physical environment treated by 'serial reproduction'. Cultural events also have greater ability to offer 'spectacle' and 'atmosphere', and they generally meet the need for co-presence and feeling of 'being there'; it means events can cost less and generate greater impact in short term (Richards, Palmer, 2010, 19). For example, they create a significance for work in the areas of service, science, and cultural production (Reckwitz, 2009, 21). Significant argument is also benefit based fundamentally on human intelligence, knowledge and creativity (Florida 2005, 292) and result of complex and multifaceted entity (Bianchini 1999, 34) with supported branding and communication strategy by adding a creative or artistic dimension (KEA, 2015, 2). Culture and creativity were means to generate an already existing process of social reconstruction, in which culture was conceived unquestioningly as wholly positive, not itself ridden by structural contradictions and conflicts, but which could create unproblematic modes of engagement with leisure, training, job creation and industry (Vickery, 2007, 58).

To conclude, culture is the heart of urban development strategy, not just because it improves quality of life for all, but also because of its role in generating employment, enhancing urban regeneration and social inclusion. Furthermore, culture also creates a unique relationship by combining new ideas, designs or expressive components such as symbols or aesthetics.

The overall aim of this study has been to evaluate the cultural consumption and participation effect on the development of Riga's neighbourhoods during the year of The European Capital of Culture. The tasks of the study include the following:

To evaluate the components of arts-led community development and arts-led city development in the programme of Riga 2014.

To evaluate the effects of cultural events and activities on the development of Riga's neighbourhoods by analysing cultural consumption and participation effect.

As Riga 2014 did not make any significant investments in city cultural infrastructure, there was no impact of urban design-led reconfiguration on the city. Methodology of the research did not cover also creativity-led social renewal.

The qualitative analysis of the Riga 2014 programme was done based on the qualitative

interviews with the artistic team, project managers and entrepreneurs from Riga neighbourhoods and a detailed analyses of Riga 2014 programme events (a data base comprising 488 events has been developed). Also other sources, such as online survey of project organisers (103 respondents, February, 2015) and survey of Latvian inhabitants (SKDS, 1045 respondents in January 2014 and 1044 respondents in January 2015) has been used for the purpose of this study.

The evaluation of the cultural consumption and participation effect on the development of the neighbourhoods was performed in Riga during the research period from May 2014 till November 2014. Data were collected using the questionnaire of the neighbourhood residents (502 respondents) with the aim to evaluate the effects of cultural activities organized in Riga's neighbourhoods. The semi-structured in-depth interviews with entrepreneurs and cultural managers were organized with the aim to reach broader perspective. Researchers did five case studies of different Riga's neighbourhoods (selection criteria were: the scale and territory of the neighbourhood, the number of inhabitants, the existing cultural venues and the number of European Capital of Culture programme's activities).

During the research, the authors used mixed research methodology. For the data analysis a content-based analysis and SPSS data analysis were applied. Results were tested with Qualitative Comparison Analysis software Tosmana 1.3.2.0., the programme for the analysis of multi-value data. Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) is a theory driven approach, analysing the causal contribution of different factors to an outcome of interest. An underlying assumption of QCA is that social phenomena involve 'complex causality'. Complex causality means that 1) causal factors combine with

each other to lead to the occurrence of an event or phenomenon, 2) different combinations of causal factors can lead to the occurrence of a given type of event or phenomenon, and 3) causal factors can have opposing effects depending on the combinations with other factors in which they are situated (Mahoney, Goertz, 2006, 236, Wagemann, Schneider, 2010, 382). The aim of QCA is enabling systematic cross case comparison. At the same time, it is a case-sensitive approach. That means it takes the internal complexity of cases into account by allowing complex causations and counterfactual analysis.

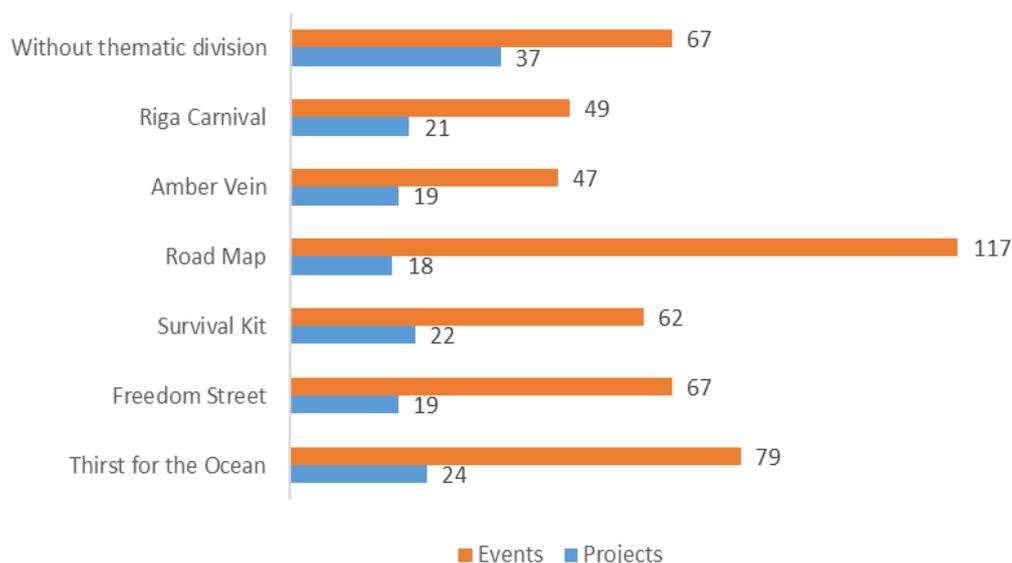
In QCA, a configuration is a specific combination of factors (or stimuli, causal variables, ingredients, determinants, etc.) that produces a given outcome of interest (Rihoux and Ragin 2009, 16).

The core element is the "truth table", a data matrix that contains all values of the causal conditions and outcomes. All conditions are assessed in strictly binary fashion as either absent/false (0) or present/true (1) for the case. The formula of the configuration is achieved with the application of Boolean algebra, in which '+' means 'or' and '*' means 'and.'

The resulting truth table shows all theoretically possible combinations and their observed presence in the cases. In the final configuration, the values are indicated with subscript numbers.

RESULTS

Artistic programming of Riga 2014 was developed in six thematic lines: *Thirst for the Ocean*, *Freedom Street*, *Survival Kit*, *Road Map*, *Riga Carnival* and *Amber Vein*. The *Road Map* was particularly focused on the development of Riga's neighbourhoods and participation of the local inhabitants in socio-cultural activities. The neighbourhood projects included such ideas as tours planned



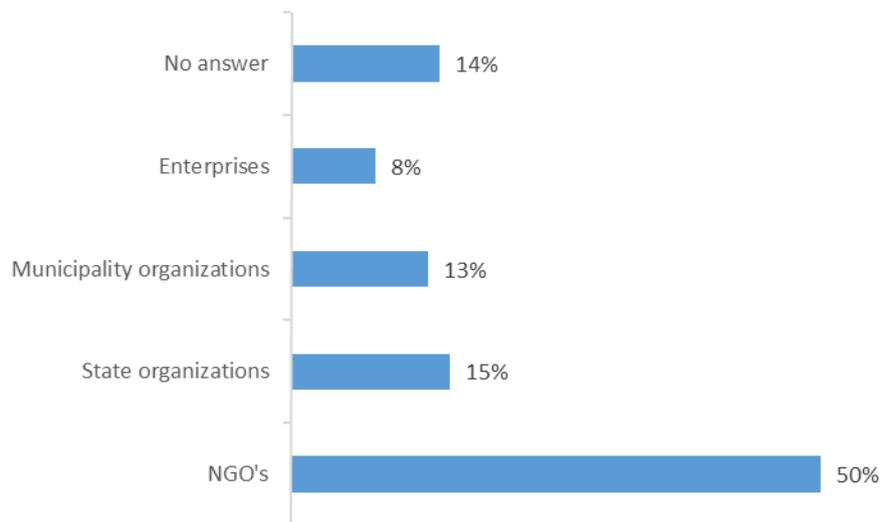
1: *Projects and Events in Riga 2014 Thematic Lines*.
Source: Riga 2014 Project Database, 2015.

and guided by the local people, art workshops, photo exhibitions, celebrations, neighbourhood festivals, lectures and discussions. The *Road Map* had the smallest number of projects, but the largest cultural activity: 117 events.

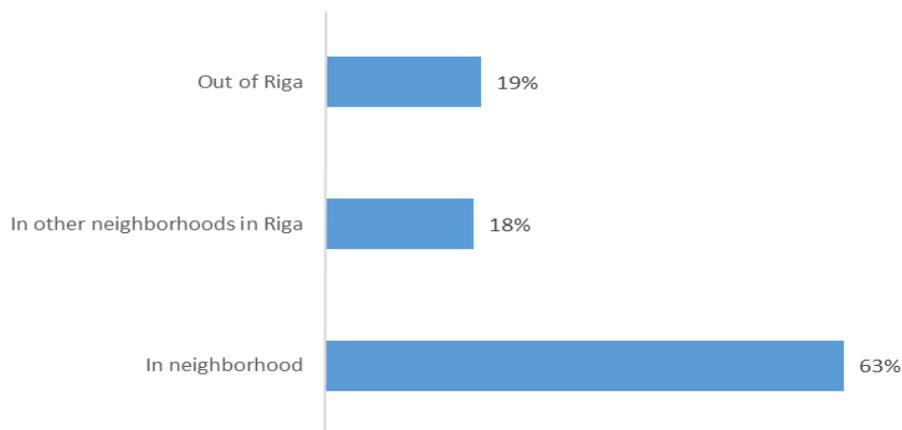
Even though the neighbourhood projects did not compete with the programme's major international events, their potential influence could be even bigger: making life in every district of the city exciting and meaningful. Riga 2014 project organisers (40 % of respondents) affirm that Riga 2014 has improved life quality of inhabitants in Riga neighbourhoods (Source: Survey of Riga 2014 project organisers, 2015). Community groups and local NGOs played a significant role in the development of the neighbourhood cultural projects within the programme of Riga 2014. Analysis of the *Road Map* programme showed that 50 % of the neighbourhood projects have been organized by the NGOs.

Interviews demonstrated that the *Road Map* initiative was highly appreciated among the local cultural managers. Moreover, the questionnaire of the neighbourhood residents showed that also people were interested in their own neighbourhood cultural facilities and leisure time opportunities, as 63 % of the respondents said they spend their free time at their neighbourhood.

The presence of cultural facilities and a beautiful cityscape can put particular neighbourhood on Riga's cultural map as a place to visit and to live and as an attractive spot for companies to locate their activities. Cultural activities per se improve the reputation and image of the neighbourhood. Most often it refers to those neighbourhoods that may have lost their industrial base (or never had one) and therefore must reinvent their identity through cultural and art activities. In this perspective, it is important to analyse the level of satisfaction with life in the neighbourhoods. The results show that



2: Project Organizers of the Thematic Line Road Map (n = 117).
Source: Survey of Riga 2014 Project Organisers, 2015.



3: The Inhabitant Choice of Where to Spend Their Free Time (n = 502).
Source: Cultural Participation and Engagement in the Neighbourhoods of Riga, 2014

85 % of the neighbourhood residents ($n = 502$) are satisfied (*rather satisfied and very satisfied*) with the quality of life in their neighbourhoods.

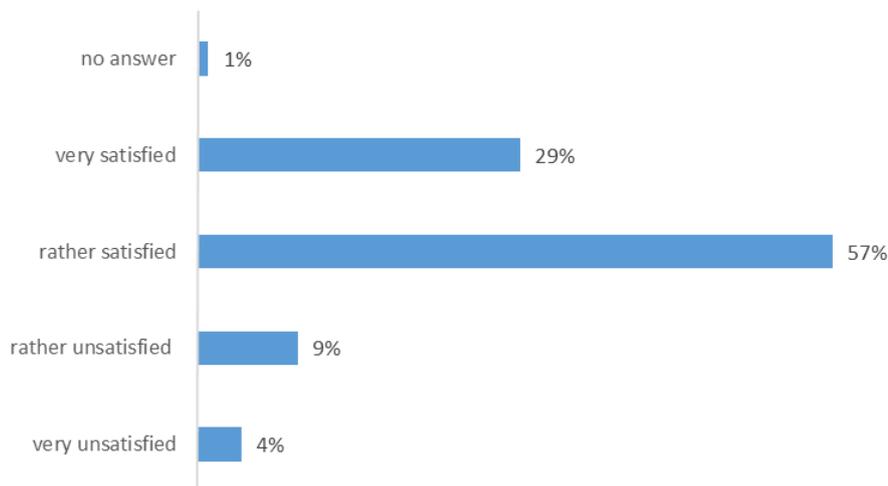
Some essential reference points for the notion of *culture-led* regeneration are questions of *quality of life* and *well-being*. Therefore, researchers had a profound interest on reasons why inhabitants are not satisfied with the quality of life in the neighbourhoods. Even though data did not provide valid and complete explanation, several respondents (11) mentioned that there is no sufficient number of cultural activities in their neighbourhood. See Fig. 5.

The development of a cultural dimension of the neighbourhood is a never-ending and creative invention of new approaches, of a new living environment, of new forms of sociability – these are significant factors leading to satisfaction with life in the neighbourhood. Digital technologies allow inhabitants to constitute new forms of participative democracy, such as social forums. Interviews

demonstrate that, despite such participation opportunities, the major issue is the lack of collaboration within and between the cultural and other sectors. The research proved that a powerful community leader is the key person for multilateral cooperation.

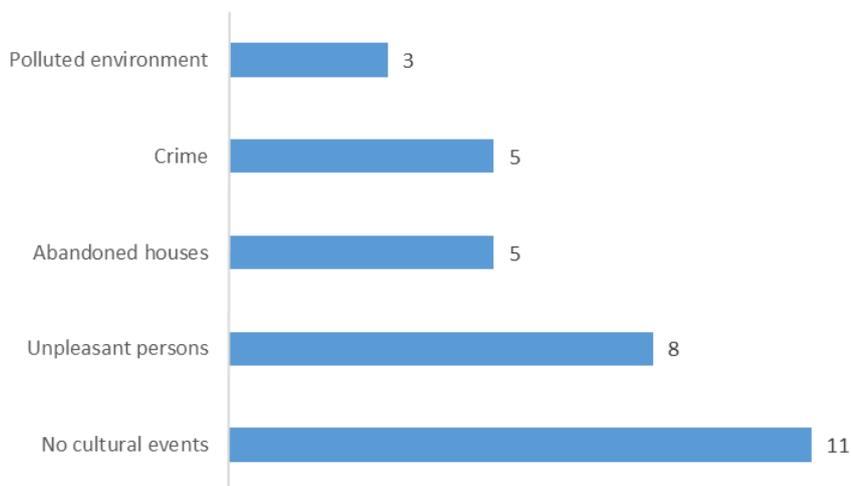
There are five categorical variables, which, according to the research, contribute to vibrant cultural life in the neighbourhoods. All variables as Cultural venues (KCA), Cultural heritage (KMA), Multilateral cooperation (DSA), Cultural NGO activity (NVO), Level of activity in social networks (IAST) were assessed in strictly binary fashion as either absent – NO (0) or present – YES (1) for each neighbourhood.

In QCA's analysis next step, inferential logic or Boolean algebra is used to simplify or reduce the number of inferences to the minimum. In this configuration, not only the presence but also the absence of a certain variable is assessed as



4: Results of Satisfaction with the Quality of Life ($n = 502$).

Source: Cultural Participation and Engagement in the Neighbourhoods of Riga, 2014



5: Reasons of Non-satisfaction with the Quality of Life ($n = 502$).

Source: Cultural Participation and Engagement in the Neighbourhoods of Riga, 2014

influential for the outcome and therefore measured. Qualitative Comparison Analysis software Tosmana 1.3.2.0. data matrix as “truth table” shows all values of the causal conditions and outcomes by mathematics in which ‘+’ means ‘or’ and ‘*’ means ‘and.’ We see Vecmīlgrāvis neighbourhood has a vibrant cultural life, having Cultural venues and Cultural heritage, and Level of activity in social networks and no Cultural NGO activity and no Multilateral cooperation (1 and 1 and 0 and 0 and 1 is 0). The results show that there are no logical contradictions (‘C’) and good cases are with the same variable combinations as for example Sarkandaugava neighbourhood and Bolderāja neighbourhood.

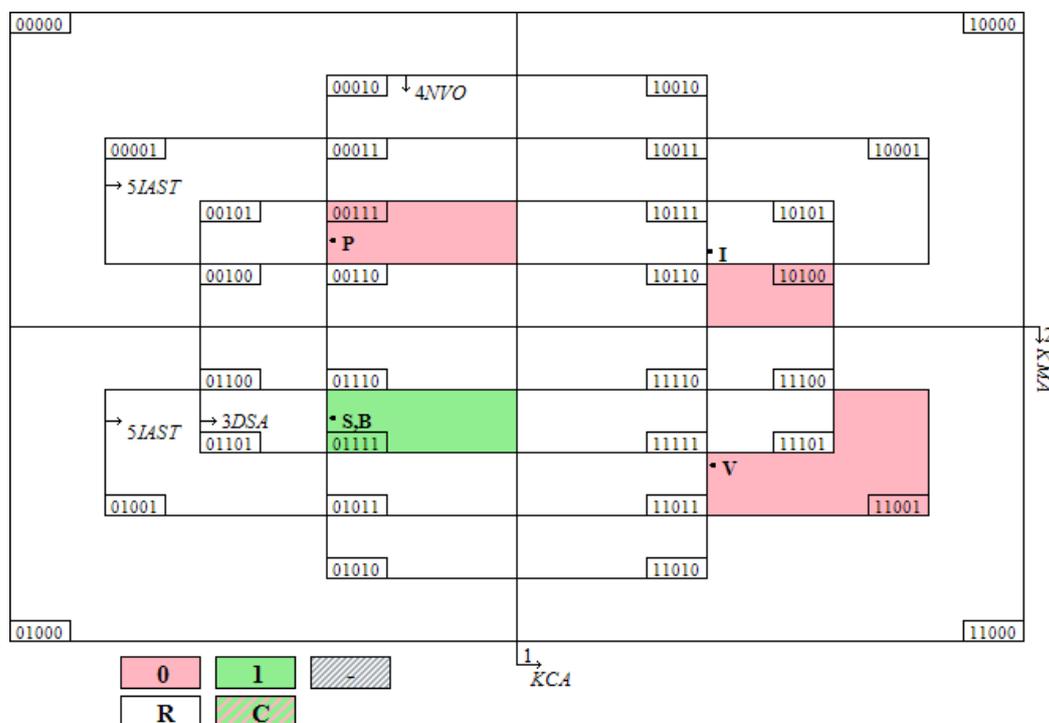
Factors such as Cultural venues (KCA), Cultural heritage (KMA), Multilateral cooperation (DSA),

Cultural NGO activity (NVO), Level of activity in social networks (IAST) taken separately do not have a significant influence, but, in case of being analysed in certain combinations, they demonstrate meaningful results. The results of QCA analysis confirm that Cultural venues (KCA) as a sovereign factor (or even together with the factor KMA and the factors DSA, NGO, IAST) manifest the same results. The investigation demonstrates that cultural venues alone are not determinant factors for active cultural life in the neighbourhood. Positive outcome is generated by combining such factors as Cultural heritage (KMA), Multilateral cooperation (DSA), Cultural NGO activity (NVO) and Level of activity in social networks (IAST).

II: Variables of Active Cultural Life in the Neighbourhoods (Yes – 1; No – 0).

	Imanta neighbourhood	Sarkandaugava neighbourhood	Vecmīlgrāvis neighbourhood	Ļaivnieki neighbourhood	Bolderāja neighbourhood
Cultural venues (KCA)	1	0	1	0	0
Cultural heritage (KMA)	0	1	1	0	1
Multilateral cooperation (DSA)	1	1	0	1	1
Cultural NGO activity (NVO)	0	1	0	1	1
Level of activity in social networks (IAST)	0	1	1	1	1

Source: Cultural Participation and Engagement in the Neighbourhoods of Riga, 2014



6: Results of QCA analysis.

Source: Qualitative Comparison Analysis software Tosmana 1.3.2.0.

DISCUSSION

In 2014, Riga became The European Capital of Culture. This initiative has achieved widespread recognition and previous studies have found that The European Capitals of Culture bring a significant stimulus to the cultural sector and the local economy. Cultural activities migrate to the suburbs and through gentrification transform degenerated territories. Short-term cultural activities and artists' interventions in the former harbour territories, monotonous residential areas or languishing suburbs continue the development of new and existing infrastructures, as well as improve the quality of life. One of the aims of Riga – The European Capital of Culture 2014 was to cross borders, which so far had kept culture within the centre, and turn neighbourhoods into cultural epicentres. It was expected that the neighbourhood projects of 2014 may have a long-term influence.

As the Riga – The European Capital of Culture 2014 did not aim to make significant improvement in the city infrastructure and mainly focused on *soft* investments in the city, the researchers aspired to evaluate the cultural consumption and participation effect on the development of Riga's neighbourhoods during 2014.

The previously published papers proposed that artists (cultural professionals or semi-professionals), cultural venues and civil society groups were the most significant components of arts-led community development and arts-led city development. Our research proved that community groups and especially local NGOs played a significant role in the development of neighbourhood cultural projects within the programme of Riga 2014. Cultural activities stimulate creativity, and it is essential driving force for the persons involved in the NGOs. It is creativity of individuals expressed collectively in the form of an organization, where they can realize their ideas. The results of the research show that bottom-up cultural activities permeate through all levels of society. Also the role of artists has been essential in the development of Riga 2014 programme. The processes of urban regeneration need to include cultural professionals. When they are included in management teams, they improve the quality of the process and provide original content, specific skills and capabilities such as imagination, creativity, empathy and trust. They advocate neighbourhood as the best place for particular cultural event. Cultural events also generate creative spillovers. Culture-based creativity by interacting with other forms of innovation and processes achieve scientific, technical or commercial results (cultural heritage preservation, green gardening concept, street gymnastics, etc.), because artists have intuition and imagination in cultural field and understanding of the community's needs.

It was also discovered that the presence of cultural facilities (cultural venues) and a remarkable

cityscape (cultural heritage sites) can put particular neighbourhood on Riga's cultural map as a place to visit and to live and as an attractive spot for companies to locate their activities. Cultural activities per se improve the reputation and image of the neighbourhood.

Moreover, researchers observed that, apart from the above-mentioned components, the cooperation of different stakeholders and inhabitant activities in social networks can contribute to the development of active cultural life in the neighbourhoods. The analysis demonstrates that none of the factors alone is determinant for active cultural life in the neighbourhood. Positive outcome is generated by combining such factors as provision of mixed infrastructure (places with cultural value, but not particularly cultural venues), multilateral cooperation of the local stakeholders, cultural NGO activity and level of resident activity in social networks, the latter two providing physical or virtual belonging to the community.

Riga – The European Capital of Culture in 2014 instead of investing in city and cultural infrastructure mainly focused on *soft* investments in artists and local inhabitants. In particular, the programme was focused on Riga's neighbourhoods, aiming to decentralize cultural activities and to boost participation of the local inhabitants in community life. The efforts of initiating a large number of small activities in the neighbourhoods have resulted in significant changes which most probably will have a long term influence on the city development and life of communities. These effects will be sustained by the planned initiative of the Riga City Council to support the neighbourhood activities during the following years financially. Further research may include longitudinal study to evaluate the impact of Riga 2014 in a longer term.

CONCLUSIONS

The main findings show that cultural life in the neighbourhoods is among the most important factors determining the satisfaction with life of the inhabitants in the neighbourhoods. People value social relationships and develop the so called 'network family'. Neighbourhoods, being a place where people live in a relatively close proximity to each other, play crucial role in improving the quality of life of the local inhabitants. Cultural facilities and cultural activities contribute to the creation of engaging places for residence, business and leisure time activities.

Charismatic personalities have essential role in the development of neighbourhood cultural life and growth potential. The results of the research show that bottom-up cultural activities permeate through all levels of society. Cultural events also generate creative spillovers. Culture-based creativity in the interaction with other forms of innovation and processes achieve scientific, technical or commercial results (cultural heritage preservation, green gardening concept, street gymnastics, etc.), because artists have intuition and imagination in cultural field and understanding of community's needs.

There are five categorical variables, which contribute to vibrant cultural life in the neighbourhoods of Riga: cultural venues, cultural heritage, multilateral cooperation, cultural NGO activity and level of activity in social networks. The research shows that cultural venues are not determining factors for active cultural life in the neighbourhood. Positive outcome is generated by combining such factors as cultural heritage, multilateral cooperation, cultural NGO activity and level of activity in social networks. Cultural activities in the neighbourhood should be carried out in close cooperation with the stakeholders from different sectors. This can bring to sustainable and long-term influence.

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