

# Promoting Europe through 'Unity in Diversity': Avignon as European Capital of Culture in 2000

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## Abstract

*This article examines the reception of European Union cultural policy through Avignon's experience as European Capital of Culture (ECOC) in 2000, focusing specifically on the EU objective of achieving "Unity in Diversity" through culture. Some recent studies argue that ECOC projects have served as media for conceptions of culture that are less essentialist and more centered on transformation and border-crossing than those promoted by national and regional cultural policies of the past. Assuming that one of the primary obstacles to overcoming social divisions in urban centers is the alienation of the residents of low-income, peripheral neighborhoods, this article focuses particular attention on a website created to promote Gypsy heritage. Consideration of this case underscores the uneasy balance struck between the goal of redefining cities as attractive to potential tourists and residents and the goal of overcoming the "democratic deficit" affecting disadvantaged urban populations. The case of Avignon highlights obstacles within cities to the broad diffusion and acceptance of more cosmopolitan models of European culture centered on dialogue and exchange. (Keywords: Europeanization, cultural policy, EU, unity in diversity, cosmopolitanism, Capital of Culture)*

Avignon, the medieval city, rich in great accomplishments and moments of glory has henceforth been consecrated European City of Culture. Chosen to be one of nine European Cities of Culture by the Council of European Ministers of Culture, our city will rediscover over 12 months the luster it once knew when it became, in the 14th Century, capital of Christianity. ... Avignon, city with its high quality of life, displays its charms and adorns itself with its assets to welcome those many people preparing to come make its acquaintance.<sup>1</sup>

*Marie-Josée Roig, mayor of Avignon and conseiller régional in the foreword to the program for the Avignon 2000 exposition, "Beauty"*

Since its inception in 1985, the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) program has been perfectly suited to political and economic changes in Europe. These include the transition from an industrial to a services-dominated economy generally, and the growing importance of cities as nodes of what have been called "glocalization" strategies (Brenner 2004, Brenner and Theodore 2002), which is to say, the development of direct links between urban centers and the global economy along with the devolution of certain political responsibilities to local levels of governance. Capital of Culture status has provided European cities a way of redefining themselves through culture, especially post-industrial cities looking to attract tourists, investors, and potential residents. As with European Union cultural policy in general, the ECOC program has also pursued a civic aim: encouraging the cultural dimension of "ever greater union" between European citizens, and especially since 1992, "unity in diversity."

The ECOC program has generated a considerable scholarly literature devoted to assessing its economic and social impact both during and beyond the Capital of Culture year (see, among others, Richards 2000, Roth and Frank 2000, Heikkinen 2000, and Gold and Gold 2005). Scholars have also addressed the ECOC's contribution to ongoing processes of "Europeanization" (Borneman and Fowler 1997) that are transforming longstanding traditions of nationhood and territoriality in contemporary Europe. Two such recent studies argue that the ECOC projects they examined acted as important symbolic media for conceptions of culture that were less "essentialistic" (Sassatelli 2008) and more conducive to "plurality, multiple subjectivities, transformations, and the crossing of borders" (Roseman 2005:75) than previous notions of culture conveyed within national and regional cultural policy. These studies emphasize interaction and exchange as crucial to the European dimension of these ECOC initiatives.

Here I examine Avignon's experience in the year 2000, considering the question of how the ECOC encourages diversity and exchange *within* specific urban settings rather than simply between European cities across national boundaries. "Unity in diversity" has been called

a "saccharine concept" (Shore 2006), and one might argue that its use in the ECOC is simply an effort to provide broader political legitimacy to the promotion of tourism in selected European cities without devoting sustained attention to the enduring causes of urban socio-economic divisions. Here I am especially interested in how ECOC initiatives might address the social alienation of residents in economically depressed areas of cities by interpreting the civic goals of the ECOC to mean furthering dialogue and exchange in peripheral neighborhoods. It is here that one finds some of the most enduring obstacles to the ECOC's expressed goal of promoting greater civic participation and addressing a "democratic deficit." "Europe" in these settings might serve as a tool for re-imagining the local social geography, and the national context that frames it. I devote special attention here to the example of a website created in order to promote the heritage of the Gypsy community in Avignon.<sup>2</sup> The stories collected and the photographs taken for the website provided a voice to the women and a medium for expressing the cultural memory of a group long marginalized. Analysis of the ECOC experience of Avignon highlights some of the political and economic stakes underlying the local engagement with an EU cultural policy initiative defining cities as European capitals of culture.

### "Unity in Diversity" as a Form of Cosmopolitanism

Within the now extensive anthropological literature on European integration, one key object of research has been the theme of "unity in diversity" as promoted by the European Union since the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> It is unclear exactly when this slogan was adopted by the EU but it has come to characterize a distinctly European approach to collective identity that is held to achieve a harmonious integration of cultural pluralism within a single political identity. This theme has a long history, as shown by Michael Herzfeld (1987) who has described "diversity in unity" as an ideology especially important to the emergence of the European nation-state and later understandings of European distinctiveness and superiority.<sup>4</sup> More recently, it has been discussed as a key concept sustaining cooperation among Europeans of diverse nationalities in administrative and other work settings (Bellier 1999; Zabusky 1995). Critical perspectives have addressed the contradictions and hidden problems in "unity in diversity" as a policy objective of the European Union (Delanty 2003; Holmes 2000; McDonald 1996, 2004). Shore (2006:20–21) argues that:

'Unity in diversity'—like the Latin motto, 'in uno plures'—offers EU policy-makers a convenient rhetorical mediation between the incompatible goal of forging a singular European consciousness, identity, and peoplehood on the one hand, and claims to be fostering cultural

pluralism on the other. However, the tension between these contradictory impulses is not reconciled by this verbal sleight of hand.

In spite of the tensions between singular and pluralist visions of European identity that it conveys, this concept is being drawn on and acted on not only by EU administrators, but by those who have engaged EU cultural policy in diverse local settings throughout Europe. Like other EU cultural policy initiatives, the Capital of Culture program has sought to contribute to processes of "Europeanization" (Borneman and Fowler 1997).<sup>5</sup> Two recent studies of the implementation of the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) event in the year 2000 argue that the project was interpreted and enacted in ways that reflect a new understanding of shared European culture. ECOC events acted as important symbolic media for conceptions of culture that were less "essentialistic" (Sassatelli 2008) and more conducive to "plurality, multiple subjectivities, transformations, and the crossing of borders" (Roseman 2005:75) than previous notions of culture conveyed within national and regional cultural policy. These studies emphasize interaction and exchange as crucial to the European dimension of these ECOC initiatives. Speaking of the ECOC bid by Santiago de Compostela, Sharon Roseman (2004:84) argues that "in contrast to the earlier image of a Europe divided into rigidly bounded states, the notion of culture put forth in the Santiago bid also accommodates a political agenda that promotes a fluid and emerging supra-national European unity."

Monica Sassatelli (2008:237) examines the interpretation and implementation of "unity in diversity" in the context of the entire 2000 ECOC program.<sup>6</sup> She sees this approach as fundamentally different from the promotion of a shared cultural background common to the cultural policy of nation-states: "In the European cultural space, it is the attitude toward diversity that makes it European, not finding a common cultural content." But Sassatelli argues that this intent has been transformed as it has been acted upon in ECOC projects. Increasingly, the European dimension is being created by the collaboration of several actors working across national boundaries. While it is not a shared way of life that characterizes this new model of culture, the act of collaboration and social interaction paradoxically creates the conditions for new networks and shared patterns of practice that can be described as singularly "European." These studies identify dialogue, exchange, and collaboration as important aspects of new transnational identity formations in Europe. My main interest here is in the use of "unity in diversity" with regard to peripheral neighborhoods of ECOC cities. To what extent have these projects encouraged dialogue and exchange within such neighborhoods and across the social boundaries isolating residents from the broader urban

community as a whole? Toward that end, I focus here on an initiative seeking both international links and a fresh look at the existing socio-economic “diversity” in Avignon. The “Gypsy Women of Avignon” website project sought to give a greater voice to a population in an economically depressed area, and also to provide greater public recognition of the dialogue, exchange, and collaboration that already existed there. In this way, such initiatives pursue a broader, more inclusive understanding of European identity. They also seek to use the “unity in diversity” theme as a way of influencing a national discourse on identity and citizenship, and introducing new speakers within it.

My approach in this regard is similar to Ruth Mandel’s treatment of the use of the term “cosmopolitan” with regard to German Turks (2008). In spite of great progress in recent years in addressing the cultural diversity of residents of Turkish descent (notably through the reform of citizenship laws that formerly reserved nationality to those of German blood), assertions that Germany is now fully “open to the world” are contradicted by the requirement that new citizens renounce their prior nationality and the expectation that they renounce their language and culture as well. A failure to do so is seen as evidence that German Turks are not sufficiently cosmopolitan. At the same time, the kinds of translocal, entrepreneurial, and often bilingual skills demonstrated by Turkish Germans in their daily lives are neglected in a popular image of them as insular and uninterested in “integration” (Mandel 2008:312): “A more nuanced understanding of the immigrant population might view Turkish Germans less as ghettoized victims than creative players whose skills may be transferred across boundaries—geographic, political, or cultural.” In light of this “elite capture of the term *cosmopolitanism*,” Mandel is concerned with identifying and encouraging the development of a “demotic” cosmopolitanism, which is to say, a more democratic understanding of otherness that does not privilege elites.<sup>7</sup> This would involve the recognition of the “self as an other among others” rather than a hierarchically construed cosmopolitanism in which essentialist ideas of national belonging continue to inform understandings of citizenship. In the ECOC projects considered here, I am primarily interested in the use of Europe to introduce new perspectives on identity and belonging in Avignon, both with regard to the social geography of the city, and the broader national context.

In her study of the overall 2000 ECOC experience, Monica Sassatelli (2008:241) considers the conception of culture motivating ECOC participants to reflect a new way of imagining cultural identity, one that parallels new conceptualizations developed by social theorists. She notes that her interviewees conceived of European culture “more as a *project* and a co-operative construction than in terms of inheritance and belonging to fixed cultural

contents (which is also the direction taken by influential academic notions of European identity.” In this view, diversity is less and less interpreted in terms of difference among national or locally bounded cultures, and more in terms of “diversity within culture, constitutive of every cultural space.” This European “cultural space” is focused on “the creation of unity as a project of social construction.” It is unclear however, to what extent this conception of European culture is limited to elites. In addressing how actors put into practice their understandings of European culture in local settings, the studies of Sassatelli and Roseman argue that in spite of fears that the EU’s promotion of European culture will help to fuel racism and xenophobia (Shore 2006:22), new and more inclusive understandings of culture are taking root through the aegis of the ECOC program. Here I consider how two groups of actors pursued the goal of unity in diversity in Avignon ECOC projects: 1) the Mayor’s Office, which planned the year-long series of events, and 2) the community leaders and project organizers associated with the creation of a website devoted to Gypsy history and culture in Avignon.<sup>8</sup> Consideration of Avignon’s experience with the program in the year 2000 shows both signs of greater inclusiveness, such as those emphasized by Sassatelli and Roseman, and signs for the kind of pessimism expressed by Shore concerning the potential limitations and consequences of EU cultural policy.

### Goals of the “European Capital of Culture”

The “European City of Culture” project was created by the European Community’s Council of Ministers in 1985 through the initiative of Greek Minister of Culture Melina Mercouri.<sup>9</sup> Since it began, the economic investment in the event by the selected cities has grown, in part because of the growing importance of the services sector in the world economy. Describing the background for the European Cultural Capital Event, Greg Richards (2000:162) notes, “As the developed world shifts from a production-based to a consumption-based economy, cities are increasingly realising that they have to attract an increasingly mobile consuming public in order to support the local economy.” As a result, as Timo Heikkinen observes, “during the last two decades, the competitive ethos of selling places has spread all over Europe” (2000:201). In this context, arts events have become important media for city promotion and municipal authorities have addressed this goal more explicitly, and in more sophisticated ways than in the past. For the European Cultural Capital event, the experience of Glasgow in 1990 was an important shift. In contrast to the previously selected cities of culture, Glasgow was not already known for its artistic and architectural heritage. A former industrial center of coal and steel manufacturing,

Glasgow was redefined by city planners in 1990 as a place of art and culture, oriented toward the future: dynamic, creative, and attractive.

The influence of Glasgow is evident in the statement of the project's goals by the General Secretary of the Association of the Nine Cities in the European Commission Final Report on the 2000 European Cities of Culture. He states that the project had two aims. The first was to "highlight the cultural wealth and diversity of the cities of Europe whilst emphasising their shared cultural heritage and the vitality of the arts." Second, in addition to the educational impact of these cultural exchanges, the project gave the city a marketing opportunity to improve its image on a national and European scale, and constituted a sort of regeneration tool for the principal areas around which the main events occurred (European Commission 2001:8). The ECOC has been especially valued as a means of drawing on the cachet of the European Union in order to spur urban renovation and local development in an era of growth in the services sector and the tourism industry in particular. As Gold and Gold (2005) note, the ECOC is one of these major international festivals offering golden opportunities to kick-start sluggish economies, knock years off the normal development cycle for infrastructural improvement, reposition a city in the global tourist market, create vibrant cultural quarters, and generally steal a march on rivals.

In recent years, some cities of culture have hired image consultants to help them craft their campaigns but Avignon did not. In contrast to most of the other nine cities, everything was done "in-house" through the mayor's office.<sup>10</sup> A "Mission Avignon 2000" committee was set up within the mayor's office and Avignon's Cultural Capital organizers were able to draw directly on the services of municipal offices. In addition, as the European Commission Final Report notes, "Concerning vital axes such as the programming of projects and events, the Mission was placed directly under the Mayor's authority" (2001:52). Thus, Avignon's project planning was integrally related to the city's overall cultural policy. Its project is a particularly interesting case for examining how the cultural policy of one municipality has engaged a European Union initiative with broader pan-European goals.

### **An Overview of Avignon's European Capital of Culture Campaign**

Throughout France, municipalities have long been pursuing their own cultural policies. Philippe Urfalino's study of cultural policy in France's roughly 32,000 municipalities from 1960 to 1980 is tellingly entitled "the municipalization of culture" (1996). This period saw the institutionalization of policy through the creation of positions such

as Cultural Assistants to the Mayor, and commissions devoted to planning and implementing local cultural policy. The vast expansion of state cultural policy in the 1980s by the Socialist President Mitterrand provided greater resources (especially for the celebration and preservation of newly designated heritage sites), but the system of distinct institutional structures for specifically *municipal* cultural policies was already in place. Given a long history of elaborating specifically municipal policies in interaction with the Ministry of Culture and other institutions, French municipal planners are particularly well-placed to succeed in "the competitive ethos of selling places."

It is therefore not surprising that the Avignon municipality did not hire consultants for the ECOC. On the one hand, the city has long experience with a major international event, the Avignon Theatre Festival, which annually brings thousands of visitors to the city in July. The administration of this festival is independent from the municipality, but the latter has seen its benefits and learned from the festival's status as an important annual site of debate about cultural policy, both state and "local" (especially, municipal).<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, in contrast to Glasgow, for example, Avignon's municipality was not trying to reinvent its image. Avignon is known primarily for its festival and its Palace of the Popes and both of these have strong appeal to tourists. The challenge for the municipality was to create a project that would integrate its already strong position as a tourist destination with the "European" dimension of the City of Culture initiative.

The European dimension of the project for the year 2000 combined an emphasis on exchange among the nine cities across Europe with civic-oriented goals in line with ongoing EU initiatives to promote a "people's" or "citizens' Europe" (see Shore 1993), and more recent calls for bringing cultural policy and disadvantaged Europeans "in from the margins" (Council of Europe 1997). These aims are evident in the stated goals of the Association of the Nine Cultural Cities:

The cities will work to make the inhabitants of the cities and the citizens of each country more aware of the culture of other cities. Furthermore, active measures through which the citizens can learn about people and culture of the other cities by themselves without prejudices, will be made possible and gain permanent forms that continue after the cultural Capital year. This cooperation will activate the citizens and support civic democracy. ... The activities of the cultural cities are aimed at bringing the peoples of Europe closer to each other by means of culture (2001:76).

The statement does not explain exactly how "activating the citizens" and "supporting civic democracy" should be pursued in the context of the European Cultural Capital year project, but in Avignon, the municipality put great

emphasis on the promotion of greater solidarity and inclusiveness among Avignonnais. The theme chosen was “Art and Creativity.” Like the Theatre Festival, the ECOC would employ the arts as a means of bringing about greater social unity. With roughly 88,000 inhabitants, Avignon is a relatively small city to host an international festival of such stature. An important ECOC goal was to present Avignon as a place with arts offerings available year-round. It also sought to publicize Avignon’s proximity to Paris following the opening of its station for the French high-speed train, the TGV.

The Cultural Capital projects included three levels of programming: European, national, and local. The European level involved coordinating associations and arts groups from the nine cities. The national level consisted of the “Beauty” exhibit. In part because of Avignon’s designation as a Cultural Capital, an inter-ministerial mission set up by the French President chose Avignon for this prestigious exhibition which was based at the Palace of the Popes. “Beauty” included both local and internationally renowned artists. The local level of the program was developed based on proposals from local organizations and arts groups. 192 projects were selected and “priority was given to those projects whose aim was regional development, value enhancement and entertainment” (European Commission 2001:29). The goal was to promote the culture and heritage of the region. The Cultural Capital Report notes that “the term culture was by no means restrictive, covering all of the social, artistic and economic practices of our society” (2001:29). Projects included those in the visual and performing arts, and those devoted to cultural heritage. A further important theme was new technologies.

The major components of the Cultural Capital project were:

- 1) **Beauty.** An arts exhibition devoted to aesthetic shifts of the Twentieth Century. This involved installations in sites selected throughout the city.
- 2) **The Yvon Lambert Centre for Contemporary Art.** This museum remains an important legacy of the Cultural Capital year.
- 3) **AvignoNumérique (Digital Avignon).** Exhibitions and structures bringing together digital technology and arts projects designed to encourage dialogue within and beyond Avignon. Included a cybercafé linking Avignon to the other 2000 ECOC cities.
- 4) **The Avignon Theatre Festival.** In 2000, the Festival’s programming included special emphasis on artists and playwrights from Eastern Europe.
- 5) The following arts projects:
  - Trans-Dance-Europe:** the dance festival *Hivernales* established exchanges with dancers from the other cities.
  - Kide:** a Finnish sculpture installation.

**Voices of Europe:** a 90-member youth choir comprised of ten participants from each of the nine cultural cities.

**Transplant’Heart:** a project pairing environmental sculptors from each of the cultural cities and including project postings on the internet.

**European Portrait:** A photography exhibition on life in the nine cities.

**Restitution of Beauty:** an exhibit of visual art.

Avignon’s planners built on the lessons of previous ECOCs, especially Glasgow (1990), where numbers of tourists fell after the initial year but rose six years later when a new art museum was opened. As Greg Richards notes, “this underlines one of the weaknesses of such event-led strategies—the need for continual innovation of the product in order to generate repeat visits” (2000:175). Avignon included a new art museum as part of the 2000 project. The city also sought to improve the attractiveness of many of its existing landmarks. Considerable energy was devoted to the Pont d’Avignon—the broken bridge of the famous children’s song, although the mayor’s office ultimately abandoned one project intended to rebuild it as a “bridge to the Twenty-First Century.”<sup>12</sup> Overall, in terms of promoting the city as an attractive tourist destination, Avignon’s experience as Cultural Capital has to be considered a success. According to statistics kept by the Bureau of Tourism, the numbers of visitors to the city’s major attractions spiked sharply upward during the year 2000. In 2001, they dropped but were still higher than in 1999.<sup>13</sup> The project further enhanced the city’s architectural heritage. It also stimulated the arts activity of the city in many areas, and in one exceptional case, was able to encourage ongoing European exchanges. Avignon’s *Hivernales* Dance Festival carried out a project entitled Trans-Dance Europe and has since maintained close contacts and exchanges with dance groups in some of the other nine cities. But how generally did Avignon interpret and enact the “civic and “European” aspects of the ECOC program? How did it interpret the phrase “unity in diversity”?

### Avignon as Cultural Capital: “Solidarity All Together”

The section devoted to Avignon in the European Commission Final Report includes the following:

Avignon 2000 was intended for everyone. It reached out to every social level in the population by adopting the widest possible definition for culture. Priority was given to events and activities for children and young people, to projects having a strong impetus on social advancement, as well as to projects aimed at various levels of sensitivity and knowledge (2001:30).

These statements make clear that the civic aims of the Cultural Capital project described above translated primar-

ily into the goal of making events accessible to as many people as possible in the spirit of the long tradition of arts decentralization in French state cultural policy. This point was underlined in an interview with Luc Armengol, the director of public relations for the mayor's office and for the Avignon 2000 program. Asked if there was an important European dimension to Avignon's civic goals in this project, M. Armengol said no, that while the goal was to bring people together through culture, "the citizen's aspect was turned toward the local."

I asked him about the stated goals of the Association of the Nine Cities, in particular those referring to "activating the citizens" and "supporting civic democracy." He replied that these had been important aims for Avignon and explained that while the primary aim was to schedule artistic events of high quality, "We said that if this project is not a citizen's project (*projet citoyen*) it will not accomplish anything." By "citizen's project" he meant that it should be accessible to everyone and not just "play to the gallery" and impress the snobs ("*épater les snobs*"):

We wanted to be a citizen's project by bringing the Avignonnais together. Throughout the year, we had popular shows, popular gatherings—the wine harvest ball, and the New Year's Ball outside on the 31st of December. We had 30,000 people and believe me it was cold.... We had a popular ball with 6 bands all along the Rhone river. ... There had never been so many people celebrating together since the Liberation. All year long, we invited the Avignonnais to events like that—free, popular, festive. Because we wanted to show that culture is that, too, a gathering of men and women who come together to share a moment of joy and happiness.

The theme of bringing people together was also central in the literature published by the mayor's office publicizing Cultural Capital events. In one short flyer, the word "together" is scattered throughout in short phrases printed in bold:

Together let's celebrate Avignon 2000  
Avignon 2000 is culture all together  
Solidarity all together  
All together without exclusion!

The key message in the Cultural Year promotional materials is the importance of unity. The political implications are important here, given that 2000 was one year away from Avignon's municipal elections. Avignon's mayor in 2000 was, and still is today, Marie-Josée Roig. She was a member of the party of the right, the *Rassemblement pour la République*, which was also the party of the President of France at the time, Jacques Chirac (1995–2007), and the party of his successor, Nicolas Sarkozy.<sup>14</sup> Roig was elected by a slim majority in 1995 but in 2001, she won easily against a strong candidate, Socialist Elisabeth Guigou, a minister in the cabinet of the Prime Minister at the time,

Lionel Jospin. Roig ran on a campaign stressing security issues: the threats of crime and drugs which have been increasingly important topics of national political debate. Roig has generally been a popular mayor, and she has devoted considerable energy to promoting the city's economic growth.

In order to provide greater access to events, the Avignon mayor's office created innovative programs providing free bus services and other assistance to people in the peripheral areas of Avignon, to people with physical disabilities, to retired people, and even people needing childcare during the time they wanted to participate in the Avignon 2000 activities. One function of the Cultural Capital project was to help Avignon's mayor mobilize the community in the name of the city's new special status as a capital of the arts in the new Europe. Through free and festive gatherings in public places, and in the name of a "citizen's project," the mayor promoted Avignon as a place of consensus, and her own office as the principal medium for achieving it.<sup>15</sup> While the emphasis on unity is evident in the preceding description, the place of diversity is less clear. In this section, I describe the "Gypsy Women of Avignon," a project involving the creation of a website devoted to the culture and heritage of Avignon's Gypsy community. Here, as in the description of Avignon ECOC as a whole, the role of the city is crucial to expressions of identity in a new "European" context. But this project sought to expand public discourse about difference by providing a voice to a community viewed as outsiders by other residents of the city.

### European Cultural Space and Avignon Spatial Divisions

The goals of "Digital Avignon" were to create "a virtual, cultural, and social space in which and through which populations in different European cities communicate and cooperate creatively through elaborating projects in common" (Avignon 2000 *Agenda des manifestations*).

The director of the project, Louis Bec, sought to encourage debate and discussion of divergent viewpoints, particularly concerning new technologies. In an article in *Artpress*, "Digital Avignon" is described as an art project devoted to pursuing the following question: "Are the Web and new technology in general opening the way to a new *urbanity*, in the 18th-century sense of that word, a new form of collective intelligence?" In a sense, "Digital Avignon" was a work of art with the city as canvas. But this is not really accurate because "canvas" implies a passive city population: Instead of the public as "receiver," Bec puts forward the idea of the resident population, a kind of evolving community or collective intelligence that *Avignonnumérique* sets out to catalyze (Hillaire 2000:55).

Louis Bec also saw the Cultural Capital year as an opportunity to build communication across the social divisions within Avignon. The Gypsy community is located in the Clarefond section of the Monclar neighborhood outside the medieval walls of Avignon. Monclar also includes many people of Maghrébin descent, and, in recent years, immigrants from Afghanistan. Usually referred to as “*banlieues*” in France’s larger cities, the peripheral neighborhoods surrounding French cities are frequently low-income and high crime areas, with a disproportionately younger and immigrant population. A 1995 study by Azouz Begag states that what is distinctive about these areas in Avignon is their proximity to the center of town. None of the areas said to be the most “sensitive” are more than 30 minutes on foot from the city center. What counts is not spatial but social distance. The insular quality of these neighborhoods emerges from Begag’s analysis of essays written by middle-school students. Asked to describe his neighborhood, Chahid (a seventh-grade boy) wrote “I’ve been living in Avignon—Monclar—for five years. Don’t like it.” Afterward, before turning it in, he crossed out “Avignon” to specify his home as Monclar. For the residents of these neighborhoods, the center of Avignon is another world. Monclar is “a sort of small village, outside the larger city, with its own character and even its own dialect: *le monclarien*” (Begag 1995:32).

The website “Gypsy Women of Avignon” was designed to express the local history and culture of the Gypsy community. The director of the project was a photographer named Sylvie Fraissard. “Digital Avignon” provided the technical assistance and paid for Sylvie Fraissard’s time, and the women took pictures, collected stories, and designed the content for the site. An important goal of the project was to counter negative stereotypes portraying Gypsies as transients, or foreigners by showing that Avignon’s Gypsies, of Catalan origin for the most part, have been settled in the city since the early 1900s. As Sylvie Fraissard notes in her review of the project (2001):

The Gypsies are often viewed as a population difficult to include (*insérer*), with whom it is often difficult to negotiate. Attempting to understand the expectations of the Gypsies of Monclar living in HLMs is already a step toward the recognition of the other and therefore towards a movement from fear to recognition of the other as such.

The Gypsy community has been moved by the Avignon municipality (prior to 1963, it was located in the Balance neighborhood in the center of Avignon). By the late 1960s, many families had moved to Clarefond, home of Mme. Bernadette Patras, President of the Association of Gypsies and Travellers of Avignon (*Association des Gitans et Gens de Voyage d’Avignon*). Mme. Patras is a well-known figure in the community. Asked for directions to her apartment, she replied, “Just get off the bus and ask people in the

neighborhood.” I asked her why there was such an emphasis on Avignon with the website.

There are 300 Gypsy families in Avignon. We wanted the value of our culture to be recognized, we insist on that aspect, to show the history here. To counter the things people say about gypsies, that they’re thieves.

Recently we’ve had to put up with the attacks of a new prefect—brand new, with these fine ideas. He called us all “travelers”—he didn’t want to say “gypsies,” even though we are settled here. Our grand-parents were settled here.

Although the Association Mme. Patras leads does include “Travelers” or non-sedentary Gypsies (as evident in the group’s name), the great majority of Avignon’s Gypsy families have been part of the city’s population for generations. This history was addressed primarily in two parts of the website, one a film recounting the community’s history, and the other a display of new and old photographs (and captions). The film is entitled *Voy Caminando. Mémoires de Gitan*, which translates roughly as “I go travelling” or “I travel along Gypsy Memories.” It is evident in the film that the municipality (rather than the department or state) has been the main political interlocutor shaping living conditions for the community. In the beginning of the film, the narrator notes the Gypsy presence in Avignon at the end of the 19th Century, when “the municipality provided them with a house on Balance Street.” The Balance is squarely in the center of Avignon, not far from the Palace of the Popes. Until 1906 however, the Palace was used as a barracks, and the Balance neighborhood (today a central, high-rent zone) was a red-light district. In 1963, a major renovation of the neighborhood began and the Gypsies were relocated outside the city’s walls. The Balance is still an important *lieu de mémoire* for many in the community.<sup>16</sup> As part of the website project, Sylvie Fraissard was asked by the women to organize a group trip there with the goal of understanding the current conditions of their former neighborhood.

Through its photographs, the website shows that the people living there today carry with them the memory of a community with deep roots in Avignon, and a rich cultural heritage. The film strikes a positive tone in describing the relocation to the Monclar neighborhood. As we see people moving belongings into apartments, the caption emphasizes continuity rather than displacement: “Clarefond is the life of before in modern times.” As Gypsy music plays in the background, old black and white photographs of relatives are superimposed on images of the Monclar streets where many Gypsies now live. Many of the captions are written in the mixture of Catalan and Provençal that has been spoken by Gypsies in this part of southern France. Shown in the images are a local musical group (*Corazon Gitano*) and Gypsy dancing at community celebrations. The photographs are of special events such as

weddings, but also of schools, work, and other aspects of daily life in the neighborhood. Many of the images show new and old together: children and the elderly, or computers side by side with models of the traditional caravans (*roulottes*) of the past.

Like all expressions of cultural memory, these images are both a commemoration of past events and an argument about how to read the present and envision the future. Most important here is the way the website represents the relationship between the Gypsy community and institutions of both the municipality and the state. The website shows Gypsies being actively involved with, and open to the broader Avignon community. There are photographs of meetings involving community leaders and social workers and other representatives of state institutions. One photograph carries the caption "Discussion Group on the theme of the insertion of the Gypsies," and another "Study Group concerning questions linked to housing." There is a whole subset of photographs devoted to schools. Some show mothers smiling as they pick up their children, often with other mothers picking up theirs. One photograph shows a smiling boy on the first day with the caption "Delighted to be at school." Another shows a speaker at a meeting speaking on the theme of "academic monitoring and support of Gypsy children and their education." In the past, Gypsy children were often segregated from others in local schools, with a distinction made between "French" and Gypsy playgrounds. There remain serious problems of absenteeism and low academic performance among Gypsy children. The images and text on this website assert that the approach of the Gypsy community toward the schools is the same as its approach to state and municipal representatives: proud of being a part of the Avignon community, and open to working with others to improve life in the Monclar neighborhood. At the same time, it is clear from the statements above by Mme. Patras about having to put up with the "fine ideas" of a "brand new prefect" that the relations between her association and state and municipal authorities are far from perfect. Nor did she see much hope in European Union initiatives. I asked her what she thought of the statement by the Cultural Capital Association of the Nine Cities, stating that:

Active measures through which the citizens can learn about people and culture of the other cities by themselves without prejudices, will be made possible and gain permanent forms that continue after the cultural Capital year. ... The activities of the cultural cities are aimed at bringing the peoples of Europe closer to each other by means of culture (2001:76).

She replied: "They are beautiful words, but how do you expect them to bring them together when they have a tendency to ghettoize people." The formulation of the "European" goals of the Association of the Nine Cities empha-

sized exchanges between cities across national boundaries but Mme. Patras underlines the distance separating center and periphery within Avignon itself. Whereas "Digital Avignon" sought to provide a voice to the peripheral neighborhoods of the city, the majority of the Avignon ECOC projects were in the city's center. According to Louis Bec, "Digital Avignon" was itself originally intended to be housed in the central Palace of the Popes before the exhibit devoted to Beauty displaced it.

The comments of Mme. Patras also draw attention to the divisions and social barriers within cities that stand as obstacles to city-centered EU cultural policy initiatives. Such projects tend to view cities as coherent communities within national societies, with exchanges between cities defined as "European" because of the movement across national boundaries. Avignon's ECOC program was successful in this regard, especially with respect to the *Trans-Danse Europe* program which inaugurated a solid network for ongoing exchanges among dance troupes from most of the nine cities. But the Digital Avignon project argues for addressing existing diversity and inequalities *within* cities. This project shows the value of initiatives that improve communication between the city's center and periphery, and lessen the social isolation of those living in the latter. This EU initiative was able to help bridge, if only temporarily, a longstanding division between a municipality and a marginalized community in one of its peripheral neighborhoods. In addition, the project also helped address gender inequalities within the community through its focus on providing training and other opportunities to Gypsy women. Mme Patras noted, "The best thing was that this opened minds a little. Otherwise, it's not worth doing. What I try to do in my work, what we tried to do on the website, is to defend our way of life, so that people will be more open to listening. It breaks old stereotypes." But she insisted that this was not a project seeking the "integration" of Gypsies: "We are integrated." The project did attempt to reach out and make new contacts with others outside the Avignon Gypsy community. In addition to the website, the "Digital Avignon" work with the Gypsies included the creation of a photographic exhibit that many of the women took to Perpignan to contribute to a documentary photography festival there. For the first time, they met members of Perpignan's sizeable Gypsy community who were inspired by the project to pursue a similar one of their own. The project was also intended to include "European" links with other Gypsy communities outside France. But, as Sylvie Fraissard noted, "that was the goal for the third year. We never got to it." Still, in addition to the site (which is no longer active), the project has had other long-term benefits. These include providing the women with computing, scanning, photographic and other skills that they have since used on other projects.

One of these was a theatre production based on the history of Avignon's Gypsies, created by Sylvie Patras (Mme Patras' daughter), who used her new skills to promote the play. Thus, while the project generated considerable benefits for the participants, it was not characterized by the kind of European dimension described at the beginning of this article, which is to say, marked by interaction and collaboration across national lines and focused on the idea of diversity rather than heritage and locally-bounded cultures. While the ECOC year provided an opportunity for new expressions of identity within Avignon, it also underscored deep and persistent divisions and inequalities that pose obstacles to the civic aims of European Union cultural policies intended to fight prejudice and promote a more democratic society.

### Conclusion

Avignon's experience as a Cultural Capital shows the discourse of Europe being used in a local campaign to consolidate municipal authority. The Avignon mayor's office has long been familiar with the advantages of arts-centered promotion because of its experience with the Avignon Theatre Festival, not only a major European arts event, but also an important site for public debate about French state cultural policy. The success of the mayor's office, both with respect to tourists and in the 2001 election, shows how cities can profitably serve as media for European Union cultural policy devoted to "unity in diversity." But the experience of the Gypsy women website also raises questions about the extent to which the border-crossing, interaction, and exchange viewed in recent studies as characteristic of the European dimension of ECOC projects is exclusively an elite phenomenon. My goal here has been to identify some of the specific challenges on the ground in Avignon to the diffusion and embrace of this model of European identity in a project centered on "unity in diversity." It seems painfully ironic that the Gypsy community in Avignon, long scorned for its mobility and lack of rootedness, has finally created a successful portrait of its rich cultural heritage and local roots precisely at a time when the new European ideal promotes border-crossing and multiple subjectivities.

The Gypsy Women website was successful with many of its goals but its failure to last points to the value of planning for long term projects to extend beyond the ECOC year. While planners have acknowledged the value of long term projects relating to economic growth and tourism (resulting in the creation of museums such as the Yvon Lambert Center for Contemporary Art in Avignon, for example), it seems equally important to ensure the ongoing vitality of initiatives devoted to the civic goals of the ECOC. It is interesting to note that Marseille's successful

bid for ECOC status in 2013 was specifically focused on small, locally-based associations. According to the Pre-Selection File, the centerpiece is the program of "Euro-Mediterranean Workshops." These reflect a broad cross-section of participants across the region, and are intended to be sustainable projects that will extend beyond 2013. There are to be 200 to 250 Workshops "within community associations, businesses, laboratories, schools and the cultural institutions in the Marseille-Provence area." Perhaps this future engagement with EU cultural policy will allow for "unity in diversity" to be interpreted in a way that encourages the development of the "demotic" cosmopolitanism called for by Mandel. The experience of Avignon 2000 highlights the enduring social divisions within cities that must be addressed if EU cultural policy is to result in a more equitably-distributed experience of European dialogue, exchange, and collaboration.

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### Endnotes

1 All translations from the French are by the author unless otherwise noted.

2 There are many terms used to refer to Roma, Traveller and Gypsy peoples in Europe. Alain Lemon notes that In English, Roma and other groups, such as Irish Travellers, are lumped together under the name 'Gypsies,' the English term being a derivative of "Egyptians." Roma who arrived in Western Europe in the fifteenth century were mistakenly thought to come from Egypt; the fact that Romani is an Indic language had yet to be discovered. Roma in East European countries only began to name themselves 'Roma' in public in the late 1980s, and the mass media switched only in the mid-1990s from variations of 'tsygane' (2000:5).

In 1995, the Council of Europe created a Group of Specialists on Roma/Gypsies, today known as the Committee of Experts on Roma and Travellers. While the word "Gypsy"

is sometimes discouraged as a derogatory outsider label, Gypsies in Avignon told me that "Roma" was a term for groups in northern Europe and that they, linked to the Catalan part of Spain, referred to themselves as *gitan*s. I have accordingly chosen the common English translation of *gitan* (Gypsy) to refer to them in this article.

3 For overviews of the anthropology of European integration, see Wilson 1998, Borneman and Fowler 1997, Bellier and Wilson 2000, and Delanty and Rumford 2005.

4 "The European ideology developed in part from a reaction to Enlightenment universalism. Characteristically, it represented European identity as revealed through specific *national* identities; paradoxically, it meant thinking nationalistically. The European ideology portrayed the internal disunity of the European peoples as a transcendent unity, their political divisions as a sign of robust health, and their squabbles as the free expression of individuality refined through constant competition" (Herzfeld 1985:77).

5 In their 1997 critical review of anthropological approaches to European integration, Borneman and Fowler called for attention to new processes of identity-formation they called "Europeanization." Accelerated by the cold-war collapse of Europe and by global changes in communications technologies, and guided by the institutions of the European Union, processes of "Europeanization," they argued, are radically changing longstanding traditions of territoriality and nationhood. Borneman and Fowler argued that what constitutes "Europeanness" is a fluid cosmopolitanism, a lack of attachment to the fundamental sources of European identity of the past: "Unlike belonging to the nation, which has a specific cultural content, identification with Europe is an empty sign" (492).

6 Since 1985, one or two cities have been chosen each year by the European Council and the EU Ministers of Culture, and the event has received funding from the European Commission. In 2000, the Council and Ministers could not decide among the proposals and they announced that to mark the millenium, nine cities would be chosen: Avignon, Bergen, Bologne, Brussels, Crakow, Helsinki, Prague, Reykjavik, and Santiago de Compostella.

7 Mandel provides this definition of demotic: "of or pertaining to the current, ordinary, everyday form of a language, of or pertaining to the common people" (311). "The demotic citizen of a denationalized state, whose demos and cosmos transcend borders, ... would represent a critical step toward the democratization of cosmopolitanism, where 'world-openness' necessarily would include the local as well as the global" (325).

8 This article draws on the author's experience with theatre arts initiatives in the Provence-Alpes-Côtes d'Azur region, including dissertation and other fieldwork research conducted in Avignon between 1991 and 2008. Although

in Avignon during the ECOC events of 2000, I draw here primarily on interviews with participants conducted after the events. These include Luc Armengol (Director of Communications for the Mayor's office and for the Cultural Capital events), Céline Bréant (Communications and European Relations director of the Trans-Dance Europe program of the *Hivernales* Dance Festival), Louis Bec (Organizer of *AvignoNumérique*), Sylvie Froissard (Photographer and Organizer of *Femmes Gitanes d'Avignon*), Bernadette Patras (President of the *Association des Gitans et Gens de Voyage d'Avignon*), as well as with residents having attended ECOC events.

9 In 1999, the "European City of Culture" was renamed the "European Capital of Culture." However, in much of the administrative literature devoted to the program, the terms "city of culture" and "capital of culture" are used interchangeably. For example, the first post-1999 European Commission final report on the project's activities is entitled *European Cities of Culture for the year 2000*.

10 The nine cities of culture in 2000 employed one of two models for administration. Avignon, Krakow, and Santiago de Compostela relied on direct administration through existing government and council structures, while the others (Bergen, Bologna, Brussels, Helsinki, Prague, Reykjavik) established independent organizations responsible for planning Cultural Capital events.

11 See Philippe Poirrier's (1998) study of Avignon's experience as host of the "*Rencontres* (Meetings) *d'Avignon*," a gathering of mayors and other municipal leaders, along with artists and administrators between 1964 and 1970 during the Avignon Theatre Festival. Also, Avignon's long experience with the inter-municipal competition centered on arts festivals is discussed by Serge Proust (2002) who draws on records of Avignon municipal council meetings in 1948 to show that Avignon's theatre festival owes some of its early support to the desire to gain a step on nearby Aix-en-Provence, which in 1948 was discussing the creation of its own choral music festival.

12 The architect's plan met with heavy criticism. For many, this was the ultimate in "festivalization": the appropriation of a local heritage in the service of a purely promotional campaign centered on the mayor's office and local business interests (for an analysis of "festivalization" with respect to Weimar's experience as Cultural Capital in 1999, see Roth and Frank 2000). The mayor's office dropped the plan and the architect left, taking his plans.

13 Total visitors in 1999: 285,481 (avg. 630 visitors/day), 2000: 338,310 (avg. 702 visitors/day), 2001: 334,723 (687 visitors/day), "Evolution du Service Accueil," Office de Tourisme d'Avignon.

14 The RPR has since merged with members of right and center-right parties to become the UMP—*Union pour un Mouvement Populaire*.

15 This emphasis on unity by organizers resonates with Michael Herzfeld's description of "unity in diversity" as "the European ideology": a dynamic central to the processes whereby states affirmed the cultural superiority of European nations and the nation-state as a superior political form. The power of the myth of "unity in diversity" derived not only from the way it distinguished Europeans from others, but also, perhaps especially, in the way it reinforced the idea of the state's role in unifying citizens. This discourse contrasted a unitary state to its fractious citizenry, and defined states as the key actors generating and maintaining national unity.

16 For discussion of this renovation (which does not discuss the displacement of the Gypsies) considered in the context of the changing relationship between the European Community and its urban forms after World War II, see Heckart 1989).

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