

# NORTHERN IRELAND, UK AND IRELAND

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## Derry-Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013: What lies ahead?

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*This article introduces the UK City of Culture initiative, and argues that the attractiveness of this title lies in the belief it can further urban regeneration within the city that holds it. Tracing the origins of this logic to Glasgow's year as European Capital of Culture 1990, the paper challenges perceptions about that city's regeneration, suggesting much of it has been superficial. Thereafter it questions the apparently universal assumption that Derry will benefit from being the UK City of Culture, and concludes by positing the possibility of a better 'model' of regeneration emerging from the experiences of 2013.*

### **The Inception of United Kingdom City of Culture (UKCOC)**

The UKCOC title came into being as a mechanism designed to capitalise upon the “success of Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture 2008” (culture.gov.uk), through the British government instituting a title which, although modelled on the European Capital of Culture (ECOC), was, from inception to execution, nationally administered. While initially centrally conceived within the UK Department of Culture, Media and Sport, responsibility for the details of the initiative was delegated to a non-governmental working group headed by television producer Phil

Redmond, and comprised of individuals drawn from the upper echelons of select public, quasi-public and private ‘cultural’ organisations, including the BBC, Visit Britain, Tate National and the Heritage Lottery Fund<sup>1</sup>. This group’s recommendations, laid down in their working report (UKCOC Working Group 2009), crystallised into the UKCOC – a title to be held by a demonstrably<sup>2</sup> ‘cultural’ UK city for a period of one year and to be awarded every fourth year thereafter. The report makes numerous references not only to Liverpool, which, as the most recent British city to hold the European title, we might expect, but also to Glasgow’s (1990) year as ECOC:

*The Working Group felt it was also worth recalling the positive impact on Glasgow after its time as City of Culture, and therefore bidding Cities should look to set out clearly what sort of anticipated step change each City is likely to make while taking advantage of the title (UKCOC Working Group 2009: 11).*

This is less surprising if it is considered that it was in Glasgow where the ECOC initiative was most spectacularly and, at the time, improbably used to transform the perception of that city from a signifier of poverty, chronic unemployment, alcoholism and violence, to the sophisticated cultural centre that is ‘Scotland with style’ (Gomez 1998, MacLeod 2002, Mooney 2004, Garcia 2004, 2005). Indeed, the spectre of ‘Glasgow 1990’ haunts the Working Group’s thinking to the extent that, rather than suggesting imitation of this, it is stipulated that candidate cities for the UKCOC demonstrate the proposed ‘step change’ in trajectory (UKCOC Working Group 2009: 11). In the sections that follow, this

<sup>1</sup> A full list of members of the working group is contained in the ‘UK City of Culture Working Group Report’ available online at [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/ukcc\\_workinggroupreport.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/ukcc_workinggroupreport.pdf) (Accessed: 18 January 2013).

<sup>2</sup> The selection process was competitive, with potential cities delivering a bid to a panel featuring members of the Working Group.

article considers: the nature of Glasgow’s ‘step change’; how selective understandings of this continue to affect urban policy well beyond that city; and, finally turns to ask what sort of ‘step change’ is likely and/or desirable for the UK City of Culture, 2013.

### **Glasgow 1990 and the ‘New’ Logic of ECOC**

Prior to 1990, ECOC involved the celebration of cities already famed for their extant cultural practices<sup>3</sup>. Glasgow 1990 marked a departure from this practice, in that strategically placed actors within powerful public-private partnerships, including most notably Glasgow Action, utilised the ECOC title as both a catalyst for, and showcase of, the city’s cultural-led regeneration. The aims of this were: ‘to make the city more attractive to work in, to live and to play in; to recreate Glasgow’s entrepreneurial spirit; and, to communicate the new reality of Glasgow to its citizens and to the world’ (Glasgow Action Chair, Lord McFarlane, quoted in Gomez 1998: 111).

This ambitious undertaking began with the procurement of celebrated urban design consultant Gordon Cullen’s services to re-image the city’s main thoroughfare, Buchanan Street. Although Cullen’s plan was ultimately only partially implemented, the process nevertheless resulted in ‘certain erstwhile derelict zones... witness[ing] an extraordinary re-aestheticization’ (MacLeod 2002: 611). Chief amongst these has been the development of the urban village that is the ‘Merchant City’, as well the opening of the Burrell Collection, St Enoch Centre, Princes’ Square and the Italian Centre. These developments provided the backdrop against which the City of Culture celebrations - 3,500 events involving 22,000 people representing 700 cultural organisations (Myerscough 1991) – were played out. The ‘legacy’ of Glasgow 1990, and the success of the city’s cultural led regeneration more generally was reflected in the open-

<sup>3</sup> The title was first held by Athens (1985), and thereafter Florence (1986), Amsterdam (1987), Berlin (1988) and Paris (1989) before Glasgow’s year (1990).

ing of the (Glasgow) Gallery of Modern Art in 1996, The Glasgow Auditorium (nicknamed ‘the Armadillo’) in 1997 and the Glasgow Science Centre in 2001. In 2006 the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum reopened after a £35 million refurbishment and, as Scotland’s most popular attraction by visitor numbers, ‘confirmed’ Glasgow’s status as a major British and European cultural centre.<sup>4</sup> Consensus prevails within the literature that the ECOC can be identified as one of the key mechanisms which have succeeded in reinventing Glasgow’s landscape, imagery and status (Young 1992, Short 1996, MacLeod 2002), strengthening the city’s inter-urban competitiveness at national and international levels (Cogliandro 2001, Davis and Russell 2001, Gulliver 2002).

The perceived success with which the ECOC award was used in Glasgow as the catalyst for, and showcase of, that city’s cultural led regeneration is such that lessons from that city have been inducted into the canon of European urban regeneration policy as a model of best practice: this has become known as the ‘Glasgow model’ of urban regeneration. Historically specific and geographically sensitive adaptations of the model have been applied to European cities as diverse as Turin (Vanola 2008), Cork (O’Callaghan and Linehan 2007), and Liverpool (Anderson and Holden 2008, Jones and Wilk-Heeg 2004). Indeed, as Beatrice Garcia (2005) notes, through the popular uptake of the ‘Glasgow model’:

*[A] rather sanguine EU initiative [...] has been transformed into what is perceived as an attractive catalyst for cultural regeneration, generating enormous expectations in cities and countries as diverse as the UK, the Netherlands and Greece (Garcia 2005: 841).*

Underpinning the enthusiasm with which candidate cities now approach

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/museums/our-museums/kelvingrove/about-Kelvingrove/TheRestorationofKelvingroveArtGalleryandMuseum/Pages/Funding.aspx>

competitions for awards such as ECOC is the faith that such a title can further the transformation of ‘their’ city’s fortunes; their city, too, can ‘do a Glasgow’. This faith extends not only to cultural designations and titles, but to other novel initiatives which can propel a city into the spotlight (Zukin 2010: 231-232). Returning to Glasgow, for example: not satisfied with the transformations instigated by the City of Culture title, strategically placed actors ensured the city successfully competed for the titles of European City of Architecture 1999 and European Capital of Sport 2003. Commitment to this ethos is perhaps even more conclusively demonstrated by Glasgow’s successful participation in the bid to host Commonwealth Games in 2014. As is argued in the following sections, this rationale is pervasive in cities across Europe, including amongst strategically placed actors in all of the candidate cities for the UKCOC.

### **Common Ground between Derry, Norwich, Birmingham and Sheffield**

Derry-Londonderry<sup>5</sup> defeated steep competition from Norwich, Sheffield and Birmingham to capture the inaugural UKCOC title. Each of these cities spent considerable sums of public and public-private money on their bids, suggesting the ubiquitous belief that the title would galvanise their various regeneration plans. Looking at the bids put forward by each city, striking similarities are evident among all four finalists. Laura McGillivray (CEO of Norwich City Council, for example, argued that public investment in the bid was justified, as successfully capturing the title would have boosted the local economy by £250 million.<sup>6</sup> The Birmingham bid made a similar claim, estimating that £200 million could be

<sup>5</sup> Throughout the bid and thereafter the city is referred to as Derry-Londonderry, a circumlocution intended to both ensure ethno-political inclusivity, and to signify the direction that the city should be moving in.

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BgURUeOrJ0M> for the Norwich bid video which also reminds potentially critical locals that Liverpool’s ECOC year netted that city an estimated £800 million. (Accessed: 9 September 2012).

injected into the economy if their bid had been successful.<sup>7</sup> In Sheffield, the rationale of successfully branding that city as UKCOC was made even more explicit:

*The UK City of Culture award is the perfect vehicle for helping Sheffield to promote itself around the globe, and also to promote the UK around the globe. The bid has also helped us to understand our unique attributes – what is special about Sheffield, so our new city brand has been developed in parallel with the bid process* (Brendan Moffett, Director of Strategic Marketing, Creative Sheffield).<sup>8</sup>

Despite its regular depiction as ‘a place apart’ and as an exemplar contested/divided city (O’Dowd and Komarova forthcoming), the rationale for Derry’s participation in UKCOC features an almost identical logic to these ‘ordinary cities’ (Robinson 2006). The celebratory reaction, broadcast live as Derry was ‘crowned’ UKCOC, was indicative of a latent civic pride awoken at last by national recognition of the quality of regional cultural offerings.

As the above discussion has demonstrated, the extent of this celebration speaks to the pervasiveness of the belief that such an award can transform the fortunes of Derry<sup>9</sup>, serving as a catalyst for the cultural-led regeneration of the city. During the ‘Clipper Homecoming Festival’ (in which the Foyle Marina was briefly transformed into a harbour for the

<sup>7</sup> See [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hv2f0D\\_301g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hv2f0D_301g) for Birmingham’s bid video. (Accessed 09 September 2012).

<sup>8</sup> See [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lj9M1r\\_4mw8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lj9M1r_4mw8) for Sheffield’s bid. The bid was supported by £500,000 private investment, which was swollen by publically pledged money also. The estimated benefit to Sheffield was £300 million. (Accessed 09 September 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Derry faces many similar problems to cities such as Liverpool and Glasgow, but these are arguably exacerbated by the specific history of ethno-national conflict which has traditionally dis-incentivised potential investment.

vessels of the Clipper 2011-2012 International Yacht Race) Derry City Council (DCC) Chief Executive Sharon O’Connor was asked to explain why public money was used to finance the event, which was undertaken as part of the countdown to the UKCOC 2013 year. Mirroring almost identically the justification put forward for Sheffield’s bid, not to mention Lord MacFarlane’s vision for Glasgow, she commented:

*[T]he reason we are doing these types of events is to try and reposition this city in the minds of the public. Not just the international public, but our regional public as well. To try and get them to take a second look at the city, and to reconsider this place as somewhere you would want to visit, that you want to work, that you want to invest in, and perhaps that you might want to live. So in those terms it’s telling our new story in a very visual way* (DCC Town Clerk and Chief Executive Sharon O’Connor).<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, when former UK Culture Secretary Ben Bradshaw opened the competition for the inaugural UKCOC title, it was hard to believe that his affirmation that ‘the title of City of Culture will be a prize very much worth having’<sup>11</sup> would have struck such a harmonious chord with Northern Irish Culture Minister, Caral Ni Chuilin. Her party, Sinn Féin, was initially ambivalent about the bid on the grounds that it was for a UK title<sup>12</sup>. Sinn Féin Council leader Maeve McLaughlin’s initial stance was that

<sup>10</sup> Interview broadcast on BBC One Northern Ireland ‘The Clipper Homecoming Festival’ Broadcast 06 July 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Coverage of Ben Bradshaw’s announcement of the competition available at: [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference\\_library/media\\_releases/6256.aspx](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/media_releases/6256.aspx) for details. (Accessed: 5 February 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Coverage of Sinn Féin’s initial opposition available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/mar/03/derry-divide-culture-uk> (Accessed: 21 February 2013).

while the bid was supported the UK prefix was not<sup>13</sup>. However, as the bid gathered momentum, apparently realising the transformative potential of the award, the party gradually changed its stance. Sinn Féin MLA and MEP Martina Anderson criticised dissident elements within Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann Doire<sup>14</sup> for jeopardising the prospect of hosting Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann<sup>15</sup> within the city<sup>16</sup>, dismissing their preoccupation with the UK prefix as ‘so ludicrous it beggars belief’, while simultaneously advocating a strategy to ‘neutralise the UK prefix’.

Northern Ireland Deputy First Minister and Derry native, Martin McGuinness, was in fact amongst those present in Liverpool to (unconditionally) accept the award, describing it as a ‘precious gift for peace makers’. The statement below succinctly summarises Sinn Féin’s current position. It seems to precisely mirror the beliefs of those behind the bids of Sheffield, Birmingham and Norwich for the UKCOC title, as well as countless others who have sought the ECOC title:

*With the eyes of the world upon us, this is an opportunity for Derry to push forward as a modern, creative, vibrant city proudly showcasing its rich heritage and culture. Culture and arts have a huge role to play in empowering citizens, in tackling long term structural inequalities faced by Derry and in helping to build a sustainable development model for the future<sup>17</sup> (Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure Caral Ni Cuillin*

<sup>13</sup> See <http://sluggerotoole.com/2010/03/02/while-we-are-a-city-of-culture-there-has-to-be-a-recognition-that-were-not/> for details of Maeve McGlaughlin’s argument. (Accessed: 21 February 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann Doire is a non-profit cultural movement involved in the preservation and promotion of traditional Irish music. They are based in Derry.

<sup>15</sup> Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann is a festival of Irish music that has been running since 1951. It is held in different locations around Ireland each year. 2013 is the first year that it will be held in a location in Northern Ireland.

<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-foyle-west-16426203> for coverage of the ‘new’ Sinn Féin position, as expounded by Martina Anderson. (Accessed: 21 February 2013).

<sup>17</sup> Ni Chuilin’s statement is taken from her welcome to the ‘Programme for Derry-Londonderry: 2013’.

2012).

### **Dissenting Voices and Dissident Voices**

Support for the proposed use of UKCOC as a driver of urban regeneration in Derry is, of course, not universal. The limited public opposition that is evident so far tends to lie along two polarised axes; dissident republicans and the more disaffected sections of loyalism. These unlikely bedfellows heap criticism upon the UKCOC according to traditionally ethno-political frames of reference. The former’s accusation is that the title normalises British colonial rule in the North of Ireland, while members of the latter protested outside the opening ceremony to broadcast their grievances with Northern Irish society post Good Friday Agreement, highlighting specifically the supposed erosion of their culture<sup>18</sup>. The TUV’s Jim Allister had previously attempted to link the UKCOC to issues of ‘Protestant alienation’. In a direct response to Martina Anderson, he claimed that:

*It is deeply disappointing that Sinn Fein/IRA won the argument to “neutralise the U.K. prefix” at the Executive table. While the Programme for Government mentions the City of Culture a number of times, significantly, it never refers to Londonderry as ‘the UK City of Culture’ (TUV MLA, Jim Allister<sup>19</sup>)*

Yet it is the former group which is believed to possess the most potential to derail the branding process, albeit inadvertently through a mission statement which might read like a modification of that well-worn aphorism: ‘whenever I heard the words UK, I reach for my gun’. In reality, when dissidents did attempt to impede the UK City of Culture preparations it

<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.u.tv/News/Loyalists-protest-at-City-of-Culture-gig/eca88ee8-26b4-4cff-8940-643796d97308> for details of the 150-person protest outside Ebrington during the Sons and Daughters concert. (Accessed: 21 February 2013).

<sup>19</sup> See <http://www.jimallister.org/default.asp?blogID=2649> for details. (Accessed: 11 March 2013).

was not with guns. Rather, on two separate occasions they demonstrated their opposition to the ‘UK’ prefix by means of bomb attacks on the Waterloo Place offices of Culture Company, the body explicitly tasked with delivering the cultural programme for the UKCOC year. As might be expected the attacks drew considerable and negative media attention, prompting one journalist to ask of Derry – ‘City of bombs or city of culture<sup>20</sup>?’ Neither republicans nor loyalists seem overly concerned with the branding of Derry as a city of culture per se. Their criticism is that the UKCOC is variously ‘too British’ or ‘not British enough’. Nevertheless both are denounced vocally in various media, discursively positioned in opposition to the wishes of the people of Derry<sup>21</sup>. Such discursive denunciation is two-pronged, and the use of the UKCOC as a vehicle of urban regeneration in Derry is proffered in juxtaposition to dissident aims, as more than simply desirable – as necessary. The same phenomenon was evident in Glasgow, where Mooney (2004) reports that detractors were labelled ‘as heretics questioning some universal truth... [w]ealth creation, economic growth and competitiveness were the solution, the only solution, for Glasgow’s social and economic problems’ (Mooney 2004: 330-33). Yet perhaps if Glasgow’s ‘renaissance’ had been subjected to more critical scrutiny, some of Derry’s citizens may join these ‘dissidents’, to ask, albeit for very different reasons, if the Glasgow model of urban regeneration is really what is best for Derry? In the section that follows this question is addressed.

### **Re-Examining the Success of the Glasgow ‘Model’, in Glasgow**

While it is undeniable that second and third cities across Europe have sought to emulate the Glasgow ‘model’ of urban regeneration, what

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-15289775> (Accessed: 14 February 2013).

<sup>21</sup> The author attended a briefing for volunteers involved in the UKCOC in which dissident republicans were denounced as ‘idiots’ and ‘morons’. At the same meeting, the ‘idiots’ were juxtaposed with those who loved their city, and who realized something had to be done to transform its fortunes. That ‘something’ was then presented as the UKCOC.

is less clear is how successful the model has been in Glasgow (Garcia 2003). Positive accounts fill the pages of the print media from local to international level and these heavily inform the discourses of professional planners and policy-makers as is reflected in their industry journals (Bianchini 1990, Bianchini and Parkinson 1993, Gomez 1998, Holcomb 1993, Khan 2003). Such accounts detail Glasgow’s progress as has been discussed in the preceding sections. Yet there is also a vast critical literature which problematises and unsettles the canonical account of ‘Glasgow 1990’. In turn this critical literature can be subdivided into: those accounts which offer explicit criticisms of Glasgow 1990 (Robertson 1992, Mooney and Danson 1997, Danson and Mooney 1998, Gomez 1998, MacLeod 2002, Mooney 2004); and, those which detail the continuing problems facing Glasgow more generally, providing inadvertent evidence that the ‘Glasgow model’ has failed in Glasgow. These latter studies point to Glasgow’s continued negative accolades of extremely high unemployment (Beatty et al. 2002), morbidity (Shaw et al. 1999) and widespread poverty and social exclusion (Brown et al. 1999). Despite the ‘success’ of 1990, five of the ten most deprived electoral wards in Scotland are home to more than 50 per cent of Glasgow’s population (Social Disadvantage Research Centre 2003) which suggests that any transformation of the city’s fortunes has been at best superficial.

The studies explicitly examining Glasgow 1990 equally challenge the positive impact of the ECOC. MacLeod (2002) draws on Neil Smith’s celebrated (1996) revanchist city thesis to explore the punitive underpinnings of a re-aestheticised city centre. He details the closure of homeless shelters, the displacement of pan handlers (Fitzpatrick and Kennedy 2000) and the criminalisation of street drinkers, contextualised against a proliferation of CCTV and privatised security operations (Fyffe and Bannister 1998), arguing these contribute to Glasgow’s ‘positive’ new image every bit as much as the high end developments discussed above. Mooney and Danson (1997), and Mooney (2004) examine the role of the

ECOC in reproducing poverty and spatial inequalities through the lens of a 'dual city'. They conclude that although the model is theoretically limited, it illuminates the process by which the positive new image of Glasgow's city centre obfuscates and exacerbates vast concentrations, and of peripheral poverty. Garcia (2003) interrogates this process through the lens of 'spatial dilemma': a metaphor which grasps the recurrent tension between 'feeding the downtown monster' (Harvey 2000) and tending to vast concentrations of peripheral poverty, 'boosting the downtown as a cultural capital, while attending to the social miseries of decline through neighbourhood social programmes' (Kantor 2000: 808). If any degree of consensus is evident amongst these critical perspectives it is that the ECOC provided a mechanism to clean up Glasgow's image, but did little to benefit the general citizenry or address the underlying structural problems. Moreover, it is tentatively posited that the ECOC can be implicated in the erosion of the right to the city (Harvey 2012): whether passively, through diverting the focus of critical attention from the poverty and exclusions experienced by so many; or, more actively, through legitimising the exclusion from public space of those deemed to compromise the production of the 'new', cultural Glasgow.

### Conclusion

It has been argued throughout this article that faith in the 'Glasgow model' is so pervasive amongst urban policy makers in Europe that it continues to serve as a template for the regeneration of very different cities. The institution of the UKCOC makes provision for one British city to attempt to 'do a Glasgow' every four years. Yet there is considerable debate about what exactly Glasgow 1990 achieved for that city. Many academic commentators criticise the continued celebration of the Glasgow model by policy makers and the media as more a case of 'sustaining a myth than celebrating a reality' (Mooney 2004: 328). The relevance of this for Derry is that much of what is currently being done there as part of UKCOC 2013 looks ominously like a scaled down version of 'Glasgow

1990'. In light of this, it is suggested that perhaps the citizens of Derry should take a second look at Glasgow, asking if that city's 'model' is right for their city. Whilst so far (misdirected) criticism has come only from various dissidents, and has been denounced accordingly, perhaps a more cautionary approach to the UKCOC would be a positive development. The people of Derry should perhaps question the assumption that an emulation of Glasgow 1990 is the only solution to the problems facing their city, and see if instead there could be a new model, which can deliver regeneration which is not based upon exclusion and displacement. If so, the 'Derry model' of urban regeneration really would provide a worthy template for other cities to build upon.

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#### Links to Online Resources

UKCOC Working Group Report': [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/ukcc\\_workinggroupreport.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/ukcc_workinggroupreport.pdf) (Accessed: 18 January 2013).

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Sheffield UKCOC bid video: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lj9M1r\\_4mw8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lj9M1r_4mw8) (Accessed: 9 September 2012).

Coverage of Ben Bradshaw's announcement of the UKCOC 2013 competition: [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference\\_library/media\\_releases/6256.aspx](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/media_releases/6256.aspx) (Accessed: 15 February 2013).

Coverage of Sinn Fein's initial opposition to Derry's bid: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/mar/03/derry-divide-culture-uk> (Accessed: 21 February 2013).

Meave McLaughlin's initial arguments on Derry's bid: <http://sluggerotoole.com/2010/03/02/while-we-are-a-city-of-culture-there-has-to-be-a-recognition-that-were-not/> (Accessed: 21 February 2013).

Sinn Fein's 'new' position on the bid: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-foyle-west-16426203> (Accessed: 21 February 2013).

News coverage of Loyalist opposition outside Ebrington during the Sons and Daughters event: <http://www.u.tv/News/Loyalists-protest-at-City-of-Culture-gig/eca88ee8-26b4-4cff-8940-643796d97308> (Accessed: 21 February 2013).