

# Exhibition and Experience of Cultural Identity

## The Case of Bergen – European City of Culture

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In the year 2000, Bergen, the second largest city of Norway, managed to get the status of European City of Culture. The new won position provided opportunities to profile Bergen as a modern city and prove its rank at the national and international stage. However, results did not measure up to ambitions. Looking back, it seems that the year turned out to be dedicated to a rural and regional self-celebration. In a way Bergen might be regarded as an example of how pre-modern culture heritage get actualised and rediscovered in an urban setting. This raises questions regarding the intentions of emphasising the past and how people respond to such efforts. In answering these questions, focus will be directed towards how place not only is an integral part of social, economical and political processes, but also the way it constitutes essential elements that touches upon the inner landscape of the individual.

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The routes that take you to a place can be many. They might go through longings, dreams and logged memories, or through actions, experiences and discursive practices; they even follow the streams of thought and the touch of things. In etymology, place references are marked by both permanence and immanence, by the fluid and changeable as well as the stable and fixed. Places are the spawning ground for the activities of our everyday lives, and as such they may be regarded as immovable points on the great and unfathomable horizon of reality. Thus we relate ourselves to places out of habit, and based on contemplation and strategic considerations that involve identity formation as well place marketing. This paper will be focussing on these issues as I look into the questions of how we charge places with meanings and use them as repositories for storing these meanings, and how places may touch us and talk to us. My point of departure will be specific and close to home: Bergen in the year 2000 – when it was awarded the status of European City of Culture.

### Bergen – a Place in Norway and in Europe

The European City of Culture is a project initiated by the EU, and the intention is to bring the multiplicity of European cultural heritage to the attention of its population. The Cities of Culture therefore take on the difficult task of transforming the variety and intermixtures of culture into a shared feeling of unity. The strategy involves exporting and importing cultural impulses which are intended to yield a result both local and European at the same time. This is not only a question of identity and creativity, but of economy. Drawing up the programme for a City of Culture, is therefore often considered a national responsibility, as the focus awarded to the specific city will inevitably draw attention to the nation.

This was, however, not the case for Bergen. Financial support from the central government was held at a minimum. Bergen's budget for its City of Culture programme amounted to no



Hanseatic warehouses – *Bryggen* – in the harbour of Bergen.

more than 10 to 20% of the funds available to cities of culture in other Nordic countries. Much of the criticism that Bergen's cultural programme appeared homespun and insufficiently challenging, may very well have been caused by the lack of financial assistance. Still, Bergen is a town with many stories to tell, many places to show off, many activities for people to take part in. The question I want to raise, is why Bergen – as a modern city – chose to present its profile against a background dominated by pre- and early modern coastal culture?

On reading the programme and catalogues for the various cultural events, we find it is the traditional culture of Bergen and its surrounding area *Vestlandet* – or the western Norway, that dominates. This literature may in fact be read as guidebooks to *Vestlandet*, its cultural landscapes and its cultural heritage. If we browse through the programmes from other Cities of Culture, we will find themes relating to the urban complexities of technology and art. This would have been an option for Bergen as well, as the city is happy to view itself in the light of the

modern and urban. Its university and colleges, commerce, technology, and maritime industries are distinctive features of its urban tapestry. Also, Bergen's cultural life is varied and variegated, with established institutions of music and fine arts. In combination with new artistic talent and experiment, these account for an exciting and progressive cultural scene. With its 250 000 inhabitants Bergen is far from a metropolis. Nevertheless, many of its features are typical of larger cities across the world. In short – Bergen is a city in motion and transformation.

So why did the Programme include so little of the modern and urban? Why was it dominated by the past and the regional? On studying the programme, we find it carries a range of different potential purposes. For instance, it may be seen as an opportunity for self-celebration, a chance to show off the ancient buildings and material remains of the medieval crown seat of Norway. Also, it is an opportunity for the city to remind itself and the rest of the country of the Hanseatic Era and Bergen's international roots as a locus for trade, which tied the northern and southern

regions of Europe together. Trade, shipping and seafaring represent the basis for the Bergensian with artistic achievement and richness of cultural life. Grieghallen, the large concert hall with its modern glass facade, speaks of a city, which by tradition is an established member of the European club of fine arts. History, and Bergen's status as European City of Culture, thus carries a potential for making the city stand out as something unique and special in a national context. As a Swedish newspaper put it, Bergen is "a cosmopolitan city, in contrast to the rest of provincial Norway, with an ancient and international view to the rest of the world" (*Dagens Nyheter* 26/3–00).

On the other hand, the "City of Culture" status can be seen as an opportunity to define the city as part of a national landscape and folk culture. In this context, Bergen's contact with Hardanger – the surrounding fjord district – is emphasized. The mountains and the fjords, the orchards and the embroidered national costumes, the fiddles and the folk music make up a setting, which is considered to be essentially and traditionally Norwegian. Bergen likes to market itself as "the gateway to the fjords", the point of departure for those who want to experience "Norway in a Nutshell". The programme for the City of Culture 2000 was no exception in this respect.

In other words, Bergen has long held authoritative local as well as national reference points. As such, Bergen was able to consider itself a cultural city long before it was awarded status as European City of Culture. Perhaps this was precisely what the organisers of the Year of Culture wanted to show? Was it their aim to display a pre-ordained self-portrait? A portrait, which would receive a spruce-up of its cosmopolitan colours thanks to its European cultural city status? On studying the programme it is obvious that Bergen's ties to the outer world are important, in terms of the old and traditional roots between Bergen and the North Atlantic region, as well as the city's participation in our contemporary global world. Thanks to partnership schemes with the other cities of culture, the programme did include events and exhibitions which focused on international issues: nomadism, hybrid culture, technology

and gene manipulations could serve as key words in this respect.

The programme includes references to the local, the regional, the national and the global, if to varying degrees. Perhaps this is why cultural anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen sees the City of Culture programme as an onion made up of numerous layers of place connections. He further argues that the programme reflects an experimental attitude to the various meanings of the concept of culture, providing space for the formation of new constellations of "high" and "low" culture. "Here there are projects that draw parallels between Norwegian, European and non-European art and literature. Projects that accentuate the essential features of local life, a multitude of cross-over-projects where the mix of impulses is easier to eye than any search for roots" (Eriksen 2000:82).

It is tempting to agree with this conclusion. Abundance and variation are present; there are events that activate contrasting concepts of culture. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to question whether the onion metaphor is in fact the best way of illustrating the programme structure. Even though different layers and dimensions of culture, place and time can be identified, many factors point to the existence of an essential core – a core which is in touch with absolute roots and which are also meant to touch the public. An alternative interpretation of the programme may thus involve formation of identity rather than artistic and cultural experimentation. The City of Culture programme could be read as a programme for testing and adjusting Bergen's relationship with the rest of the nation and for investigating and reconstructing its bonds with the rest of the world.

## Bergen and the Local Culture

Looking more closely at the City of Culture programme, we may find reason to see it as part of a strategy to emphasize regional identity and a search for distinctive roots. It might be interpreted as an attempt to disassociate Bergen from its former local image were either towns people or fjord-based farmers would play the leading part. A new front figure seems to recur in exhibition after exhibition, re-appearing at



Coastal farmers – *striler* – in town.

one event after the other, whatever the genre: the coastal peasant, the so-called *stril*. One of the more original manifestations, the *Naust* (boathouse) project is worth a special mention. A group of Nordic artists were invited to set up exhibitions and installations in old boathouses on the shores outside Bergen. The intention was to unify international contemporary art with local tradition and history. Another noticeable project focused on maritime food in art, featuring food-related installations in various passenger boat terminals along the coast. A third example worth a mention is *Mass for bad weather*, a project, which set out, no less, to poetically, reflect the sensuality and potency of coastal culture. However, most elements in the series of regional displays were based on the traditional coastal peasant, who appeared as part of innumerable more conventional museum exhibitions, shows, market days, crafting festivals and fish festivals. Through music and drama, folksongs, craftwork and traditional foods, a wide range of artefacts from coastal life and meagre rural existence were elevated and transformed into West Norwegian cultural heritage – worth conserving, worth passing on. This accentuation of coastal culture can be seen as an effort to legitimise and extend the culture of western Norway, for which Bergen is a focus and natural centre.

Many critical voices claimed that the Year of Culture was too colloquial and too parochial. Media researcher Jostein Gripsrud found in his project evaluation report (2000: 59) that the programme typically concentrated on small-scale producers, voluntary cultural contributions and just about anything that could be associated with the western Norway. As a result, the true “light houses” within the programme tended to disappear from sight. The endless series of events would generally involve activities with a somewhat mundane and parochial profile. Artistic expressions of urban life, with all its industrial and global aspects, were conspicuous only through their glaring absence. The national newspaper *Dagbladet* voiced similar comments (9/10–01). Unlike other Cities of Culture, Bergen’s events came across as regional branding. We are living in a global era and are witnessing weakening national sovereignty. According to the newspaper, the result is the emergence of an arena where the battles between different cultures are not necessarily of a national nature; self-assertive regions like western Norway can just as easily be a party to this fight for further symbolic and economic influence.

Perhaps, then, place marketing was in fact the main project for this special year of culture. In this context, the long and varied range of local and regional activities was transformed into

tools for highlighting Bergen, not only as a town, but also as a regional centre. If so, the re-discovery and recreation of that which was seen as traditional coastal culture must be understood as a core element in a renewed identity project based on a revised concept of place.

## The Flexibility of the Coastal Culture Programme

The City of Culture 2000 programme received mixed reviews in the media, ranging from outright slaughter to great praise for a programme, which incorporated a multitude of cultural expressions. However, how was it possible for pre-modern coastal culture to attract this level of attention and enthusiasm?

Firstly, the traditional fisherman farmers, or coastal peasants, appear to have rid themselves of their former stigma, now enjoying more of a neutral status in social and cultural terms. This has turned the coastal peasant into a cultural icon, which comes in useful for locating and logging old and renewed traditions. Secondly, the coastline stretches to the very head of the innermost western fjords, thus tying the whole region together. Consequently, coastal culture is an extremely useful label for a programme seeking to establish networks and profiles to be shared by the entire region. Through this process, the various communities are linked to each other in new ways as new connections are established between the centre and the periphery. One of the positive comments following the City of Culture year was in fact that Bergen at last had recognised its hinterland as worthy of esteem.

The coastal culture also appears important in making western Norway specific and distinct. The director for the City of Culture put it like

this: “The Coastal culture of western Norway is a significant element of our programme. Our aim is to bring coastal cultural into its European context. Norway has long neglected its boathouses while celebrating the traditional inland larders. The cultural institutions that focus on traditional inland Norwegian culture and building traditions are sufficiently many. However, there are numerous exciting dimensions to the boathouse – the building where the sea meets the land – and so far these have largely been ignored. Coastal communities need to strengthen their identity and legitimise their culture. We have an important job to do” (Gloppen 2000:17).

Furthermore, coastal culture may serve as a link between a heroic past and an industrial and prosperous future where Bergen takes on a leading position, both politically and economically. Its status as an international city is not a fact of the past; on the contrary, Bergen demonstrates a “natural” connection to the outside world. Seen from a regional viewpoint, the concept of “local globalism” is exceedingly appropriate. In this context it is possible to stress a cultural openness implicit in local traditions and cultural heritage.

The focus on Bergen as a West Norwegian centre rooted in rural, coastal culture carries many positive implications. The city may well uphold its position as “Norway in a Nutshell”, but while appealing to the recognisable, Bergen’s reconstruction of coastal culture is also an invitation to something wider, different and more challenging than the established image of the national culture. In this way the City of Culture programme may be seen as a project of identity formation, where Bergen and its surrounding areas appear as a unique place in



Boathouses symbolising the identity of Western Norway.

Europe. The programme stresses the opportunity to experience Norway in new ways, precisely because the emphasis on tradition has made Bergen a city where modernity appears to have touched the landscape unevenly. The different ages are still palpable in the spaces left behind, providing a sense of contrast as well as synchronism.

In this process the cultural heritage and cultural landscape carry political potential. Local culture can, for instance, be exploited so as to disrupt the balance of the national self-image. In the aftermath of the Year of Culture, the media debate included numerous calls for Bergen to be launched as the cultural capital of Norway. In national opinion polls, for instance, close to 50% felt that Bergen was the cultural city of Norway, whereas a mere 19% referred to Oslo in a similar way. In discussions and publications, it was pointed out that Bergen, in contrast to Oslo, was able to accommodate its surrounding countryside. Bergen allowed people from out-lying areas to feel at home. As a matter of fact, even if they were not from western Norway they would be able to recognize familiar features and feel at ease. Oslo, on the other hand, had been reduced to a centre of bureaucracy where feelings of alienation were tangible. In other words, Oslo is a city where the majority of the population is thoroughly urbanised, offering no familiar links with the countryside (*Morgenbladet* 10/6–00). These claims are clearly rhetorical in nature, but there is a message to be read between the lines, a message of cultural hegemony, which was never there before.

We could easily stop at this point and draw the conclusion that the City of Culture 2000 was a success. Rather than showing off an established, frozen and nationally constituted picture, Bergen was transformed into a movable landscape, which regardless of national ties, was marching to its own drummer-beat. But was this really a breakthrough in terms of Bergen and western Norway as a place for unique experiences? Coastal culture is a highly versatile concept, particularly because it carries such a large number of associations on individual as well as collective levels. Nevertheless, it is in fact this very versatility which gives rise to the

problems. The coast encompasses the whole country. Last summer, another series of coast cultural events were staged in Bergen. One of them was officiated by the Minister of Petroleum and Energy. He gave voice to many of the points previously made by the City of Culture Director; only this time coastal culture was linked to the Norwegian nation. "It is unfortunately the case that in Norway, inland rural culture is called to our attention at every opportunity. It is now important that we focus on the coast. Most people live on the coast anyway" (*Bergens Tidende* 5/7–01), the minister claimed. In saying so, he readjusted the focus of our national cultural heritage, a result of which may well be found in many of the recent presentations of Norway, especially those intended for an international audience. Norway is here promoted as a modern coastal nation where industries such as oil, energy, underwater-technology, marine research, shipping and fishing are key features. The rural past of the coastal peasant is important in this context. Boathouses, traditional seafood, boat festivals etc. provide historical weight and legitimacy to this new national reconstruction. It is perhaps not without reason that the National Archives chose the year 2001 for directing their efforts towards the build-up of coastal culture.

Coastal culture thus appears to be an elastic concept, readily available for many different modes of exploitation. Returning to the question of why pre-modern coastal culture appears to flourish in an urban setting, we may perhaps find that the answer rests with the versatility of concept, in local as well as national and international terms. It expresses something about times past and present; it articulates something specifically characteristic about a certain place, yet without setting definite and fixed boundaries. On an official and collective level, it may be utilised as a hallmark; on an individual level it may give scope to private imagination and experiences.

## The Experience of Coastal Culture

This raises the question of how most people perceive the phenomenon of coastal culture. The highlighting of a place is not a process under-



From the North-Steam Festival.

taken in an individual or emotional space. Personally, I have lived on the coast all my life, yet does not see myself as part of a coastal culture with long unfaltering traditions. On the contrary, I consider myself as a human being influenced by the lifestyles of modern urban Norway. But what happens when a more or less urban individual meets the past and the coastal culture?

If we pay one of the events of the City of Culture programme an actual visit, the *North-Steam Festival* might illustrate some of the potential experiences that the phenomenon of coastal culture give rise to. This event was largely organised and staged by voluntary organisations working for the enhancement of vintage boats and coastal culture. Its spotlight was on the recent past, when steam and diesel engines made the boat the most important means of transport, linking outlying coastal areas and the fjords with Bergen and the rest of the world. As such, the event was easily grafted into the Cultural City year, and to noone's regret, as the event was considered one of the most successful.

The North-Steam Festival represented one of the events I more or less by chance happened

to become part of it. It was therefore with a certain sense of detachment that I walked onto Bergen wharf one Saturday morning, joining over 50,000 other people – if we choose to believe the newspapers – who had gathered to watch more than 50 vintage boats depart at the same time, all heading once more for their old destinations. Climax was reached at two o'clock. The boats were preparing for departure, many members of the public climbed aboard, while the rest stood waiting ashore – like tinned sardines. Children sat on their parents shoulders, people pointed, discussed, told each other stories and explained what they were watching: that boat over there was built in ... that one was used during the war ... this one sank at ... we always used to go on that one when we went on our summer holiday ... my granddad helped build it ... my neighbour was the engineer aboard this one ... do you know him? ... my aunt was a waitress ... was she the one who ...? There were monologues, dialogues and heated debate, and suddenly many found they were talking about the same boat, the same crew, the same episode from times long past. In an instant, people on the wharf were no longer strangers. Familiar

people, places and references made everyone feel acquainted, there and then.

The boats left the harbour, with steam rising towards the sky and engines gaining pace, accompanied by a multitude of choirs and bands in colourful period garments, all drowning each other out, yet at a volume which never managed to rival that of the hooting fleet of boats. They greeted one another and their passengers, while saying farewell to the people left on land. The air was filled with noise and smelled heavily of coal and diesel. Passengers waved and were greeted in similar fashion by the crowd of spectators. People smiled, some laughed – but as I looked around, I saw just as many weeping.

What is happening, I wondered. What is this? Then – suddenly – I heard the beat of a familiar engine. I recognized the sound, and turned around – to see the boat of my childhood years. This was rather unexpected, because this originated from further south than most of the other boats in the Festival. Its familiar beat went straight up my spine. Distant places and times came back to me, faraway faces came close, and I remembered the smell of the lounge – oil, damp clothes, cigar smoke mixed with newspapers, stories and gossip. It was perhaps not overwhelming, but nevertheless I did have to wipe a tear from my eye.

So what happened? The stir and hustle round the boats, the confusion and tangle of smells, sounds and colours in different shades rendered the senses alert and sensitive, thus bringing the past to mind and enabling the recollection of things forgotten. Bergen became a bigger city, transformed into a gateway to other places and other times. For a moment even I became part of coastal culture.

This episode may help illustrate some of the reason why coastal culture as a concept is useful in a drive to experience and market places. On the one hand, coastal culture can be related to specific artefacts, places and periods. On the other hand, the concept is so wide that it will evoke personal associations in most people. When Anthony Cohen (1996:807) writes about how national symbols become effectual and powerful, he claims it depends on how the symbols are constructed and what opportunities they offer for individual and collective inter-

pretation and action. We examine the material of tradition and watch the rituals connected to them, and as individuals “we interpret and remake them in the sense that *we* are able to make of them” (ibid.). We listen to the rhetoric of government agencies, but mobilise our own common sense to understand its meaning. Abstractions such as nationality, and by default we could add concepts such as local and regional belonging, would become too slippery and lax if individuals were unable to process them through their own experiences. Instead the concepts like nationalism and regionalism are personalised.

These phenomena are of interest to Gaston Bachelard (1994). By using the concepts of “resonance” and “reverberation” he describes our approach to places and things, and our ability to grasp them as “poetic” pictures and movements. This occurs when we transform the expressions of a place into personal impressions so that the place not only becomes a part of our lives but also takes root within us and triggers our personal re-creation of our own selves. This process establishes a “reverberation” between the individual and the place, making us co-poets of our own lives. In this way, the sense of belonging to a place is never forced on us from above – it is a feeling we all help generate.

It is highly uncertain whether coastal culture founded on a pre-modern way of life might attain such “poetic” significance to the Bergensians. It would in any case need to take place through modes of recognition that point beyond themselves, beyond the world of stereotypes and clichés. However, I hold the view that pinpointing a specific taking on the phenomenon of coastal culture is not all that important; perhaps it represents merely one of many opportunities for evoking past experiences and glimpses of recognition – like the North-Steam Festival did for me. To others, coastal culture may represent an interlude, or perhaps a different landscape where the pulse and trains of thought move at another pace than usual. Perhaps it unveils or releases a past filled with more magical and mythical yarn than what we spin in our everyday lives. The culture becomes a dig for an “archaeology of experience” (Turner & Turner 1995), which allows us to peer backwards in time through our own senses



There are clearly numerous reasons why coastal culture in a pre and early modern disguise now seems to be integrated in present-day urban Bergen. It is a highly pliable concept with scope not only for cultural, political and economic meaning, but for an existential dimension as well. With traditional coastal culture integrated in the urban, modern city, we may draw the conclusion that the promoters of the City of Culture managed to create a programme, which made Bergen and western Norway visible on the national and European map. In doing so, the programme organisers addressed existing expectations amongst the public. Perhaps, then, the focus on coastal culture was a success because it helped highlight the sense of place, and the public joined the organisers in making this happen. In this process we might observe a shift or better, an intermingle between a “constructive authenticity” based upon stereotypes and clichés and an “existential authenticity” where experiences and emotions are understood first and foremost as echoes of our inner selves (Wang 1999).

To conclude, it appears that the concentration on coastal culture directed the focus onto Bergen and Vestlandet – western Norway – as a unique place, brought to life by the organisers as well as the public. In this manner the region as a place turned out to be an eventful and specific happening. As the geographer Mike Crang (2001) put it: place “is more to do with doing than knowing, practice then representation, less a matter of ‘how accurate is this?’ than of ‘what happens if I do it’” (ibid. 194). In other words, Bergen and western Norway turned out to be a place for acting out, for doing, a place where things and thoughts happen.

## The Limitations of a Rural Past

The North-Steam Festival was a success in terms of spectators as well as participators. People were enthused; the past came nearer, people felt close to one another because they came close to their own feelings. In this way, dialogues were initiated with memories, which perhaps were not normally as intensely present. The triggers may have been many – the crowd, the noise, the smells, the visual impact of the old

boats, the architectural surroundings with the old quays and ancient buildings. Through the experiences taking place here, the present was lived in an unspecified future. The boats, chiefly from between 1930 and the 1950s, and the ancient Wharf with its Mediaeval, Hanseatic and early 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings, represent the city’s highlights in terms of history and cultural heritage. Through the material surroundings the past made itself tangible and thereby showed its capacity to become a “memory-place” were the power of the place it self marks our minds (Andersson 1996). As such the place constitute a potential storage room for various small and anonymous events as well as those we celebrate officially and recognise as our collective memory.

Perhaps it would be appropriate to say that the various material elements form some sort of punctual axis of time, which provides the place with its identity. However, the exciting thing about events such as the North-Steam Festival is their capacity to dissolve this axis of time and blend its elements with personal recollections about lives lived and the expectations associated with what is happening just there and then. In this way, bridges are built between the representations and stories about the past on the one hand, and the actions and experience of it on the other. Perhaps this is the key to the success of this type of events, i.e. the opportunity to experience a place in times present as well as past while perceiving ones own life in an extended continuum of time. The place, is transformed into a form of virtual reality where multiple times are on show, yet it is up to the individual to utilise his own senses and experiences in order to stage manage his impressions and the context they appear in. In this way, the place generates experiences, which in turn become new narratives about the place, continually charging it with new meaning and significance.

Consequently, what makes events such as the North-Steam Festival important is not the celebration of coastal culture in itself, but the fact that it reminds us of the deeper layers of our existence. These events show us that we are not only living in the present, but in a reality where different times and temporalities are overlapping, because our experience of the present

moment is based on recollections of the past and expectations of the future. These are dimensions of experience, which are not stored in well-defined or closed files within our consciousness. On the contrary, they have deposited themselves in different ways within our memory and sensory systems through the lives we live and have lived. In this way, we exist not only within but also by virtue of time and space; our bodies link and incorporate these dimensions (Crang 2001).

However, the Bergen Wharf and harbour where the North-Steam Festival was based, is but a single place in Bergen. There are a multitude of others: streets and squares that carry associations with entirely different times and horizons of expectations. There is the Torgalmenningen Square for instance, which carries a resemblance with the wharf by virtue of the age of its surrounding buildings. Through being a commercial centre as well as a venue for various events and meetings, be they public or private, this is nevertheless more of an ambivalent place where the hustle and bustle exist side by side with leisurely strolls and relaxation.

Were we to continue our stroll into side streets and alleys, we would have found cafes which through minimalistic architecture, espresso coffees and music from other corners of the world, would signal a reality far removed from coastal and peasant culture. It would be possible to continue endlessly. Like any other city Bergen is a place with many squares, streets and alleyways, a place with many different speeds and intensities, a place with scope for numerous rhythms and times. This may well be what characterises modern communities and the people there. The challenge facing a City of Culture where locality and identity are central themes, could therefore be to grasp the place with all its multitude of intertwined times and places. Obviously, the practical implementation of such a scheme would be far from straight forward. However, it might be a good starting point to introduce a cultural concept which focuses not only on recognition, but which provides scope for the unexpected, unfinished and surprising. This would direct the focus not only to the 'intervals' in the temporality of everyday life or to the larger and more abstract

lapses of time. On the contrary, there will also be possibilities for including speed and noise of the still unsettled and unfinished. The result might accentuate how both memories and imaginations mark the place and simultaneously link past and future to a continually altering present.

There is nothing wrong about coastal culture, but we might perhaps have incorporated other dimensions worthy of preservation – dimensions that are not necessarily founded on a more or less rural past. It would at any rate have been interesting to investigate this potential during Bergen's year as City of Culture as the city clearly wished to see itself as a European meeting place. Instead, the programme – whether intentionally or not – provided a venue for Norwegian culture to *meet* European culture. Understanding ourselves as part of what is European is perhaps too complicated a task when identity so often appears in the singular in a more or less one-dimensional past.

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