Derry-Londonderry is the second largest urban centre in Northern Ireland and fourth largest on the island of Ireland. The city is recognised as the economic, cultural and infrastructural hub for the north west of Ireland. Derry-Londonderry has a very young population, with 40% under the age of 25 and over 34,000 students. Small enterprises make up 98% of area businesses. Major sectors include software/digital media, retail and tourism.

The Troubles that hit Ireland beginning in the 1970s are said to have started in Derry-Londonderry. The city was heavily militarised and there was widespread civil unrest in the streets. Barricades were constructed to control access and prevent the state police forces from entering the city. One of the Troubles’ most notorious events, “Bloody Sunday”, occurred in Derry-Londonderry in 1972.

The Troubles and the urban conflicts that occurred at the time had a huge impact on the city, but Derry-Londonderry is now using culture-led regeneration as a key factor in overcoming economic and social challenges and this troubled history. Cultural tourism has been identified as a key economic driver for Northern Ireland, and the legacy of UK City of Culture status has allowed significant benefits in terms of skills and employment, health and well-being and social inclusion. Being the 2013 UK City of Culture was also a way to accelerate the peace-building process. Building on the success of 2013, the city adopted the five year Legacy plan and is now working on the legacy of the City of Culture year.

Challenges

Derry City and Strabane District Council is ranked the second most deprived council in the UK, with unemployment a big issue: 49% of the working age population in the council area are economically inactive. The city identified a number of ongoing challenges to tackle through the UK City of Culture title while bidding, including a limited involvement in culture by the population at large and underdeveloped seasonal cultural and tourism products. A clear correlation between income/class/gender/age and participation in culture was acknowledged. The objective of the year and beyond was also to enhance community relations in a context of the peace process, specific to Derry-Londonderry’s troubled history.
First UK City of Culture

In 2010, Derry-Londonderry made history after successfully winning the bid to become the first ever UK City of Culture in 2013. The creation of the UK City of Culture title aimed to build on the success of Liverpool European Capital of Culture in 2008, which brought many social and economic benefits to the area.

The project of UK City of Culture was strongly linked to a bigger project for the city of Derry-Londonderry: the One Plan. The plan is about raising the ambition of the city, its morale and, most important, the social and economic output and forward prosperity of the city. The One Plan is about identifying and delivering positive step-by-step changes that lead to transformation in the city over the next ten years.

As the first UK City of Culture, Derry-Londonderry combined headline cultural acts and a range of artistic and cultural events that have attempted to engage with the complex histories and experiences of the city. The year as City of Culture was aimed to use culture and creativity to globally transform communities and help encourage artistic talents. The programme set up by the city touched every aspect of culture in the city and managed to revitalise the urban landscape through cultural investments. Highlights of the year were the all Ireland Fleadh Cheoil attracting an audience of 430,000 over the ten day Irish traditional music festival and the Lumiere Light Festival.

The UK City of Culture competition acted as a powerful catalyst in galvanising the city to think more strategically about its cultural offer, identity and heritage.

Impact

• Social impact

Culture in Derry-Londonderry is now seen as a tool to promote peace, intercultural dialogue and urban regeneration. The image of the city has been enhanced for the external and internal audience. The title can be seen as a promoter of inclusivity, social interaction and community spirit. The City of Culture year helped the city articulate better what Derry is about, its identity, its heritage, and what it has to offer. Business confidence, sense of community and citizens’ interest in the world beyond the city have increased.

“Derry 2013 has been a year of inclusion, participation, confidence and ambition.”

Shona McCarthy, Former CEO of Culture Company, Derry-Londonderry
UK City of Culture 2013

• Economic impact

More than 1 million people visited Derry-Londonderry in 2013. Over 400 events and programmes were delivered; 41% of attendees surveyed at key events were from outside the city, whilst 22% of local people surveyed came from the city’s most deprived areas.

In relation to tourism, Derry-Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 status resulted in overnight trips to the city increasing by 61% between 2012 and 2013, with associated expenditure increasing by 86%.

Over the course of 2013, about £100 million (£140 million) was invested in the city through cultural programming and infrastructure. It is estimated that for every £1 spent, there has been a £5 return. Derry-Londonderry City Council has also committed £2 million (£2.8 million) for legacy projects in 2014-16 and this will provide a basis for seeking further financial support from other partners.
Budget and financing

There is no direct national funding from the UK Government for events and initiatives related to the UK City of Culture programme, as one of the driving principles is to bring people together using existing resources. Bids are therefore expected to be aligned with local resources and budgets, with evidence of a credible fundraising plan, including the development of new sources of funding. The city of Derry-Londonderry therefore decided to invest more than £20 million (€14 million) in programming and over £140 million (€100 million) in capital infrastructure.

The Urban Regeneration Company Ilex delivered £3.9 million (€2.8 million) for cultural and community groups to strengthen their contribution to City of Culture 2013. Funded by the Department for Social Development and supported by the Arts Council, the scheme helped finance 33 local projects.

Sustainability

Acknowledging that the economic benefits do not accrue during the year but in successive years, Derry-Londonderry is building on its legacy and capitalising on the public recognition it gained in 2013.

Derry-Londonderry now offers a comprehensive range of arts and cultural venues and events, and tourism is playing an ever increasing role in the success of the city. Culture and leisure projects include a local Cultural Capital Fund for venue refurbishment, the creation of multipurpose state of the art sports venue, as well as a range of private sector projects including hotel creation and refurbishment.

The Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure outlined a three-year Legacy Plan and approved £2 million in funding up until March 2014. Derry-Londonderry City Council also committed £2 million for legacy projects for the period 2014-2016. The City Council also set up a dedicated Legacy Team to liaise with partners to coordinate programmes and delivery mechanisms.

The Legacy Plan has designated Derry-Londonderry as the 2014 City of Music and the 2016 Maritime City (with the development of a new Maritime Museum). Thematic years include Creativity and Learning in 2015 and Community Choices in 2017. There is also a strong possibility of Derry-Londonderry bidding to become European Capital of Culture in 2023.

A Derry-Londonderry Legacy Fund, worth a total of £900,000 (€1,257 million), was set up by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and Derry City Council in order to bring a three-year programme of arts and heritage projects to the city. The fund promotes community engagement and campaigns against social exclusion. It finances projects that are intended to encourage citizens’ participation in arts and culture, especially those in harder to reach communities.
Transferability

The city had huge expectations to live up to, using the 2008 European Capital of Culture Liverpool as a model for the UK City of Culture.

With a much shorter period to organise the event and a much smaller budget, this imposed a huge amount of pressure on the organising team. But the fact that Derry-Londonderry had two lead programme directors (one who focused on mass participation and another who mainly focused on engaging people from all parts of society) ensured that various groups were reached.

Management level and partners

The UK City of Culture has mainly been managed by the Derry City Council, Department of Culture Arts and Leisure and the independent Cultural Company with support from a broad range of partners including ILEX and the Strategic Investment Board.

One of the greatest impacts of the cultural year in Derry-Londonderry lies in a change of relationships within local governance. Partnerships have been created and cooperation engendered. Cultural organisations now work more closely together and have created a fruitful relationship with the City Council.

Tips

Partnerships with other agencies were critical in the organisation process. The UK City of Culture team worked together with an Infrastructure Group within the local City Council. This group took care of the blue light services and maintained connections with the Head of Transport and the department responsible for roads. In addition, they had partnerships with the City Council’s Finance and Audit Committees.