DESTINATION BIENNALE: AN EXAMINATION OF THE INTERFACE BETWEEN BIENNIALS OF ART AND PUBLIC POLICY WITHIN A NEO-LIBERAL CONTEXT

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Abstract

Destination Biennale: an examination of the interface between biennials of art and public policy within a neo-liberal context.

This thesis explores the interface between biennials of art and public policy, primarily within the UK but informed by comparison with biennials of art in other countries, notably the Istanbul Biennial. It examines whether and in what ways public policy has been help or hindrance to two major biennial events in the UK – the Liverpool Biennial and the Folkestone Triennial - and positions this question within the international trend towards neo-liberal economic development. By situating the biennials within this broader perspective, I examine the question of whether biennials are expressions of policies that conform to neo-liberal agendas, or are able to function, within their limited sphere of influence and in particular circumstances, as a form of resistance and what this might mean. This research questions the dominant rhetoric of biennials of art as catalysts for regeneration using the Liverpool Biennial as a case study, complemented by exploration of the Folkestone Triennial and the Istanbul Biennial. It suggests that their influence is more symbolic than quantifiable, and sometimes perceived rather than actual. It argues that the literature does not take sufficient account of the competencies, experience and professionalism of high-level arts managers who work to deliver these large-scale events. The actuality demonstrates that the relationship between policy and arts delivery is essentially functional and perceived to be mutually beneficial. Drawing a contrast with the situation in Istanbul, it is clear that a healthy arts ecology needs public policy and finance to support it. Further, that without the constraints and motivations that public policy brings, there is no obligation for the arts, in production or presentation, to have any relevance or benefit to a wider public. Overall, this thesis suggests that the existence of UK cultural policy and other public policy agendas, allied to significant public funding, may allow biennial of art events to resist, within their limited sphere of influence, the trend towards economic neo-liberalism; even while being partially implicated within those policies.
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I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed: 
Dated:

Dany Louise, candidate

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Chapter One: Introduction

The Research Question

At an October 2012 event I attended at the Arnolfini in Bristol to discuss the notion of a “Biennial for the South West”, participants rejected the use of the biennial term, deciding that it privileged the international over the local and regional, signified bloated budgets and possibly bloated art, and raised expectations for a particular type of event that did not allow enough flexibility.¹

The above attitude is striking in that it signifies a changed perception of the biennial of art. The participants were arts professionals who could be expected to have an informed perspective on the subject, and they included senior staff from Arnolfini and Spike Island, and other regional arts organisations, artists based in the south west, curators, PAYE and freelance arts professionals, representatives from the Contemporary Visual Arts Network, and Arts Council England, totalling about 100 people. For these stakeholders, the glamorous association with the international high-end art world and the potential benefits this could bring masked a fundamental flaw in the model: what actual favourable impact would it have for artists and the arts infrastructure in the south west? Would it simply siphon off increasingly scarce public money and create more losers than winners? Would it genuinely provide opportunities for career development and income for artists living and working in the south west? On balance, it was felt that a more localised approach with tangible rather than symbolic outcomes would suit the region, and be more appropriate given the economic constraints of “austerity Britain”. The lengthy day-long conversation reflects what appears to be a significant downturn in the fortunes of the biennial of art, as public budgets shrink and an ambivalence about continually replicating the biennial model becomes more mainstream.

This research thesis is concerned with the interface between biennials of art and public policy, primarily within the UK but informed by comparison with biennials in other countries, most notably the Istanbul Biennial. It examines whether and in what ways public policy has been help or hindrance to the two major biennial events in the UK – the Liverpool Biennial and the Folkestone Triennial - and positions this question within the broader international trend towards neo-liberal economic development. By situating the biennials within this broader perspective, I have begun to examine the question of whether biennials are expressions of “creativity strategies” that “work quietly with the grain of extant ‘neoliberal’ development agendas” (Peck 2005 p740), or are able to function, within their limited sphere of influence and in particular circumstances, as some kind of resistance to neo-liberal economic agendas, and what this might mean.

By public policy agendas, I mean all the policies that have an impact on how biennials are shaped and delivered in the UK. Formal cultural policy is of course central to this, but so are other agendas not so obviously associated with the arts. These include those areas dealing with culture within a regeneration and urban renewal context, economic development policy and the search for new high-growth economic sectors; the European Union intention to become a continent wide “knowledge economy”; social and health policy where it relates to on-the-ground community experience, cohesion and individual life chances; and to an extent formal education policies such as Creative Partnerships and Lifelong Learning.

The impetus for this research came from drawing together three factors: a professional background in arts management; expertise within the visual arts; and a personal interest in biennials of art. My original research question hypothesised that the delivery of “world class” large-scale visual-arts-led events in the UK – biennials of art - was likely to be hampered by the demands of the public policies that funded them. Since the early 1990s, cultural policy in the UK has allegedly become increasingly dominated by instrumentalist thinking (Belfiore 2002, 2007, 2009, 2011; Matarasso 2002; DCMS; Arts Council England) with considerable emphasis placed on
access, inclusion and community connections, alongside a need to demonstrate a quantifiable contribution to economic development, place-making and destination marketing – aspects further emphasised by other, non-arts funders. Additionally, the tendency outside Arts Council England to articulate cultural value in terms of economic value suggested potentially conflicting value systems, both at micro and macro levels. It seemed to me that the two fields of discourse were semi-incompatible and likely to lead to conflict and compromise from biennial managers. I began by asking, how were these negotiated and what impacts did they have? What position and role are biennials of art expected to have locally, regionally, nationally and internationally?

Deciding a case-study methodology allied to empirical research was the right approach in order to explore these questions, I chose three biennial events. These were the Liverpool Biennial as my primary case study; the first UK biennial, established in 1999 using an ambitious and expensive international commissioning model (which therefore also makes it the biggest UK biennial to date), and two others for contextual analysis. These were the Folkestone Triennial, which operates on a similar model to the Liverpool Biennial with more modest budgets; and the Istanbul Biennial, which provides an international comparator. Each of these three biennial events had sufficient commonality to provide useful compare and contrast analysis. Each of them takes place in locations that are metaphorically and geographically “on the edge” – in art terms, in places that are peripheral to the mainstream art centres which have tended to be in wealthy Western capital cities - and were established within an urgent regeneration context. Indeed, Istanbul and Liverpool were members of the “cultural co-operation” project led by Professor Franco Bianchini titled “Cities on the Edge” which formed part of the European Capital of Culture 2008 programme

This regeneration context is particularly important in Europe, as it moves inexorably from an industrial manufacturing economy to a post-industrial knowledge economy (Lisbon Treaty 2000). While the establishment of new biennials post-proliferation has frequently taken place outside Western
centres of contemporary art, and often in peripheral locations, it can be argued that broadly, those countries are concerned more with development (becoming modern), rather than the regeneration of already developed, post-industrial cities or regions, as is the case in Europe. For this reason, the biennials chosen for study are northern European in nature, with Istanbul Biennial providing a useful and appropriate international comparator to the UK biennials. Situated on the edge of both Europe and Asia, Istanbul has traditionally been a divided city, not just physically by the Bosphorus, but economically, with an enormous poor working class, and a very small, very wealthy elite. Over the last thirty years, it has consciously modernised on the European model and it recognised the benefits of hosting a large scale international art festival relatively early, establishing its biennial in 1987 (http://bienal.iksv.org/en/biennial/history accessed 17/6/11).

Using these three examples, I aim to contribute to international debates about the use of large-scale art events within the regeneration process by asking the following questions:

1. What are the political, financial and cultural contexts of these three biennials of art?
2. What are the implications and consequences of these contexts for the production and presentation of art within the biennial context?
3. What is the relative submission to the dominant political, cultural and economic trends of each biennial, and/or their relative resistance to these dominant trends?

This research is informed by existing academic research in the fields of culture-led regeneration, cultural policy, and the implementation of economic neo-liberalism, along with other literature such as governmental and Arts Council England policy documents, local authority research and policy documents, organisational publications, and allied to empirical research. I present my research methodology in detail in the Methodology section of this chapter.
Overview of the Biennial Context

In order to establish the basis for the above, it is important to briefly consider the context of biennials of art. The proliferation of biennials could be viewed as the triumph of both romantic *and* instrumental views of art and culture: that art can improve the quality of life and society for individuals, as well as contributing to the fulfilment of other agendas largely based around economic returns for city-regions (*What Can Culture Buy Us?* Art Monthly November 2005). While biennials as representations of a national ideal is a now discredited notion (Alloway 1969), biennials as an overt marketing and regeneration tool has significant zeitgeistian currency (Partridge 2005). However, the production of fine art - even that of a peripheral nature in a peripheral location (Fialho 2005), as Liverpool was when it started - does not inherently serve public agendas. There are inherent tensions between the standards and priorities of the contemporary fine art field - the profile and status of which the public and indeed private sector is buying into when it funds biennials and other art institutions - and the place-making-marketing and economic agendas to which biennials are expected to contribute (Biggs, L. interview with author 2011).

This situation may be on the cusp of changing as a result of the 2008 financial crisis and its after effects, with a Coalition government that is implementing drastic public spending cuts and accompanying policy changes. This is likely to affect production and presentation within the UK biennial organisations and future levels of funding are uncertain. According to Mike Stubbs, director of FACT, there may be emerging evidence that the production and presentation of art in Liverpool is likely to come under increasing “neo-liberal pressure towards compliance” (conversation with author November 2012); and the 2012 Liverpool Biennial featured far fewer newly commissioned and site-specific works - approximately 20% of the exhibition rather than the 100% new work in each edition since 2002. But for practical reasons, this study is concerned with data up to and including 2013.
Prior to 2010 and “austerity Britain”, the key debate in the UK, and to an extent internationally, had been focused on the use of art – or very loosely defined “culture” – in increasingly instrumental ways. This use of art, not so much as a public good, but for the publics’ good, has been formalised at Government level since the 1997 New Labour government came to power (Stevenson 2004; Belfiore 2002), although the trend began earlier than this, in the 1980s (Matarasso 1997, 2003; Comedia 1978), and was further defined with the introduction of the National Lottery in 1994, with “the Arts” identified as one of the “four good causes” to whom profits should be distributed. Understood as a general ‘public good’, art can be seen as contributing to the sophistication and cultural capital of a civilised society, an expression of the human spirit and to an extent, of national wealth and leisure (see Hunt (2004) ideas on the thinking of Victorian philanthropists). However there is increasing evidence that successive governments see art as, at best, “for the public’s good”, a metaphorical medicine to make individuals and communities better. Some have argued that art is being used as a palliative measure for some of the social problems the UK has experienced over several decades, as a displacement activity to avoid directly addressing the structural deficits that have led to these problems (Stevenson 2004; McGuigan 2005).

Through the four UK Arts Councils, numerous local authorities and other regional and local agencies, instrumentalism has become embedded in the UK to the extent that it has significantly changed the nature of arts management, delivery and practice (author experience and see, for example, Liverpool City Council’s “Arts and Cultural Investment Programme”, and Brighton and Hove’s Cultural Strategy for examples of culture used within “cross-cutting themes”, and the expectation that arts organisations will follow this strategic lead). The debate has centred not so much on the actuality of instrumentalism within the arts, but on whether and how far this instrumentalism is successful in its stated aims, which can be summarised as (a) Increasing the quality of life and life chances for the most vulnerable in society and (b) “Leading” economic regeneration via place-making, destination marketing, and the attraction of cultural tourists.
In assessing this success, or otherwise, many academics have asked questions about what success means, who has gained most, how sustainable these models are, and whether civic gains have been at the expense of peripheral populations (Mirza 2009; Jancovich 2011; Matarasso 1997, 2002; Merli 2002; Miles and Paddison 2005). This research examines the actualities of national and localised policies and their effect on two UK arts organisations, and is situated within the international context of biennials of art and the trend towards neo-liberal economic development strategies. I hope to add some useful and specific insights to the debate.

While it is accepted that arts funding has never been given freely without expectation of certain outcomes – whether from the Medicis in Renaissance Italy or from the modern State (Vuyk 2010) the codification of those outcomes to the extent that they have been, along with their alliance to agendas such as health, social inclusion, regeneration and economic development, has been controversial and much discussed (Belfiore 2002, 2007; Kawashima 2006; Matarasso 1997; Merli 2002; Warnock and Wallinger 2001; Mirza 2005; O'Brien and Miles 2010). Biennials are no exception to this instrumentalisation. In fact, the very first one was created by the civic authorities and patrician artists in Venice in 1895, with Alloway (1969) arguing that it was partly as a form of cultural imperialism - a method of promoting Italian artists and art across Europe - but also largely to increase tourism to Venice after the demise of the Grand Tour. However, in the case of Liverpool and Folkestone, both events were initiated not by the state, but by philanthropists. Their considerable initial investment, £1m in Liverpool and £1.5m in Folkestone, allied to their art world connections (Liverpool) and civic contacts and influence (Folkestone) enabled the first and second edition of these events. In Liverpool, the original aims were to benefit visual artists and enrich the visual arts infrastructure in the city (Biggs, L. interview with author 2011). The first two editions took place without instrumental agendas being imposed on them by funders (Biggs, L; Biggs, B; Berg interviews with author 2011, 2012; Moores in Collard 2007). In Folkestone, the overarching objective was and is the cultural and economic regeneration of the town, but sufficient expertise was employed
to enable the Triennial to be arts-led, and to be devised as one initiative in a holistic and fairly wide-ranging “creative industries approach” (Ewbank 2011). This aesthetic and organisational independence has evolved over the years as each event widened its financial support base and the philanthropic seed-funding has been phased out or become a smaller part of the whole. In the period of this research, both events are heavily reliant on public funding and have been for some time, and therefore have also needed to understand, negotiate and be seen to deliver to the agendas of their funders, as already described. It is interesting to note that it was also philanthropy – albeit self-interested – that initiated the Istanbul Biennial, via the establishment of the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (IKSV). In the absence of state mechanisms, it was and remains a key player in the establishment of arts provision in Istanbul at an international level. The difference with its UK counterparts is that while in the UK the philanthropists provided significant funding that was expected to lever in considerable extra public funding, in Istanbul, the absence of public funding has led to a reliance on the private sector and the trusts and foundations of super-rich industrialists working to promote themselves within recently globalised new markets (Ada, interview with author 2011).

It is this context - the globalisation of markets for enormous trans-national corporations, and the role and deployment of new biennials of art within this - which provides the context for my consideration of the question of biennials and neo-liberalism. Neo-liberal policy is the shorthand for an enormous range of policies and actions associated with promoting economic liberalism. Liberalism in economic terminology refers to state deregulation to promote free trade, open markets and privatisation of services. Associated with right-wing and Conservative ideologies that want to see the role of the State diminished, and that of the private sector enhanced, along with perceived greater individual freedom, this trend has been particularly widespread and influential since the 1980s (Tallon 2010; Harvey 2005; McGuigan 2005, 2009; Peck 2010). It is the ideology responsible for deregulating markets internationally, leading to what we now call globalisation. Supporters of neo-liberal policy see it as a vehicle for
increased employment, efficiency and competitiveness at a macro level, and as providing the best route to increased employment, individual prosperity and quality-of-life gains at the micro-level, via a “trickle-down” effect (Tallon 2010). Critics see it as eroding hard-won workers rights and benefits; the shifting of responsibility and costs from the State to the individual; the institutionalisation of the for-profit motive above all other considerations; the promotion of trans-national corporations over individual entrepreneurial activity and small businesses; and ideologically, as a vehicle of Western economic imperialism that is destructive of local culture and economies, and a homogenising of the world to an extreme Western capitalist model (Brenner and Theodor 2002). That the proliferation of biennials has taken place within this era of globalisation is no coincidence. Chapter three discusses and analyses the role of biennials of art, perceived and actual, within this framework.

The research process has confirmed that the exploration of biennials of art and their relationship with cultural and other public policy is an under-researched area. While the study of public policies, cultural activity and urban regeneration are now well established research fields, with commentary from Belfiore (2002, 2007), McGuigan (2005, 2009) and Garcia (2004a, 2004b, 2010), for example, there is a gap in the literature relating these fields to the specifics of art production and presentation within the biennial of art format. Similarly, while there is widespread questioning of the contribution the provision of art venues and activity makes to economic development, to date none of these have related this question to biennials of art. This research links these areas and shows that by instituting certain key conditions into the operation of biennials of art, their impact on a local, holistic and experiential basis is enhanced. By looking at cultural and regeneration policy through the biennial lens, it is hoped that this provides additional insight into public cultural policy in the New Labour years, and the urban regeneration field.

My research suggests that the reality of biennial-event delivery is nuanced, sophisticated, and while influenced by certain art-world cultural tropes, is,
perhaps to a surprising degree, aesthetically robust and independent, at least in the UK. My research questions the dominant rhetoric of biennials as catalysts for regeneration, suggesting that their influence is far more symbolic than quantifiable, and even then, sometimes perceived rather than actual. Overall, it suggests that the existence of UK cultural policy, and to an extent, other public policy agendas, allied to significant public funding, may actually allow biennial of art events to function - within their limited sphere of influence and under certain conditions - against the prevailing tide of economic neo-liberalism; even while being enabled and therefore partly implicated within aspects of those policies.

A Definition of Biennials of Art

Before going further, it is helpful to define as far as possible what I mean when I use the term “biennials of art”. Biennials provide opportunity for large-scale and expensive art production and presentation, of great benefit to a wide coalition of stakeholders who all have a vested interest in, and a varying definition of, the success of each biennial edition. Simultaneously, at any given point, their operation is constrained by the range and expectations of the multiple agendas and ideologies that surround them. Biennials occupy a complex and challenging space between the competing priorities and standards of contemporary fine art, the international art market and instrumental public policy relating to economic, cultural, social and tourism agendas. Each organisation and realisation of a biennial event must negotiate these agendas while maintaining the values of contemporary fine art, and, generally, aspiring to take its place within the international contemporary art field.

The proliferation of biennials of art since the 1990s means that there are currently around 150 - 200 different visual-arts based biennials worldwide, with new ones being initiated and others expiring on a regular basis. It is therefore virtually impossible to know exactly how many biennials are extant at any one time, and no great imperative or significance to finding out. But the large number of events does represent an evolution of the form and this presents instability in defining what a biennial of art is, even in simple
descriptive terms. Gardner (2011) suggests we are now in the “fourth wave” of biennial development, with the first stage spanning 1895 to the late 1950s, from the establishment of the first ever biennial in Venice and incorporating the establishment of the second, in Sao Paulo, in 1951. The second wave was from the 1960s to the mid 1980s, a period when the third biennial event was established in Sydney in 1973 and a fourth and fifth in Havana and Lyon in 1984. These “waves” correspond to a period that was pre-globalisation and pre-internet. With less than ten biennial events taking place worldwide, each one was considered – within an art world elite – to contain significant artistic status, importance and cultural capital, bringing together artists and practices in innovative ways that had not previously been seen and which had the potential to expand the boundaries and geographies of art (Niemojewski 2010; Mosquera 2010; Domela, interview with author 2012). Because they were so rare, at that stage biennials had “scarcity value” (my term) an important factor which I return to in chapter three, which added to their desirability, glamour, status and artistic and cultural value. The third wave has come to be known as “proliferation” (Gardner 2011), a period corresponding to globalisation of the art market (and other markets) from the late 1980s onwards. It was a period when as many as 150 new art biennials were established. According to Gardner (2011) we are now in a “fourth wave” of biennial development, a point at which they are self-reflecting and questioned. We are in a period when a significant amount of artistic and cultural capital attached to the concept has become debased (Bloch 2005; Niemojewski 2010); an international financial crisis has gripped the world putting budgets for biennials at risk; and critiques of “biennial culture” (Filipovic 2010) are widespread and influential.

New biennial initiatives are by necessity adaptive to curatorial and cultural vision, and the specific local imperatives of location, funding, politics and economic situations. Therefore, it seems no two biennials of art are entirely alike in their models, although there are of course significant commonalities

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2 Documenta, a large scale art exhibition that takes place every five years, was initiated in 1955. Although it is considered to be part of the biennial family, it is rarely discussed in the same terms as other biennials of art, and appears not to have the same criticisms attached to it.
across many events. Additionally, there are biennials of art devoted to sub-sectors of the visual arts, such as print, craft, ceramics, artist film, digital technology, photography and design that must be acknowledged, with the understanding that these tend to have very specific and niche objectives, content and audiences. Because of this, their public, political and economic context can be quite different from the case studies used in this research, and their models differ from the historical and “contemporary biennial model” that I am going to propose (although the possible exception to this statement is where sub-sector biennials are allied to a mainstream “visual art” biennial as happens in Venice and is beginning to take place in Istanbul). This situation is further complicated by a growing trend to ‘appropriate’ the biennial term and its symbolic value for a range of events that sometimes bear little resemblance to any historical manifestation of a biennial of art, and which hold little symbolic value or status in themselves (Bloch 2005; Niemojewski 2010). An additional complicating layer is an observed newer trend amongst visual arts professionals in the UK to reject the term “biennial”, as the benefits of its perceived cultural and symbolic value are coming to be seen as outweighed by the negative ‘baggage’ associated with it. One example, already mentioned, took place at an October 2012 event at the Arnolfini in Bristol to discuss the notion of a “Biennial for the South West”. As already described, stakeholders rejected the use of the biennial term, deciding that it privileged the international over the local and regional, signified bloated budgets and possibly bloated art, and raised expectations for a particular type of event that did not allow enough flexibility or benefit to the region. It is also worth noting that the Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art avoids the biennial word in its title, although it has many commonalities with a biennial model, including new commissions and a two-yearly cycle.

The historical or traditional model of a biennial of art dates back to the inception of the first biennial in Venice in 1895. Although it too has gone through various adaptations and development (see Alloway 1969), its foundation elements are:
1. International in ambition, reach and artists.
2. Large-scale (a “mega exhibition”).\(^3\)
3. Presenting contemporary visual arts and practices, often experimental or particularly new and unsuited to a museum or gallery environment.
5. Periodic.
7. Award of prizes.
8. Status, prestige or symbolic value.

The awarding of prizes has been questioned and is not a feature of many new biennials but it is the use of national representation that has come to be seen as most problematic, critiqued as an outmoded manifestation of imperialism and nationalism (Vogel 2010; Niemojewski 2010). As a result, this practice is not replicated in many biennials. However its association with Venice and for many years the Sao Paulo Biennial makes the use of the descriptor “traditional biennial model” in relation to newer biennials problematic, since it implies the use of national representation and the awarding of prizes. I am therefore proposing the term “contemporary biennial model” to suggest five basic elements of the biennial form that are derived from the grand international biennial of art tradition (pre-proliferation), but attempts to avoid the inference of national pavilions and prizes.

The five elements are:
1. Large-scale.
2. Multi-sited.
3. International in ambition and scope.
4. Periodic.
5. Presenting a range of contemporary visual arts and practices, often experimental or particularly new and unsuited to a museum or gallery environment.

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\(^3\) As described on the Sao Paulo Biennial website (http://www.bienal.org.br/FBSP/en/FundacaoBienal/Pages/Carta-do-Presidente.aspx accessed 19.11.12)
environment.

The term is intended to suggest these as foundation elements, on the understanding that it is unlikely to give a full description of any particular biennial and is most likely to be used in discussing local adaptations from this template. For example, both Liverpool and Folkestone conform to this contemporary model, with the additions of a strong commissioning ethos rooted in site-specificity, and outreach and education work to connect the artworks with specific city and town communities. I have also not included any reference to status or symbolic value, as this is problematic in itself and is discussed in detail in chapter three.

It might appear that the above description is mechanical and overly reductive. As important is a more conceptual understanding of a biennial that informs this thesis, the notion of a biennial as a cultural super-vehicle for artistic and civic ambitions in an internationally competitive age: “The contemporary biennial can be distinguished by a strong will to negotiate its peripheral condition, to represent the ambitions of its host city, and to form infrastructures for contemporary art and the public sphere” (Niemojewski 2010 p91).

The critical debates surrounding the value of biennials in this era of proliferation and globalisation is usefully summarised in the following quotation from the editors of The Biennial Reader:

“For some skeptics the word biennial has come to signify nothing more than an over-blown symptom of spectacular event culture, the result of some of the most specious transformations of the world in the age of late capitalism – in short, a Western typology whose proliferation has infiltrated even the most far-reaching parts of the world, where such events are little more than entertaining or commercially driven showcases designed to feed an ever-expanding tourist industry… Pernicious not only in its imported form the biennial is taken to be equally dangerous to the development of serious
art….For others the biennial is a critical site of experimentation in exhibition-making, offering artists, curators, and spectators a vital alternative to museums and other similar institutions whose institutional inertias does not allow them to respond with immediacy and flexibility to contemporary art’s developments.”

(Filipovic, Van Hal, Ovstebo 2010 p13).

Examples and arguments can be found to support both of these viewpoints, but on balance, this thesis suggests that neither of the above extremes is a full or accurate description of my UK biennial studies. This thesis suggests that the existence of very specific public policy and the publicly funded arena acts as an enabling interface that allows my two UK studies to avoid the charges of being pernicious and specious, and other associated criticisms.

Defining “culture”
It is also important to define a usage of the word “culture” since consideration of the arts, in the form of biennials of art, and its relationship with cultural and other public policy is the defining characteristic of this thesis. The word “culture” has been used and abused within public policy discourse at sector, local, regional, national and international levels for quite some time, along with related words and terms such as “the arts”, “the creative arts”, “creative industries” and “cultural industries”. These have become portmanteau words and terms, often used interchangeably, with shifting meanings and ‘terminological clutter’, depending on the context in which they are used, and by whom (Galloway and Dunlop 2007, Gordon 2010). Politicians, regional bodies and local authorities have often used the word “culture” in an anthropological manner, intended to encompass a wide range of human leisure activity, lifestyles and behaviours (as Liverpool City Council did in its bid and lead-up to its year as Capital of Culture 2008). This anthropological usage is inappropriate and unhelpful to this research, and, according to Hesmondhalgh and Pratt (2005, p5) stretches the concept “beyond breaking point”, and in my view, to the point of meaninglessness. According to Vickery (2007), there is also a serious macro-effect in policy
terms by this failure to properly “conceptualise” what culture means:

“In the context of government policy fields, the concept of culture or art remains weak and undefined. There is no central synthesising concept driving a clear conceptual case on how culture or the arts is a structural feature of the social economy and thus open to systematic application on its own terms within the context of substantive physical reconstruction of the urban environment.”

Although Vickery is talking about the role of culture in regeneration here, this analysis is applicable on a wider basis and reflects current debates and struggles within cultural policy at empirical and policy levels. It perhaps partially explains the threat to continued investment in the arts at governmental levels, where at points since 2010, there have been reports that the Coalition government has been considering abolition of both Arts Council England and the DCMS.4

Bearing these points in mind, throughout this thesis I have tried to minimise my use of the word ‘culture’ in favour of a more precise use of language. But where I have used the word or phrase ‘culture’ or ‘cultural policy’, unless in a direct quotation or external context, it is intended to signify a meaning approximating ‘the arts and creative industries’ with ‘the arts’ corresponding to the Arts Council England footprint,5 and ‘the creative industries’ corresponding to the 2006 DCMS definition.6 This is still not entirely accurate or comfortable, given that sectors such as advertising and software are within the DCMS definition of the creative industries, but it allows for a pragmatic solution in this context.

5 Before ACE took on responsibility for museums, libraries and archives, therefore Visual Arts, Theatre, Dance, Combined Arts, Music, Literature
6 Advertising, architecture, arts and antique markets, crafts, design, designer fashion, film, video and photography, software, computer games and electronic publishing, music, visual and performing arts, publishing, television and radio.
**A Developing Research Project**

My suspicion from the start of this research was that it was likely that the reality of biennial delivery is far more nuanced than has previously been acknowledged within mainstream policy and biennial delivery organisations, and my research further illustrates this view. That is, to say that biennials will *cause* regeneration within a culture-led regeneration strategy is inaccurate and misleading. Similarly, to dismiss them as simply “instruments of neo-liberal economic agendas” is equally partial and inaccurate. My research suggests that the relationship between biennials of art, quantifiable regeneration and gentrification is indistinct and complicated. My hypothesis is that while the delivery of the biennials chosen for study must *negotiate* these agendas, and are to a significant extent, *enabled* by these agendas, and even *implicated* in these agendas, the UK biennials functionally resist the march of what Peck (2010) calls “neo-liberalisation” within their own limited sphere of operation and influence. The chapters that follow outlines the arguments with an indication of where further knowledge, research and understanding is required.

Chapter two goes into considerable detail about the theoretical research background as it relates to UK domestic public policy. It describes the conditions into which the UK biennials were ‘born’ and the influences and impacts that these have had on the arts generally, and on my two UK studies in particular. The urgency of urban regeneration needs provides a dominant backdrop, along with the increasing deployment of “culture-led regeneration”. The advent and increasing riches of the National Lottery gains to good causes from 1994 enabled a significant increase in arts funding, enabling not just the growth of the sector, including new biennial events, but a large number of new capital build programmes to take place. Additionally, new thinking in urban development, from thinkers such as Landry (2000, 2006) and Florida (2002, 2005) influenced the policy and delivery of local and regional authorities in their attempts to address long-standing issues and to provide civic infrastructures for the twenty-first century.
Chapter three focuses specifically on the role of biennials as an expression of international policies, which includes that of cultural exchange and the global art market. But more importantly for this research, biennials are explored as vehicles of other international trends, in particular destination marketing, the influence of neo-liberalism as trans-national economic development policy and the co-option of the biennial model as “soft power” within the world’s diplomatic stages.

Chapter four provides an in-depth look at the Liverpool Biennial as my primary case study, citing supporting evidence from other biennials as appropriate. Analysing its model, operations, delivery and contribution to the city, it describes its achievements, including the consistency of its aesthetic vision and its negotiation of instrumental policy, as well as questioning its role and impact within the regeneration of the city. Overall, this chapter provides the empirical and other evidence to support the conclusions that I will present in chapter five.

The final chapter articulates the findings of this research project, presenting the conclusions I have arrived at, and further contextualising them within a wider framework.

**Research Methodology**

My primary methodology has been a case study approach, using primary and secondary research methods to examine the work and localised contexts of three large scale visual arts events:

1. The Liverpool Biennial
2. The Folkestone Triennial
3. The Istanbul Biennial

The practical methodology I have employed can be divided into three specific areas, which are primary research, secondary research, and the role my own professional experience within the arts has played within the
research methodology. These are presented in turn below.

**Primary research has involved:**

1. **Observation**
   - Seven editions of the Liverpool Biennial.
   - The 2011 Folkestone Triennial.

2. **Interviewing key players using a semi-structured interview technique.**

   Interviews with staff focused on the operation of their professional roles, approaches and motivations, aims and vision, experiences of enablement or constraint, relationships with peer organisations and other stakeholders, and subjective views of their biennial and the value or otherwise of biennials generally.

   Interviews with associates and stakeholders focused on their experience with the biennial, its history, their role in working with it, attitudes towards the art it has presented and the arts in general, the external policy and economic climate and what impact this is having.

   Interviews about the Liverpool Biennial took place with:
   - The first and second directors of the Liverpool Biennial, Lewis Biggs in 2011, and Sally Tallant in 2012.
   - Seven members of Liverpool Biennial staff in 2012 (all staff except book-keeper and IT).
   - ‘Founding committee’ members and subsequent curators and host venue directors within each biennial edition: Eddie Berg, director of FACT, in 2011; Bryan Biggs, director of the Bluecoat, in 2012.
   - Karen Newman, ex-curator at FACT, then curator at Open Eye Gallery, in 2012.
   - Sarah-Jayne Parsons, exhibition curator at the Bluecoat, in 2012.
   - Councillor Wendy Simon, Labour, Cabinet Member for Culture and Tourism, Liverpool City Council, in 2012.
• Councillor Barbara Mace, Liberal-Democrat, Shadow Cabinet Member for Culture and Tourism, in 2012.
• Mark Kitts, Deputy Director Regeneration, Liverpool City Council, in 2012.
• Emily Speed, Liverpool-based artist (former member of AIR Council and nominated for Northern Art Prize in 2012) in 2012.
• Olga Gribben, then visual arts relationship manager for Arts Council England, in 2012.

Interviews about the Folkestone Triennial took place with:
• Andrea Schlieker, director-curator, in 2012.
• Jennifer Thatcher, education co-ordinator, in 2011.

Interviews about the Istanbul Biennial took place with:
• Bige Orer, director, in 2011.
• Administrator, Istanbul Biennial, in 2011.
• Dr Serhan Ada, course director, Masters in Cultural Policy, Istanbul Bilgi University, in 2011.
• Ozge Celikasman, Dr Ada’s personal assistant, in 2011.
• Gulsan Karamustafa, artist based in Istanbul, exhibited twice in Istanbul Biennial and was a Management Committee member for ten years. International reputation with Tate purchasing one of her works in 2012.

3. Audience questionnaire at the Liverpool Biennial 2012

A questionnaire was distributed at four of the exhibition venues (the Bluecoat, the Cunard Building, FACT and the Monro Pub) during the opening weekend of the 2012 edition, and three subsequent weekends. Biennial volunteers pro-actively asked visitors to complete the questionnaire, with 229 filled in and collected. The questionnaire asked a range of questions designed to gauge the audience response to actual
artworks, the biennial in general, and their attitudes towards art. Although not statistically significant, reasonable demographic spread is represented in the completed questionnaires. Poorly represented groups were the disabled and long-term sick (0.9%), and the unemployed (3.5%). Overall, this empirical research suggests a high percentage of Merseyside residents visiting (confirmed by externally commissioned reports with larger samples); and that this support for the biennial, and the arts generally, exists across the spectrum of people with no existing knowledge of the visual arts, to those with a vocational interest. It is also noted that access to questionnaires was only available to people who had already decided to visit, and that completion was self-selecting with prompts from Biennial volunteers.

**Secondary Research**

Secondary research has involved four areas of documentation review. The aim of the top level document review was to gain a detailed knowledge of the local, regional and national policy context of each Biennial; identify key debates and commentary; and mine sources of relevant quantitative data. The second level, a localised document review, gave me a solid understanding of how each organisation and programme operates; the organisational perspective on the challenges and opportunities it has faced; an understanding of organisational culture and structure, and provided a significant amount of factual quantifiable information. All levels of documentation reviews informed, cross-referenced and authenticated where appropriate the semi-structured interviews and other research activity; and vice versa.

The four areas of review were:

1. “Grey literature” produced from within the visual arts sector, often commenting on policy and funding issues as they affect the sector in practice.
2. Literature relating to biennials of arts generally, and in particular, from three books: The Biennial Reader; Shifting Gravity; and Biennials – Art on a Global Scale. There is a paucity of rigorous academic literature relating to biennials, but a considerable amount of “grey literature” that is of value, particularly that which has been produced by curators.

3. Localised documentation and literature relating to my three studies. For example, cultural policy and strategy documents produced by municipal or other authorities relating specifically to Istanbul, Liverpool and Folkestone. Academic commentary on the cultural and political histories of these locations.

4. Documents produced by each biennial organisation, such as meeting minutes, forward plans, evaluations, economic impact reports, marketing and audience studies, artistic direction guides, internal policies, funding applications, catalogues, contracts and financial data, and conference reports (for example, the Istanbul Biennial produced two substantial publications in 2011 with each guest curator critically discussing first hand and in detail each biennial edition since inception). First hand accounts, for example, the former chief executive of the Creative Foundation produced a comprehensive book explaining in detail the regeneration strategies, processes and experiences of Folkestone (“Adventures in Regeneration”). In particular, the Liverpool Biennial allowed me to spend a week in their archive, with unrestricted access, which has proved extremely valuable.

Also reviewed have been press reviews, critics’ opinions, media interviews, and artists’ and other commentary in various media.

Author’s professional experience, knowledge and contacts

My own professional background informs every aspect of this research project and has enabled me to bring considerable existing knowledge and experience to the research question and narrative. My professional background in the arts has involved project delivery, strategy and policy
development, teaching and writing. I have worked in Arts Council England, four local authorities, taught at three universities at BA and MA levels, and was course director of an arts management programme. Freelancing for four years, I now work with small arts organisations on projects and research that has a strategic impact for them, and regularly write about the arts and cultural policy in various national magazines, newspapers and websites. This considerable background knowledge is constantly updated through daily working within the sector and has sometimes been hard to separate from knowledge gained through formal academic research methodology. My hope is that this enhances the rigour and vitality of the thesis.
Chapter two: The UK Context for Biennials of Art

Introduction

One of the motivations for this piece of work was to better understand the interface between cultural and other public policy and a specific form of art production and presentation, the biennial of art. Coming from a lengthy and reasonably senior background as an arts professional, I had practical experience of cultural and other public policy in the UK, and how each organisation I worked in or with adapted, to an extent, its programming, planning and operations according to particular priorities, strategies and funding opportunities. Equally, having worked in four local authorities, I was aware how local politics – the particular make-up of a Council administration and the beliefs of individual politicians – had a surprisingly strong influence at a local level (a process reportedly similar at national level) leading sometimes to a certain human irrationality and unpredictability in the system. Having wrestled with programme delivery within this context on a daily basis for many years, I have tried to bring a practical understanding of cultural and regeneration policy to this research. That understanding has been greatly enhanced by the academic literature addressing various aspects of arts and cultural regeneration policy. This is largely the subject of this chapter, which sets out to investigate how and where biennials sit within the domestic political, cultural and regeneration context. However it also sets out to show that the literature and theory do not, on the whole, reflect experience “on the ground” – the experience of the professionals actually delivering large scale biennials and other arts projects. My experience in the sector makes me particularly aware of how committed to realising projects of high artistic quality many arts professionals are, and how determined they are to achieve this by working with, around and through various public policy agendas that surround the cultural workplace. For many of them, years of experience of working within a regularly changing system has enabled a long term view, sound judgement, and in the most skilled, adeptness at making the system work for their organisation and programme, along with valuable cognitive agility. The contention underpinning this chapter is
therefore that looking at the actual practice of realising large-scale multi-sited biennial of art exhibitions provides additional insight for scholars into how policy is translated by arts professionals into public experience of the arts.

As I originally suspected and this research has confirmed, there is relatively little academic literature that deals specifically with biennials of art and cultural, or other public policy. While there is a small but growing literature around the role of large-scale events (Garcia 2004; Evans 2003; Boland 2010), these tend to look at the “mega-event” such as Capitals of Culture, the Olympics, or other international sporting activities. With the exception of discussion of the Liverpool European Capital of Culture 2008 year, they have limited direct relevance to this study. Even Arts Council England, the major funding and development body for the arts in England, had no formal strategy or policy on biennials of art⁷, and the outgoing director of visual arts was reluctant to give me an interview on the subject. This may be understood as biennials being a niche and specialist genre, which, despite their proliferation worldwide, are relatively few in number in the UK. The cultural policy and regeneration fields of academic research – generally undertaken by scholars, rather than arts professionals – may also find biennials both too specific and too varied as a subject, embedded as they are within a specialised part of the art and curatorial world.

Where biennials are specifically addressed it is often in terms of their geopolitical nature and status, and their tendency to reproduce existing global power relations. This is an area of significance to this study, however many of these papers are either too macro in stance, or too specific in their reference to particular biennials to do much more than broadly inform this study. Many papers tend to originate in the fields of art history, or curatorial studies, and the concerns of these disciplines are at their core, making them less relevant to this research. Within arts sector publications, there is a reasonable amount of “grey” literature about biennials, written with no

⁷ Requested as part of this research.
particular depth by arts journalists, and some more usefully written by the ‘star’ curators for hire, who travel the world applying an aesthetic and intellectual framework to the assembly of artworks that make up each biennial edition. This is informative, particularly in terms of giving an international perspective and overview, but must also, to an extent, be seen as self-legitimating. There have also been a number of high level and international symposia, lectures and debates that biennials have inspired, some of which have resulted in documentary publications, for example, the Bergen Biennial Conference in 2009 and the first World Biennial Forum in 2013.

But as the editors of The Biennial Reader note – to date, this is still the only substantial publication on biennials - “little sustained critical assessment of the phenomenon – in its specificities and implications – has yet been carried out” (Filipovic and Ovstebo 2010 p16). This absence demonstrates that there is considerably more literature addressing culture-led regeneration and cultural policy than biennials of art. This thesis attempts to bridge cultural policy and culture-led regeneration research with biennial-specific research in order to make a useful contribution to an emergent field.

The Policy Context for Biennials of Art

Biennials sit firmly at the interstices between several key currents of the twenty-first century world. Those currents include international art practices of production and presentation, regeneration and urban social issues, international “destination marketing”, and global competition for tourist spend and inward investment (Jones 2010), as well as less tangible notions of “the civilised society” (Hunt 2004) and diplomatic “soft power” (Miller 2013). Interrogating these currents through the biennial lens reveals a complex interplay of agendas and politics, and comparing the UK context with that of Istanbul and its biennial makes for a richer understanding and perspective.

Cultural policy has become increasingly aligned to a variety of strands of
regeneration policy and initiatives, which have ultimately evolved into regional, national and international economic development initiatives - although for organisations like the Liverpool Biennial and the Folkestone Triennial, the quality of programming remains a key indicator. Within this chapter, I have found it helpful to consider regeneration, culture-led regeneration and cultural policy separately, despite their continued alignment and interconnectedness, in order to articulate most clearly the dominant strands of public policy that affect my case studies. (Key emergent trends such as destination marketing, Landry (2000, 2006) and Florida’s (2002, 2005) influential thinking on urban policy and the neo-liberal economic context are discussed in chapters three, four and five). What becomes clear in terms of the UK is a pattern of significantly increased resources that biennial organisations have intentionally utilised to their advantage – providing that in return they demonstrate tangible contributions towards these non-arts agendas.

My three biennial studies have commonalities in that they are sited in locations that have urgent regeneration and modernisation agendas. The arts largely operate against this background and in many cases respond to it, by obligation and aesthetic. Therefore over the last twenty-five years regeneration has become the single most important context for publicly funded biennials. Interestingly, in Istanbul the situation is strikingly different from that of the UK, as is detailed in chapter four.

The dilapidated and neglected state of many of many of the UK’s core cities at the beginning of the era of biennial proliferation presented the urgent case for social and physical regeneration and provides the background for significant changes in cultural policy. It is no exaggeration to state that the impact of urban decline and its associated problems have been a consistent and dominant feature of late twentieth century domestic policy, with numerous and wide-ranging responses to what appear to be intractable social, urban, economic, educational and quality of life problems (Vickery 2007 p28). These responses and initiatives have evolved and changed over time, as professional knowledge and experience has increased, and as
successive governments have emphasised specific priorities based on their political values. This sets the scene for an increasing use of arts and “culture” within aspects of urban regeneration, to the point where it moved from the margins to the mainstream in what has come to be known as ‘culture-led regeneration’.

It is appropriate to provide a brief history of UK regeneration initiatives with particular reference to Liverpool and Folkestone, because it is so important within the UK context, and within the context of those locations. The Liverpool Biennial and the Folkestone Triennial are also judged by their non-arts funders on their contribution to regeneration agendas. Liverpool has been one of the hardest hit of Europe’s post-industrial cities leading it to be judged by the European Union as one Europe’s most deprived cities and ‘awarded’ Objective One status in 1994, allowing it to bid into European Structural Funds for regeneration purposes. The city has been the recipient of considerable public funds - over £3bn worth in the last thirty years (Liverpool Echo 9.3.04) – from Europe and UK central government, given to alleviate symptoms of poverty and industrial decline in the city. The Folkestone Triennial is also overtly positioned as part of a holistic and long-term regeneration strategy for Folkestone (Ewbank 2011). This history is directly relevant to the aims and work of both the Liverpool Biennial and the Folkestone Triennial, therefore, there is value in considering both the Liverpool Biennial and the Folkestone Triennial within the regeneration as well as cultural regeneration sphere.

A History of Regeneration in the UK
The word “regeneration” – along with variations on the theme, such as “urban renewal” “renaissance” and “revitalisation” – has come to be widely-used by policy-makers, professionals and academics, for a range of initiatives, approaches and practices that attempt to address aspects of urban blight and decline (Tallon 2010). Vickery (2007) suggests a usage difference between the terms regeneration and urban regeneration:

“It now seems to be the case that the single term ‘regeneration’
generally signifies the more basic industrial land physical reconstitution and development, whereas ‘urban regeneration’ refers to the development of the orbit of social habitation: it involves communities and the social-cultural infrastructure...” (p14).

However, as Tallon (2010) points out, “regeneration remains the most recognised and widely used term by professionals and academics alike” and has also “come to be associated with any development that is taking place in towns and cities” (p5). It is therefore the term used in this study to refer to both physical development and social-cultural infrastructure and initiatives. An idealised definition of regeneration is put forward by Roberts (2000 in Tallon 2010) as:

“a comprehensive and integrated vision and action which leads to the resolution of urban problems and which seeks to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental conditions of an area that has been subject to change” (p17).

However, given regeneration in practice has been an ongoing multi-dimensional series of processes, there are obvious criticisms to make of this definition. Notably, as Turok (2005 in Tallon 2010) points out, “regeneration is rarely, if ever, comprehensive… and the urban problems addressed are not resolved in practice because they can be amongst the most intractable or ‘wicked’ problems in society” (p5). Tallon’s 2010 description of the broad aims of regeneration work well for this study, corresponding as it does with contemporary on-the-ground guiding principles and practice in both Liverpool and Folkestone, my two UK research case studies:

“In terms of people, regeneration aims to enhance skills, capacities and aspirations to enable them to participate in and benefit from opportunities. Regeneration also aims to improve economic competitiveness in terms of business performance to create more local jobs and prosperity. To attract both people and business, regeneration aims to improve the general appeal of a place. The
theory is that in balance all three elements combine to secure the upward trajectory of a locality in a long-term and sustainable manner” (p5).

How these aims and principles have been employed in Liverpool and Folkestone is explored in chapter four.

The conditions that have made the need for regeneration in the UK so urgent have their roots in changes to the national economy post World War Two. The decline of traditional industries and manufacturing from the 1950’s onwards has been widely documented. Cheaper labour costs and overheads led to large-scale production shifting to Asia in a process that has accelerated since the 1950s. In both the US and Europe, it has been acknowledged that an economy based on manufacturing is not viable for the future. In the UK, the decline in manufacturing was particularly sharp in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Lupton and Power (2004) describe the result:

“Industrial collapse left a legacy of high worklessness, poverty and declining social conditions. The physical environment of industrial areas was blighted by contaminated land, obsolete infrastructure, and the debris of two century's of rapid growth and exploitation of natural resources” (p14).

Major urban centres outside London experienced decreasing populations as people left to find work in more affluent areas, and the children who went to university often did not return to their home cities. Liverpool, for example, lost 7% of its population between the 1991 and 2001 census’ (Lupton and Power 2004 p7), additional to a recurring population decline from the 1970s, with reports that the city lost 10,000 people a year in that decade. 8 Lupton and Power note repeating vicious and virtuous cycles: “Declining cities are heavily concentrated in declining regions; growing cities are concentrated in growing regions” (p14). High worklessness led to lower civic tax revenues

and higher welfare costs for these cities, contributing to less local ability to alleviate conditions and invest in urban renewal programmes.

The effects of urban decline came to national prominence in 1981 as violent civil unrest took place on the streets in Brixton, London, and Toxteth, Liverpool – two inner city areas of extreme poverty. This marked the beginning of a decade of two extremes: a Conservative under Margaret Thatcher that deployed monetarist policies that were shown to have exacerbated hardship, divisions and inequalities in the country, and initially pushed the unemployment rate to above 3m. At the same time, deregulation of the City (the financial trading centre of London), privatisation of utilities, the railways and other previously State-owned entities, along with a focus on entrepreneurialism, were all symptomatic of a shift “from managerialism to entrepreneurialism” in urban governance (Harvey 1989). This allowed rocketing wages and a new ‘get rich quick’ culture for those able to take advantage of the financial opportunities these and other policies presented (Clegg 2009). In response to the visible manifestations of urban unrest, Conservative government Secretary of State for the Environment Michael Hesseltine spearheaded initiatives intended to address issues of urban blight in places such as Liverpool, London, and Bristol (Hesseltine 2000). His approach can be characterised using Vickery’s 2007 definition as “basic industrial land physical reconstitution and development”. For example, in Liverpool, two major land and building-based projects were undertaken:

1. Physically decontaminating land along the Mersey, and re-opening it to the public in 1984 with the short term “Liverpool International Garden Festival”.
2. Re-developing the derelict but architecturally important Albert Dock into a shopping and leisure attraction, which included the creation of the flagship Tate Liverpool.

Both initiatives were intended to prepare previously derelict urban space for private sector investment, which would in turn stimulate economic development via the creation of jobs, the attraction of tourism and service-sector businesses. The Albert Dock development was by far the most successful (although its original remit of housing local independent businesses at affordable rents soon gave way to higher rents that attracted chain stores, bars and restaurants). The Garden Festival site remains largely undeveloped although open as a park and river walkway.

From a theoretical perspective, both of these are examples of specific initiatives intended to stimulate economic development via entrepreneurial activity, an approach consistent with political Conservatism, with its beliefs in free-markets and a limited role for the State. These and other projects utilised methods such as the creation of the controversial Urban Development Corporations (UDCs), Enterprise Zones, public-private partnerships and property-led regeneration. Tallon (2010 p30) identifies five stages of policy approach since 1945, demonstrating how they are experimental and sometimes reflecting a lack of institutional knowledge and experience, but are also directly influenced by the political colour of the Government of the day. For example, the “structural approach” – which assumes problems of urban decline lay in “societal forces” – is associated with the Callaghan Labour government from 1977–1979. From 1979-1991, a period when a Conservative government in power with what has subsequently come to be acknowledged as an explicitly neo-liberal agenda (Harvey 2005; Tallon 2010) the approach was a mixture of structural but also “social pathology”, where the problems of urban areas are located in the failings of people who live in them (Cochrane 2000 p535).

In 1989 the Audit Commission published a review of urban policy in the decade since 1979, and was critical of a number of aspects of this Conservative government approach.10 For example, they cite “important sources of friction, particularly in the relationship between central and local

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government” and that “key organisational structures have fallen into disrepair” (p1). Similarly, researchers of these initiatives have found that, for example, the structure of UDCs lacked local accountability and therefore local “buy-in”, impairing their effectiveness, and that Enterprise Zones were largely ineffective since rather than stimulating new business, they tended to redistribute the locations of existing ones (Tallon 2010). Researchers have regarded the impact of these policies as “at best modest” (Robson 1994, Tallon 2010). Vickery (2007) comments on “the now notorious intellectual limitations of Conservative policy”. Drawing on his own and others’ research, Oatley (1995, pp 262-265) summarised the principal criticisms as:

- The definition of the urban problem and the scale of the response – too much focus on symptoms and not enough on causes; not enough investment relative to the scale of the problems;
- Fragmentation of policy and lack of co-ordination – too many government departments responsible for urban policy and too many separate and different initiatives;
- Lack of a long-term strategic approach;
- Over-reliance on property-led regeneration – seen as relatively ineffective at attracting private sector investment and overlooking human issues such as education and training;
- Problems of governance, managerialism and bureaucracy.

Despite various regeneration initiatives, at the tail-end of the Conservative government in the mid-1990s, in Liverpool and Folkestone the economic and social outlook remained dire. According to a Mersey Partnership report (2009):

“The process of de-industrialisation through the 1970s and 1980s impacted heavily on the industrial cities and regions of northern England. The LCR(W) proved to be no exception with an employment base of 1.1m at the start of the 1980s falling by 8% to the mid 1990s, but the rate of decline was more pronounced in the
Jones and Wilks-Heeg (2004) cite a loss of 192,000 jobs – 53% - in Liverpool between 1971 – 1996. In Folkestone, when the charitable Creative Foundation was formed in 2002, there was still a huge requirement for regeneration interventions in the town, ranging from physically revitalising semi-derelict urban areas to addressing failing schools to stimulating business start-ups. The early 1990s saw a change in approaches to regeneration, with attempts to respond to the criticisms of the 1980s model (Tallon 2010). Vickery (2007) summarises the rhetorical and policy changes from a Conservative government to the New Labour government:

“During the first four years of New Labour’s governance some conceptual innovations emerged – the use of the term ‘quality of life’ as a policy concept; the integration of social and environmental matters: regeneration was no longer fragmentary in its focus on social behavioural problems and employment related economics” (p44)

This period saw the rise of what has come to be known as “culture-led regeneration” and later on in the decade, significant changes to cultural policy that further aligned it with wider policy agendas.

Culture-led Regeneration

I refer extensively to Vickery’s (2007) paper for the foundation and narrative elements of this section, since this paper usefully and comprehensively synthesises considerable evidence and research from the New Labour years 1997-2007, a period which could be described as the golden age of culture-led regeneration in the UK, to paraphrase ex-Prime Minister Tony Blair. However, as Vickery notes, it was Glasgow’s Capital of Culture year in 1990 (perceived as successful despite later critiques, for example, Garcia

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11 “Economic forecasts for the Liverpool City Region” Pion Economics and Cambridge Econometrics for The Mersey Partnership, 2009, p10. LCR refers to the Liverpool City Region and LCR(W) refers to the wider area including areas such as Warrington, Chester and north Wales.
12 “Adventures in Regeneration”, Nick Ewbank, 2011
2004) when culture-led regeneration rose in profile and credibility in the UK; and during the 1990s when the cultural dimension of urban regeneration emerged strongly in policy contexts. The higher profile was helped by strategic initiatives that created mechanisms that could be used to fund ambitious and additional arts and cultural projects, such as Percent for Art, and Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, which enabled local authorities to levy “developer contributions” as part of private sector capital projects. The introduction of the National Lottery in 1994 with the arts as one of the four original “good causes” (with £3bn awarded to arts, heritage and museum projects in its first seven years (Evans 2002)), enabled significant amounts of extra money to be made available, as did the designation of four areas in the UK qualifying for European Union Objective One status in 1994. The importance of European Structural Funds in Liverpool should not be underestimated, since as well as their considerable monetary value, these funds were able to be spent on arts and cultural purposes within the regeneration context, as a result of the Maastricht Treaty of 1991. Consequently, the city of Liverpool made considerable use of European funding for cultural purposes, and the Liverpool Biennial received a substantial amount of ERDF cash (personal interview Sally Lupton, development manager Liverpool Biennial 2012).

Defining Culture-led Regeneration

It is useful to repeat Vickery’s (2007) understanding that “this concept of ‘culture-led regeneration’ is not singular but multiple and not wholly coherent; moreover it is never hermetic but always embedded in shifting politically-driven agendas” (p6). Used by commentators, the term often remains undefined but situated within regeneration discourses that seek to include a “cultural component”. Its meaning tends to be signposted through manifestations of practice. For example, building on work by Evans (2005) Vickery identifies “four major categories” (p19):

(i) ‘flagship’ cultural facilities, such as signature style architecture or a new cultural institution (such as Tate Modern in London).
(ii) landmark sculptures or public art schemes (Antony Gormley’s Iron Man, and the Birmingham Centenary Square regeneration).

(iii) innovative structural engineering, such as bridges or archways (Coventry’s ‘Whittle Arch’ or Gateshead’s Millennium Bridge).

(iv) Unique performances, events or festivals (such as The Kendal Mountain Film Festival in Cumbria).

Biennials of art map onto (iv) – “unique events or festivals” - but there are two aspects of culture-led regeneration that are noticeably missing from this list. One is mention of the role of large-scale and durational events, such as European Capital of Culture or UK City of Culture. The other are the socio-cultural initiatives that engage residents and those classed as “socially excluded”, “deprived” or “at risk” in projects that aim to transform neighbourhoods or provide access to training and development. These types of initiatives were often enabled by European Objective One money in some parts of the country and were most certainly part of regeneration as well as economic development programmes. With the advent of the National Lottery and the election of the New Labour government, these aspects of (culture-led) regeneration practice were mainstreamed. Vickery rectifies this omission with his consideration of four practical models or methodologies of involving culture within urban regeneration (Vickery 2007 p71):

1. **Urban design led reconfiguration of an urban centre.** This creates some physical change with some degree of permanence in the form of landmark buildings, facilities and public spaces... stimulated market... perhaps with a ‘hub’ around which creative industries or arts and media ‘quarters’ can develop.

2. **Creativity led social renewal.** This is community based activity with various social groupings, minorities, with the intent of integrating ‘creativity’ into various public sector education, training, health and other services; creativity is conceived as a means of developing social interaction, social identities, communications skills and the skills of individual expression.
3. *Arts led Community Development.* This involves the activity of professional or semi-professional artists, and can take the form of artist participation in a leadership role in a regeneration scheme, or whose work plays a generative and symbolic role motivating further regeneration initiatives (famously Antony Gormley’s *Angel of the North*); artists can of course play a role in *creativity-led social renewal,* but would not retain their own professional self-interests in generating their own art; *arts-led community development* could also take the form of artist’s renovating or reinvigorating an urban area (such as artist’s studios or galleries, and their impact on Hoxton in East London).

4. *Arts led Civic Development.* This involves the cultural infrastructure… arts organisations or institutions maintain a central role in this process, whether symbolic (a highly visible and notable institution, [such as] the Sage in Gateshead), or simply in terms of facilities provided, increasing performance or arts production capacity of the area; regeneration is often the policy context for arts-led civic development, but for the organisations concerned the motive an extended cultural infrastructure and institutional profile within the art-world network.

In combination, none of the above have quite enough specificity to genuinely capture the range and nature of projects in the UK over the last fifteen years but they do give a sense of the type and style of intervention that has been employed, and it is possible to map my UK case studies, and aspects of their activity, on to them (specifically, arts led civic development, and varying degrees of community development and social renewal). Use of this framework also works to highlight the activity and framework missing from my third case study, the Istanbul Biennial, which exists largely independently of public policy – by default, since arts policy in Turkey is minimal and where it does exist, is, in my judgment, approximately a century behind the UK. Vickery tends towards understanding culture-led regeneration in terms of capital projects – and indeed, this has been a central and highly visible component. However, regeneration as an evolving notion – no longer tied specifically to urban blight, or even necessarily to
specific social problems, but more generally allied to economic development objectives - means that the above categories, while still useful, are becoming out of date.

What is clear from the literature is that culture-led regeneration takes place within an interdisciplinary context, recognising the relevance, influences and ‘co-production’ of fields such as urban studies, cultural geography, town planning, architecture, urban design, economics, training, and business and management practices. This provides a far richer context than the meager and inaccurate phrase “culture-led regeneration” suggests and reinforces Vickery’s (2007) view that “culture-led regeneration is not a major policy term” (p70).

Problematising “Culture-led Regeneration”

Bianchini and Landry (1994 cited in Vickery 2007) point out general issues that relate to the empirical practice of “initial wave” culture-led regeneration:

(i) Regeneration is invariably based on capital projects, and these are detrimentally expensive to maintain post-facto;
(ii) The construction industry benefits more than the arts sector in terms of capital gains;
(iii) Large capital projects, on completion, absorb large amounts of public sector funds, funds diverted from other beneficiaries;
(iv) It does not necessarily connect with local needs and interests;
(v) It is usually a metropolitan phenomenon, not involving smaller communities.

I have already noted that culture-led regeneration projects are not by definition or necessity always capital, but with this caveat, the above statements are self-evidently true. They are particularly relevant – and problematical – in 2013, as the Arts Council struggles to apportion its decreasing Treasury settlement and is criticised for “propping up buildings” at the expense of small arts organisations, non-building based activity, and
artists pay, working conditions and production. Also missing from these criticisms – and many other commentaries - is acknowledgement of the significantly strengthened and enhanced infrastructure for the arts in the UK, made possible by the extra resources that regeneration and other funding made available. Across the country, this has significantly increased art production and opportunity in a variety of contexts, created new opportunities for artists to have their work seen in professional venues of status, contributed to their employment, professional practice and career development, and has brought distinctive projects and participatory activities to a significant proportion of the public. Arts Council England figures show that 12 million people engaged in some way with visual art activity in 2012. And although the link between culture-led regeneration and biennials is indistinct, this increased credibility, profile and resources have sustained the programmes of organisations like the Liverpool Biennial and the Folkestone Triennial. The importance of this should not be underestimated, coming as it did after two decades of under-investment in the arts (Selwood 2006 p37; Miles, M. 2005).

The inclusion and implication of the word “led” within the phrase culture-led regeneration presents difficulties. Why does Vickery (2007) think that “culture-led regeneration is not a major policy term?” (p70). Evans (2005) explains: “In this model, cultural activity is seen as the catalyst and engine of regeneration.” But on a literal basis very few, if any, regeneration strategies are genuinely led, or driven, by their cultural component. A possible exception is Liverpool’s Capital of Culture 2008 bid (and subsequent action plan), if these are re-considered as cultural regeneration strategies by default. But more usefully, the cultural or arts aspect is the symbol of a much larger project and ambition, with, for example, a new arts building or event being the most visible and attractive representation of it,

easily communicable through media and to residents. This can be argued to be the case for Turner Contemporary in Margate, where the old Dreamland site is still in regenerative flux; and for the Folkestone Triennial which sits within a comprehensive, innovative, long term and wide-ranging regeneration strategy. This has also been argued for the most famous example of them all, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao which opened in 1997, a building of unique and landmark design by “starchitect” Frank Gehry. Drawing 1.3m tourists to Bilbao in its first year after opening, it was seen to enable the development of a city tourist infrastructure and the city’s existing businesses to benefit economically from tourist spend (Evans 2005). It has also contributed massively and almost immediately to the re-branding, or public rehabilitation, of what had been a run-down post-industrial city. The project gave culture-led regeneration its international boost and had cities everywhere scrambling to replicate “the Bilbao effect”. These effects were measured in economic impact statistics, a vocabulary that cuts across sectors and hierarchies and is perhaps better understood outside the cultural sector. The Bilbao Guggenheim is happy to publish the following statistics on its website:

“Total direct expenditure generated by the Museum’s activity in the Basque Country in 2010 amounted to 212,925,617 euros, which translates into an average expenditure of 223.97 euros per visitor. Of this, 27,393 was spent in the Museum itself, with the rest spent within the city. … Therefore, considering direct, indirect and induced effects, the activities of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in 2010 have generated a wealth of 193,228,895 euros in GDP and an additional 26,315,843 euros in revenue for the Basque Treasury, and they have also helped to maintain 3,853 jobs… Between 1997 – 2010 Treasury revenue was 369,520,428 euros and GDP generated was 2,380,824,752 euros, with 4,253 jobs “preserved” (rather than created).”

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However despite initial promise, researchers have found problems within the Bilbao strategy (Evans 2003), summarised by Ploger (2007), who also notes areas where “some concerns and questions about the future remain”. As with many economic impact reports, the art or ‘cultural content’ is invisible in this one. While the sector finds measuring itself on these terms uncomfortable and reductive, and it has been subject of considerable research and debate – see for example, Belfiore’s current Cultural Value Initiative project which attempts to articulate alternative ways of measuring cultural value – there has been an unintended side effect that is enormously beneficial to the arts. As Evans (2005) points out:

“the cultural programme, its purpose, sustainability, mix and relationship with regeneration objectives, is treated independently – being largely the preserve of arts and cultural organisations and funders…and therefore has a benign place in the overall regeneration scheme” (p974).

This has the ring of truth based on my own experience and observations in the sector. Interviews with all three biennial organisation directors have also confirmed that both Liverpool Biennial and Folkestone Triennial have benefited from this aesthetic indifference by key enabling agencies, ensuring that the artistic programme has remained organisationally independent. The Istanbul Biennial has a policy that each guest curator it employs has artistic independence. This is an important finding for this research, and it provides a foundation stone for the arguments I develop within this thesis.

The Guggenheim legend is accompanied by a perception that a unique flagship building along with the Guggenheim name alone is enough to transform the fortunes of a location. The first Director of the Liverpool Biennial, Lewis Biggs, reports a Liverpool Councillor asking him in 2004

16 http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cr/CASEreport43.pdf accessed 7.1.14
17 http://culturalvalueinitiative.org/about/
whether and how the city should try to attract a Guggenheim (despite already having the Tate Liverpool which opened in 1988).\textsuperscript{18} This story – and the fact that the Tate Liverpool clearly did not “lead” regeneration in the city – illustrates a misunderstanding of culture-led regeneration by local politicians and officials. Perhaps exacerbated by an imperfect understanding of “the Bilbao effect”, the rhetoric can suggest that a flagship cultural building on its own, with or without a strong brand, is enough to regenerate a location. As recently as May 2013, there were rumours of an initiative to bring a Guggenheim to Wales, with former Plaid Cymru MP Adam Price reported to have said:

“This idea is not just a glint in my eye, we have been in discussions with key stakeholders for the past six months. The Welsh Government have been kept informed as have the Arts Council... A Guggenheim would powerfully transform Wales’ international image.”\textsuperscript{19}

These reports prompted the Guggenheim Foundation to issue a public denial: “In response to BBC News reports about a Guggenheim in Wales, we confirm there have been no proposals or conversations on this subject.”\textsuperscript{20} While there are impressive economic impact and visitor figures associated with the Bilbao Guggenheim’s opening, as both Evans (2005) and Landry (2006) point out, the actuality is more sophisticated and complex. The cultural aspect holds the symbolic value while other associated, essential but non glamourous activity, such as improving transport connections, goes on behind the scenes. In The Art of City Making (2006), Landry suggests that the success of the Guggenheim Bilbao, and “the Bilbao effect” was due to its integration into a much wider structured and strategic regeneration programme that renewed and modernised transport infrastructure and other elements of the city (also see Evans

\textsuperscript{18} Interview with author 2011
\textsuperscript{19} http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/guggenheim-lets-bring-one-worlds-3904239 accessed 14.6.13
\textsuperscript{20} Guggenheim Museum tweet 23\textsuperscript{rd} May 2013
2003). He suggests the notion that landmark buildings are “iconic containers” with festivals and programming providing the all-important “content” or quality, contributing to the narrative of the city. In other words, iconic buildings by themselves will not regenerate a city but are effective ‘brand’ carriers that can work within a broader integrated strategic vision of what the future of the city should look like. This idea, of art providing an alternative narrative of place, is useful when thinking about my biennial case studies. Certainly, the Liverpool Biennial provides an alternative popular narrative than that of the previously dominant ones of crime and unemployment. Similarly, the Folkestone Triennial carries an alternative message to that of irresistible seaside decline, and the Istanbul Biennial was specifically positioned to promote the idea of Istanbul as a modern, enlightened Western city. This idea, then, that art can play a crucial role in altering perceptions of a place by creating different stories, contributes quite considerably to place-marketing activity.

The work of urban policy thinkers like Landry (2000, 2006), and Florida (2002, 2005) attempts to address long-standing issues and to visualise refreshed civic infrastructures for the twenty-first century. Florida’s work has proved controversial, with severe criticisms from Peck (2005) and McGuigan (2009) amongst others. It is characterised by a single theory, that by implementing policies that will attract young professionals doing “creative” jobs, a city can develop its economy. The “creative class”, Florida argues, will be attracted by lifestyle facilities and resources, such as cafes, sports and arts facilities. Therefore the provision of these resources are seen as being able to stimulate a “bohemian” atmosphere, will encourage creative-class businesses and practitioners to re-locate, thereby boosting the economy and stimulating the trickle-down effect. A side effect will be that making the city more attractive will also provide greater “place making” and destination marketing potential, thus creating a virtuous circle. It’s a theory that belongs firmly within the Conservative tradition of economic development, and (well founded) criticisms of it centre around the neglect of other workers and social classes, as well as its structural likelihood of increasing social divisions and economic inequality. I refer again to Florida
and his critics in the Conclusion, suggesting that sufficient time has passed for his theories to be evaluated, and that these evaluations tend to discredit Florida’s “creative class” theory.

Landry (2000, 2006) on the other hand, generally promotes a more holistic approach to the city, positioning his work within the strategic urban planning umbrella. His writing (2000, 2006) recognises individual cities as having a unique ecology within which all aspects need to work but he promotes the notion of creativity – “creative solutions” - playing a larger and more cross-cutting role than had traditionally been recognised. Importantly, he recognises “preconditions” for “the creative city”, not least of which is recognition of “a crisis or challenge” which requires a creative solution. Like Florida, he promotes the idea and usefulness of creative people but understands this creativity in the form of personal qualities that can be employed in a variety of situations rather than as a job role. His approach is characterised by a challenge to the traditional thinking that has tended to accompany specific roles, such as land-use planning, effectively promoting the notion of “thinking outside the box” within existing urban planning and management frameworks. His work provides for a “Creative City strategy method” (p166 2000) with associated frameworks and “tools” rather than a one-size fits all solution.

The influence of Florida and Landry, as well as experiential learning by local authorities, regional agencies and Arts Council England, have changed the understanding and application of culture-led regeneration initiatives. These have evolved considerably (along with the basic concept of regeneration) as has the role that culture can play in society. These factors, combined with a dramatically different political and economic landscape since 2008, make ‘culture-led regeneration’ seem a term now belonging firmly in the past. Instead, this activity has come to be dominated by an overarching concern with economic development, and the role that culture – the arts - can play, at both macro and micro levels, in contributing to this.
Cultural Policy

Cultural policy and its alliance with wider agendas has been contested ground over the last twenty years as it has become inextricably intertwined in the regeneration, education, social inclusion and health public agendas. This has led, I suggest, to an increasingly indistinct boundary between regeneration, economic development and domestic cultural policy. It marks a dramatic change in priorities that has been controversial, both within the sector where it was felt by some senior arts managers and some artists (such as Sir John Tusa and Mark Wallinger) to overly influence arts organisations’ core missions, or have the potential to do so, and within academic debate. On the one hand, the arts have been ‘instrumentalised’ by successive governments and UK Arts Councils (measured and justified in terms of its contribution to agendas extrinsic to its own qualities and benefits) and perceived to be controlled to an unprecedented degree. On the other, these changes have enabled and sustained a great renewal in the nation’s arts infrastructure, stimulating production, new forms of activity and experiment, a great expansion and professionalisation of the sector and generally significantly increased audiences.

The increasing credibility of cultural policy as a field for academic research has given rise to a body of literature that questions the outcomes, methodologies and ideological positions that have underpinned the manifestation of domestic cultural policy and culture-led regeneration (for example, Belfiore 2002; Evans 2003, 2005; Matarasso 1997; Mirza 2009, 2012; Merli 2002; Miles and Paddison 2004; Miles, M. 2005; Jancovich 2011; Miles 2012). Criticisms of cultural policy since 1997 centre around the increased harnessing of the arts for overtly social and economic purposes, and the increasing privatisation of the public sphere. While it is acknowledged that patronage of the arts has never been given freely without expectation of certain outcomes – whether from the Medicis in Renaissance Italy or from the modern State (Vuyk 2010), commentators have questioned the effectiveness of the increasingly instrumental use of the arts; the position of the arts within creative industries policy, and how cultural value is being defined. In relation to the use of the arts as a vehicle
for social inclusion under New Labour, the debate centres on three areas: its effectiveness in practice; access versus excellence; and whether it is being used as a ‘palliative’ for social concerns, displacing the obligation to address structural issues that have lead to inequalities and differences in life chances.

The embedding of wider policy initiatives within the arts funding system has also come under scrutiny. For example, while New Labour created a governmental department dealing exclusively with culture, media and sport – the DCMS – it has limited its spending power, required it to report on tangible economic and quantifiable outputs to the Treasury, and insisted that its strategy is “joined up” with other departments under the notion of collective government (Selwood 2006). It can be seen as, in effect, a junior department of government (O’Brien 2013 lecture). Systemically, the DCMS makes a legally binding funding agreement with the Arts Council of England, the main funder for the arts and also a distributor of lottery funds for the arts. As part of these agreements, participation and social inclusion have been foregrounded, along with requirements to report quantifiable outcomes back to the DCMS. Selwood (2006) identifies how the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review “committed the Department and its sponsored bodies to the delivery of government objectives” (p38). DCMS responsibilities included the intention:

“to maximise value for money, review the structure of its public bodies, and encourage Arts Council England and local authorities to become more strategic. It also made clear that it would pursue certain priorities, in particular those associated with the government’s social agenda” (Selwood 2006 p37).

Further the DCMS was subject to a Public Service Agreement and “responsibility for the fulfillment of these is passed on to its sponsored bodies” (Selwood 2006 p38). In turn, local authorities followed government lead, and since the early 1990s, have also explicitly cited their justification for supporting the arts in terms of their contribution to other agendas at a
local level, for example, regeneration, health, social inclusion, education, tourism, destination marketing, and employment – if only for the pragmatic reasons of internally securing budgets for the arts. With the election of New Labour in 1997, local authorities were invited to take a more holistic approach to the provision of culture, integrating it into community and area strategies, and eventually into urban planning documents such as Core Development Frameworks (now an obsolete requirement). These documents promoted the use of arts and culture as contributors to the government’s social inclusion and other agendas (health, learning, diversity, access, economic development, ‘sense of place’) and contributed to the instrumental uses of art and culture. This new centrality of the arts, as a credible discipline taken seriously by Government, changed the status of the sector considerably and brought welcome extra resources with it. The New Labour document “Culture and Creativity: The next Ten Years” had a foreword by then Prime Minister Tony Blair in which he stated “…arts are part of the core script of this Government.” (DCMS 2001), and Blair’s own assessment was that New Labour had created “a golden age for the arts” under his leadership.

However, this “golden age” did not come without strings attached. The instrumentalisation of the arts was formalised within policy via a number of mechanisms that came together to considerably influence the funding and manifestations of art and art programmes in the UK. An important development was the creation of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) in 1997, created explicitly to address issues of extreme social alienation in the UK, aspects of which are experienced, according to Hutton (1995) by a massive 30% of the population. In the spirit of “joined up government” the SEU had a remit to advise and influence policy across governmental departments, including DCMS, and its work was one of a number of priorities of the new administration. Thus the Arts Council (ACE) has been required to align itself to wider agendas of health, social inclusion, physical regeneration, and others, as well as pass on requirements for tangible quantifiable outcomes to the organisations and individuals it funds. This has lead to strong criticism within the sector of over-bureaucratic systems and top-down managerialism,
felt by some to be at the expense of personal judgements and the quality of artistic production. This has been expressed many times by, for example Sir John Tusa, and was particularly influential when articulated by Sir Brian McMaster in his report “Supporting Excellence in the Arts – From Measurement to Judgement” (2008) (Robinson 2012). Certainly, on a practical basis, it puts a strain on the administrative capacity of organisations, or, where they expand to meet these demands, it can be at the expense of the artistic programme.

Theoretically, ACE has its independence protected by what is known as ‘the arms length principle’, whereby government can broadly set out its priorities but should not interfere in decisions on what art receives funding. During the early New Labour years there was considerable anxiety in the sector that this principle was being eroded (for example, Belfiore 2002; Warnock and Wallinger 2000). The former Chair of ACE from 2005-2009, Sir Christopher Frayling, suggests there is some justification to this, saying that “there were times when the arm was of Venus de Milo length”\(^{21}\) (referring to an ancient Greek statue whose arms are broken off just below the shoulder). This is an important point, since it demonstrates that sector fears were not unfounded and illustrates an awkward “double bind” for those working in the sector. Theoretically they had artistic independence, but the unspoken anxiety was that this might be notional if unstated boundaries were overstepped.\(^{22}\)

Because of this, I made particular effort, through a range of staff interviews, to ascertain how my three biennial studies developed their artistic programme and to discover, what, if any, constraints they may have felt in realising it. As already stated, the artistic directors of my two UK biennials were quite clear that responsibility was vested in them, and that there was no overt ‘interference’ from funding bodies. Similarly, the only significant constraints they reported were those of a practical nature: the apportioning of funding to individual projects, and questions of affordability in terms of

\(^{21}\) Lecture by Sir Christopher Frayling at University of Brighton, 22.5.13, also in 2005 speech at RSA (reported in The Stage http://www.thestage.co.uk/news/2005/03/morris-defends-whitehall-role-in-ace-policy, accessed 4.2.14

\(^{22}\) Discussed by Jude Kelly at “Taking the Offensive” conference organised by Index on Censorship 29.1.13 and based on author experience.
responding to selected artists’ ideas; the nature of finding suitable locations and spaces, along with civic permissions for installation and access; and fabrication and engineering problems or requirements to problem solve. Indeed, Lewis Biggs, ex-Director of the Liverpool Biennial, cites the then Leader of Liverpool City Council as being particularly supportive when one artwork was the subject of “a volume of complaints not seen since the Titanic sank” (Biggs, L interview with author 2011) and the former public art programme director at the Liverpool Biennial reports considerable goodwill and “can-do” attitude within the Council in terms of siting projects in the public realm. The Istanbul Biennial operates differently, in that it is not publicly funded and has a different operational system. However it does need to be accountable to the İKSV senior management who are aligned to the economic interests of the city (the Director of İKSV is also Director of the Eczacibasi global corporation). It has a small administrative team but brings in a guest curator for every edition. The guest curator is chosen by an advisory group that includes the management of İKSV but also artist representatives. According to Bige Orer, the Istanbul Biennial director, once appointed, each curator has complete artistic independence to realise their vision.

However, what is also very clear in my dual role as arts manager and researcher, is a significant disconnection between the rhetoric of arts policy and funding, the academic questioning of it, and its implementation by arts organisations. Commentators questioning cultural policy have tended to come at it from a ‘flawed system’ perspective, making interesting and useful points, but generally arguing for perfection above pragmatism. Further, this literature has the effect of making invisible the professional knowledge, expertise and professionalism of those in the sector who actually make the production and presentation of the arts happen. These professionals are, on the whole, well aware of the flaws in cultural and other policy, and the pressures it puts on them. They work with it where it makes sense, and around it where necessary, and advocate against it when appropriate with the decision makers and stakeholders who can influence change. The most skilled prioritise the art programme and their work with artists regardless of
the external context, and cultivate relationships that can work to support them. They shield the artists they work with from being concerned with it as much as possible. They operate at local and regional levels with specific local and regional knowledge and in many cases act as hubs for the creative sector in their locality.23

In other words, whatever the external context, arts organisations at their best maintain their aesthetic and professional integrity. Alongside this, and equally importantly, is the crucial requirement of a senior management role to have the experience and knowledge to utilise strands of public policy and various streams of finance to their organisations benefit, while still maintaining high artistic quality and organisational integrity. I emphasise this notion of actively utilising public strategy and policy because it is a key point. It is a positive action relating to intention and delivery. This utilisation of regeneration and other streams of funding may be from necessity, but within the sector there is a recognition and gratitude that extra resources have been available through these areas. Without specific public policies it would otherwise not have been available to the arts. Similarly there have been enough progressive and influential thinkers outside the arts sector who have recognised value in making some of this resource available to the arts.

Lewis Biggs, former director of the Liverpool Biennial, cites Howard Rifkin, then Director of Visual and Media Arts at what was North West Arts Board (now Arts Council England, North West), and Peter Mearns at the North West Development Agency (a well-funded regional economic development quango, disbanded by the Coalition Government in 2010), as “the two friends I had without whom it could not have happened”. Mearns agreed that the Biennial should apply for “several hundred thousand pounds” which was awarded from the North West Development Agency marketing budget, “because they couldn’t pay for art, but they recognised that putting art on the street was a form of marketing” (Biggs, L. interview with author 2011). As a result, the North West Development Agency funded the Liverpool Biennial to the tune of £650,000 a year for several years, a considerable

23 See for example, Ladders for Development, a-n The Artists Information Company 2011
sum from one agency and an amount matching that of their Arts Council England regular funding. In Folkestone, the Triennial was initiated and funded through The Creative Foundation, a charitable organisation set up by philanthropist Roger de Haan specifically to spearhead (and seed fund) the regeneration of Folkestone. Its initial contribution to the Triennial was £1.5 million, an amount that has levered in significant extra public funding from art and other sources.

In other words, it is not accurate to think of the arts and arts professionals as powerless victims of cultural policy, helplessly tossed about in the storms of changing priorities and funding. They can, and often do, thrive in the mainstream, or in unexpected ‘liminal’ ways through the qualities of strategic thinking, planning and commitment to mission. The nuance of how they do this, shape and deliver projects to meet local need, local policy and aesthetic concerns is, on the whole, not available to academics within cultural policy and therefore generally not reflected within it. This absence can be interpreted as implying those engaged with arts development, production and presentation are at the mercy of the flawed prevailing policy, without tools to counter its potential effects or to use it to their advantage. This is quite manifestly not the case, or at least not necessarily or always the case. Equally, the response of the visiting public, or members of specific community groups, is directly available to arts professionals but difficult to communicate to researchers or indeed, Arts Council England, local authorities, other agencies or governmental representatives (DCMS 2013; Belfiore 2013). Arguing, as Stevenson (2004) does, that encouraging social inclusion via the arts is motivated by “social control” (and is therefore wrong) is profoundly dismissive of the many arts professionals who have invested significant time and effort in making thousands of projects happen. It is equally dismissive of the thousands of participants in projects who have given time and energy to them, and whose lives may well have been enhanced as a result. Unfortunately, because agreed standards of measurement for this kind of experience do not exist, it is all too easy for non-arts stakeholders such as local authority development officers, the regional development agencies (when they existed) and the Treasury to
argue that because the type of evidence they require is not available, individual impact carries little weight (for example, Ed Vaizey, in his conference speech, Cr8net conference 24.4.13).

Conclusion
How culture-led regeneration initiatives are set-up and intended to work has led some commentators to criticise them as “working quietly with the grain of extant ‘neo-liberalism’ development agendas” (Peck 2005 p740), instruments of state control (Stevenson 2004) or even overstated in importance, as Vickery (2007) puts it: “culture-led regeneration is not a major policy term” (p70). These are critical points for my research question, which aims to explore how much truth these ideas have when applied to my three biennial case-studies. In order to explore and unravel the basis for these critiques, this section has analysed the history and theory of culture-led regeneration – of which both UK biennials are a part - and summarises the key debates that have arisen from this practice.

There have been substantial criticisms of major culture-led regeneration schemes, for example, as an alternative form of property-led regeneration that leads to gentrification, displacing indigenous and low-income populations: “Each story of regeneration begins with poetry and ends with real estate”, Klunzman 2004 in Evans 2005 p959; or as Miles, M (2005) notes: “what is sometimes called urban regeneration (with an implication of community benefit) has become urban redevelopment” (p894). There are difficulties in measuring success over the long-term, along with reconciling the social with the economic and physical outcomes (Evans 2005; Miles and Paddison 2005). These are discussed in detail in chapters four and five in relation to the Liverpool Biennial specifically; with reference to my two supplementary case studies as comparators. Other commentators focus on the co-option of culture to the place-making or destination marketing agendas, the ultimate aim of which is, of course, also economic gains. This is a useful lens for this study, since the proliferation of biennials worldwide from the early 1990s is closely linked to the notion of place-making, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter. Arguably, the drive towards place-
marketing – creating a distinctive city brand that has national and ideally international profile - now tends to over-ride other motivations for culture-led regeneration and dominates current practice. In my view, it also presents the most problematic area, given it has been uncoupled from social-regeneration practices and outcomes. As a result, the disadvantages of increased harnessing of culture and creativity for overtly economic, tourism and entrepreneurial purposes are shown to disproportionately affect those people whose lives are least equipped to adapt and benefit. “A common limitation has been the inability to use cultural hallmark investments to improve the conditions of deprived local communities” (Garcia 2004 p323).

I have here explained the policy context which forms the backdrop to the development of my two UK biennial case studies, and drawn attention to some of the differences between the UK and Istanbul in terms of the role of art in addressing urban issues. I have presented an overview of the academic literature and critiques as it relates to my research, and suggested that valuable as this body of work is, it does not bridge the gap between policy and operational delivery. As a result, there is a perspective available that has not yet been fully articulated, and to which my research aspires to contribute. I have demonstrated that there are valuable policy critiques to make at macro level, but that it is equally important to look at on-the-ground delivery and what can be learnt from doing this. The richness and humanity of the arts exists at the point of delivery and exchange, not in their policy context. In the words of Karen Newman (interview with author 2012), former curator at the Open Eye Gallery and at FACT, both in Liverpool:

“Since 1999, the [Liverpool] Biennial has commissioned over 200 new artworks, which is a brilliant thing for artists and the city. It represents the city to its residents every two years. One of the key strengths has been in putting public art on the street so that it becomes part of people’s everyday experience. It’s shifted the residents’ perception of art, in a good way.”
In other words, the literature, whether based around cultural regeneration or cultural policy, doesn’t tell the whole story. Even when based on empirical research, inevitably it uses a partial lens. What I think is missing from the narrative is an acknowledgement that public policy and associated finance has been a tremendous enabler for the arts generally, and for the Liverpool Biennial and the Folkestone Triennial in particular. Without public policy – and that includes the actual policies that have been in place in the UK over the previous twenty or so years, however flawed – neither of these biennials could have sustained themselves at the significant scale they have for, to date, eight editions (Liverpool Biennial) and three editions (Folkestone Triennial). I have asked direct questions of staff in both organisations and they have been absolutely clear that they do not perceive the servicing required by funders to be in any way a hindrance or source of conflict for themselves or their organisations.

Despite bureaucracy, instrumentalism and the deployment of other agendas, it is demonstrably true that public money has been a crucial enabler for these large-scale and unusual events. This at first appears counter-intuitive when thought about in the context of academic literature which has warned alarmingly and at length of disaster in the arts precisely because of what is critiqued as misguided thinking in policy matters. Certainly, in terms of my original research question, I was surprised to come to this conclusion, commonplace as it now seems. I do not suggest that policy cannot be improved, or that its manifestation in the sector doesn’t make for some tedious work and inefficient use of resources, or indeed, that the relationship between policy, funding and delivery is entirely harmonious. But the process of this research enquiry has convinced me that the relationship is firstly, essentially functional, and second, mutually beneficial (at least in common perception – more on this in chapters three, four and five). Drawing a contrast with the situation in Istanbul, it is clear that a healthy arts ecology needs public policy and finance to support it. Further, that without the constraints and motivations that public policy brings, there is no obligation for the arts, in production or presentation, to have any relevance or benefit to a wider public.
However, discussing regeneration policy is a different matter. There are clearly very significant flaws with property-led regeneration – which as we have seen, is the ultimate basis of all physical regeneration - and the arts have perhaps too often been co-opted into the gentrification agenda, a situation which is discussed further in chapter three. Particularly where very large-scale regeneration projects are concerned, the accusation of neo-liberalism is very clear-cut, even if ameliorated by requirements for affordable housing or section 106 levy or some form of cultural input (although this too is contested ground, for example, Miles). But biennials of art are a very specific genre of art production and presentation, with their own field of practice, internal logic and discipline. In the next chapter I aim to illustrate that standard critiques cannot be unquestionably applied to them and identify the international policy and trends that influence the biennial genre. By positioning biennials within the international sphere – and biennials are essentially international in nature – further levels of examination and insight become possible.
Chapter three: Destination Biennale - The International Context

Introduction

Having examined the UK domestic policy context for biennials in chapter two, this chapter concentrates on the international context for biennials of art. It does this through four themes, which are:

1. Biennials and destination marketing agendas (as one expression of neo-liberalism that implicates biennials);
2. Neo-liberal agendas and the role of culture;
3. Biennials and enlightenment values (leading to their association with neo-liberal values);
4. The art and curatorial context from the perspective of arts professionals.

These themes provide additional insights into the agendas surrounding biennials of art generally, and enable an expanded context in which to examine my three studies in chapter four. Since biennials are understood to be international (Filipovic et al 2010 p14), the international context is necessary for a more complete understanding of biennials of art. This chapter examines how they are positioned within the arts world, and the debate about their co-option to wider political and economic aims on the international stage. It demonstrates how some biennials can become uncomfortably close to the neo-liberal agendas that are critiqued by various commentators such as Peck (2005), Harvey (1989), Brenner and Theodore (2002, 2005) and McGuigan (2005, 2006, 2009). This chapter also presents an overview of the alternative perspective, which I call the “utopian strand” of biennial thinking, which argues that biennials can and do offer opportunities for more progressive possibilities, and even some resistance to prevailing effects of neo-liberal development. By doing this, I aim to present the building blocks of my overall argument, expanded upon in the following two chapters, that although biennials of art are in some quarters associated with neo-liberalism via the globalisation of the art market and their co-option as political statements (and the Venice Biennale can be cited...
as the ultimate example of this), a number of factors make biennials of art at least “modestly disruptive of neoliberal models of development” (Peck 2005 p760) in the UK. Additionally, I note that biennials of art are considered to be in a “self-reflective stage” (Gardner 2011). There is evidence that those closely associated with making individual biennial editions happen are self-consciously aware of the international trends and agendas I discuss in this chapter, and are debating how they – through their involvement with art biennials – could and (perhaps) should respond:

“The model of the biennial is currently being reconsidered; a search for its identity is underway with an attempt to maintain distance from the pressures of the globally operating art market and commercially driven criteria for evaluations.” (Shifting Gravity 2013 p18)

This political self-consciousness and intention from within the international curatorial world represents a crucial aspect of the debate about biennials and is discussed in detail from the art world perspective. This chapter also details the international changes and trends that have impacted on the development of biennials, and which has led commentators to critique them as an instrument of neo-liberalism (for example, Charlesworth 2013). It’s a fascinating story of how biennials have grown beyond their intellectual and practice-based boundaries to a perception of them as desirable and powerful symbols contributing to the nature – perceived and actual – of nation states.

1. The Place-Making-Marketing Agenda
A key context of the post-industrial city is that of an increasingly globalised economy, where competition for corporate investment, job creation and tourism spend is no longer simply regional or even national, but global. To compete on this level, the notion of place-making and destination marketing has gained currency, and art has been deployed to play a significant role within this. As such it can be seen as an evolution of culture-led regeneration as well as a co-option of cultural policy. In its broadest application, arts’ role in place-making has become so seamlessly
intertwined with cultural policy that it is hard to distinguish between them – what Stevenson (2004) calls “city-based cultural planning” (p119). Internationally, biennials of art have come to be perceived as a potential contributor in this agenda (Jones 2010; Marchart 2008).

Place marketing is widely perceived to be an international trend that is consistent with “a framework of zero-sum inter-urban competition for resources, jobs, and capital” (Harvey 1989). Place-making-marketing requires cities to package themselves as a ‘product’ and use targeted marketing techniques to sell themselves to a range of market segments. In order to do this, cities try to position and market themselves nationally and internationally based on qualities that make them distinct from – and therefore as or more desirable than – their comparator or competitor cities. The external perception of a city has come to be seen as enormously important in terms of attracting businesses, private sector investment and skilled workers to locate in a particular place. The culture and leisure facilities available are seen to be an important component of this (Florida 2002), and also help to develop business and leisure tourism (as well as amenities, quality of life and other benefits to the existing population). The requirement to market a city’s (and region’s) strengths and opportunities externally has become an essential part of place-making, as has ‘branding’ or ‘re-branding’ of a particular place (in marketing terms an essential corollary to a distinct identity) (Kearns 1993). However as Evans (2003 p421) points out: “Brand competition and the price of maintaining visibility in a fickle market also ensures that a single dominant product or experience is likely to be diluted.” The advantage of cultural branding in this context is that it is generally plural in nature, and constantly changing, whether in the form of new exhibitions, unique annual or biennial festival programmes and events or expressions of ‘grass-roots creativity’. With this thinking, the role of culture has become understood as contributing to a perception and ability to market distinctiveness: “Culture is the panoply of resources that show that a place is unique and distinctive... Cultural resources are the raw materials of the city and its value base; its assets replacing coal, steel or gold” (Landry 2000 p7). Therefore art’s role in competitive positioning has
become well established, not simply in the UK but internationally:

“The idea that culture can be employed as a driver for urban economic growth has become part of the new orthodoxy by which cities seek to enhance their competitive position... What is remarkable here is not just the speed with which culture driven strategies have become advocated by governments and local development agencies as a means of bolstering the urban economy, but also how their diffusion has globalised. Within the space of little more than two decades, the initiation of culture-driven urban (re)generation has come to occupy a pivotal position in the new urban entrepreneurialism” (Miles and Paddison 2005 p833).

As Evans (2003) implies, place-marketing dictates a constant search for the distinctive and unique on an international basis, as part of the new ‘globalised economy’. For these reasons, competition for titles such as European Capital of Culture or the opportunity to host large scale events, such as the Olympics or Commonwealth Games, is intense. This competitive scenario, taking place on an international as well as national basis, reinforces a culture of winners and losers, and works against polycivic and multi-city networks of co-operation and is seen to be a symptom of economic neo-liberal policy. Harvey (1989) characterises this as a “zero-sum” game that perpetuates and repeats the competition for (finite) revenue investment, already the primary and consistent source of difficulty for civic administrations and city regions. Further, Harvey (1989) critiques the effect of “urban entrepreneurialism” as contributing to “increasing disparities in wealth and income as well as to that increase in urban impoverishment which has been noted even in those cities (like New York) that exhibited strong growth” (p12).

Although opened in 1988 (making it an early example), and positioned as part of a property-led regeneration initiative, the development of a Tate in Liverpool can be seen to provide a significant early cultural place-making project. In this instance, it is the internationally respected Tate brand name
that provides the symbolic value. Tate Liverpool’s association with the redevelopment of the Albert Dock was perhaps the most significant aspect of this development, which otherwise might have been little more than an up-market shopping centre with apartments above. That Tate chose Liverpool above any other city or place brought enormous status and respectability to the development, especially since it was Tate’s first experiment in expansion (opening five years before Tate St Ives, and twelve years before Tate Modern), guaranteeing positive national press, art world attention and a consistent quality of twentieth century art to the residents of Liverpool. It also provides a very different type of activity to shopping and eating, and so could be said to be a “modestly disruptive” force within this centre of free market consumption.

Liverpool’s designation as European Capital of Culture 2008 is another example of destination marketing on a grand scale. This was used as a national and international re-branding exercise for the city (Jones and Wilks-Heeg 2004), one that did indeed change many negative perceptions of the city into positive ones (Impacts 08, Liverpool University 2010), and which attracted considerable private sector capital. Since the Liverpool Biennial was a key part of the successful bid document, and the effect of being awarded the title turned Liverpool into its own ‘cultural microclimate’ (author’s phrase) I discuss this in detail in the next chapter. But worth noting here is the change of the Liverpool Biennial dates from odd years to even years; the first Biennial edition taking place in 1999, the second one in 2002 and every two years thereafter. This ensured that it would coincide with the Capital of Culture year and enabled much to be made of its uniqueness and international outward-facing value within the bidding document (Biggs, B. 2012, interview with author; Molyneux 2011, 2014 interviews with author). Board member and first Biennial director, Lewis Biggs, denies that this was a decision aimed at reinforcing the bid document (and therefore the Biennial’s overt alliance with destination marketing agendas), saying that: “It didn’t happen in 2001 because the Walker24 was shut for refurbishment

24 The Walker Art Gallery hosts the John Moores Painting Exhibition, one of four Biennial strands.
which is how it came out right for 2008” (interview with author 2011). He also cites the delays in appointing a director to the new organisation (which took place in autumn 2000), and the difficulty of organising a biennial edition in only a year (interview with author 2011). The Walker Art Gallery hosts the John Moores Painting Competition and, according to Biggs, the Biennial was initiated in part to bolster this event, hence the ongoing deliberate coincidence of their exhibition dates. It may well be true that the closure of the Walker for refurbishment was the primary reason for delaying the Biennial for a year, but nonetheless, it was extremely useful to the City Council engaged with the Capital of Culture bidding process, that this delay, and subsequent timings, took place. How would the bid document have been assessed had the Liverpool Biennial not been a part of it? That the Liverpool Biennial contributed to cultural tourism in Liverpool was also recognised by the Regional Development Agency which for several years was a very significant funder (£650,000 a year), until its abolition by the Coalition government. Founded to promote economic development in the North West region, it funded the Liverpool Biennial’s artistic programme from its tourism budget, in acknowledgement of the number of tourists its site specific public realm artworks brought to the city, and at least the perceived economic impact this brought with it (Biggs, L, interview with author 2011). The Folkestone Triennial is positioned in a similar way, largely (but not only) as a place-making tourist attraction. Founding director Andrea Schlieker was well aware that it needed to conform to the place marketing agenda but understands this from an arts perspective:

“Yes of course the Triennial attracts people to come, that’s the whole point. Whenever you do an exhibition you want people to come, and if you do an exhibition in a small seaside town, you don’t just want the people from the town to see it, you want people from further afield to see it” (interview with author 2011).

The proliferation of biennials of art allows for a different but related perspective on this theme. Cultural tourism has become increasingly important as an attractor of educated tourists who want stimulation and
entertainment via a range of activities while on holiday, and are willing to pay for it. This has become particularly important in the absence of a sound local economic base, as is the case with Liverpool and Folkestone. Biennials have often been seen as one way of making a city distinctive in its offer, and therefore biennials of art, as large scale events, have come to have an important role as part of place-making-marketing agendas (Sheikh 2009 p155). It is no coincidence that the rise in the number of biennials worldwide from the 1990s onwards – known as biennial proliferation - correlates with the trend towards globalisation – an opening up of economic markets that transcends the boundaries of nation states – and the era of affordable travel. The creation of biennials of art is therefore part of the competitive destination marketing agenda (Sheikh 2009). There is no external bidding process, but more simply, the requirement for enough cash, and the artistic and political motivation to make it happen. Consequently, providing these broad conditions are met, there are no constraints on the number of biennials that can be created, and no formal mechanisms of influence to assess artistic quality. Biennials have therefore played a significant role in the place-making-marketing agenda since the 1990s - although with wildly varying degrees of success in terms of creating international distinctiveness.

2. Neo-Liberal Agendas and the Role of Culture

In this section, I start with a true, if somewhat colourfully written story that is intended to give a sense of how and where art meets the international corporate economy.

A Short True Story

Venice Biennale 2011. Chris Hornzee-Jones, an engineer, works through the night – works through two nights – to resolve a technical problem that is stopping Anish Kapoor’s artwork “Ascension” from working. He has installed this work around the world previously; indeed, he has designed the engineering that makes it work. Why, then, is it not working now, when within 24 hours the international art elite will descend on Venice for the Vernissage? What infernal petty-minded god of this Basilica di San Giorgio
Maggiore has decided that the work is not sufficient to work? A calamity of truly art-world proportions is brewing: a global art star brand, a very expensive project, a stunning church, a high profile Opening – but no art.

Ascension coughs into weak life for 30 minutes as the international curators, press, dignitaries and officials, a few collectors, artists and assorted liggers arrive for the opening. It is enough. No-one is happy, but they are forgiving. Another sleepless night follows. Finally Chris realises the problem lies with the Church’s faulty air ventilator. A new one is ordered but installation is slow and still ongoing the next morning, when Biennale officials rush into the building. They are panic-struck, hyper-ventilating. A new crises awaits, this time of truly genuine horror, because it doesn’t involve the tinpot art merry-go-round, but international mega finance and power:

“Quick, rapido!” they say, “veloce! The Russian Oligarchs are coming!”

They are panicking because these are the really important people, the men with unimaginable money. Allied to this money are formal structures of influence, and with structures of influence comes considerable power. These are the new Masters of the Universe, in control of transnational corporations that make them, in some cases, more powerful than elected heads of state, and certainly richer.

These are the people to whom the international art elite genuflects. These are their gods. Not the art, nor the artists whose concepts the whole edifice rests on. Not the curators who at their best enable the artists to work at their best. But the money, the big money, the I-can-make-your-career money. Money talks, money is powerful, money pays for art production, money makes collections, and production and collections make the art world go round.

The End.

I’ve exaggerated this incident in order to illustrate one aspect of how
biennials are connected not just to specific domestic UK policy as detailed in chapter two, but also to a highly commercialised international art market that is closely linked to trans-national corporations and international finance. This story offers a glimpse into how large-scale international art exhibitions can operate, and the underlying influence of an art market that has expanded greatly in the last twenty years, closely mirroring the stock market (Ferguson and Hoegsberg 2010 p362) with the implication that art has become a blue-chip investment opportunity. As Verhagen (2005) said: “The commerce in art benefits from the appearance of disinterestedness and the institutions that project it. The biennial, like the museum, is crucial to its functioning” (p3). The concern – and questioning around this - is whether the independence of production and presentation of art at the highest levels is threatened by the increasing association of trans-national corporations with biennials and other international institutions.

The caricature of the international art biennial refers to the idea of a commercial art fair hidden behind the civilising notion of high art (Bloch 2013 p108). There is an annual art world calendar with an hierarchy of biennials and art fairs that includes Frieze Art Fair (every September in Regents Park, London, and every May in New York); Venice (biennially, opening in July); Istanbul Biennial (every other September); Art Basel (annual art fair in June); Art Basel Miami Beach (annual art fair in December), Art Basel Hong Kong (annual art fair in May), Sao Paulo Biennial (every other September); and various others scattered in between – The Whitney Biennial, Havana Biennial, the Sydney Biennial, all of which attract an international art elite. The art and artists are flown in to exotic places; rich and privileged people fly around the world going from one to another (Biggs, L. interview with author 2011), with a scattering of art fairs and auctions in between; elite parties take place, large numbers of back-room deals are agreed, artistic and curatorial reputations are confirmed and occasionally, made (Alloway 1968, Bydler 2004, Marchart 2008). The party comes to town every two years, stays for a short period, and leaves. This kind of biennial culture can be considered superficial and irrelevant (Ferguson and Hoegsberg 2010 p363; Jones 2010 p70; Filipovic et al 2010
p13; Verwoert 2010 p187) and like all caricatures, it contains elements of truth and exaggerates them. However, Venice is an event that stands alone, the mother of biennials but particularly unique, and Kapoor is one of a handful of artists whose business brand is genuinely international and of significance in this type of situation. In practice, Venice is also one of only a handful of biennials where the actuality of “bloated art” and rich elites has any real currency. There really are very few biennials that are genuinely part of the international globe-trotting art world calendar, showing works by international brand-name artists, and genuinely having global reach (an estimated twenty-five, in the opinion of curator Daniel Birnbaum, quoted by Ferguson and Hoegsberg 2010 p363). Most of the other one hundred and fifty or so biennials are considerably more modest, and struggle to achieve anything beyond national or even local reach.

The international agendas described below suggests that many do aspire to become part of this global international art calendar, and it is fair to say that, on the whole, this is the type of template that influences their initiation, design and operation (otherwise, why call themselves a “biennial” with all that this implies? See chapter one). While the creation of biennials of art in the UK has generally grown out of the urban, policy and funding conditions described in chapter two, the proliferation of biennials worldwide has been considerably influenced by international trends associated with globalisation, economic neo-liberalism and geo-political concerns relating to the position of specific countries on the world stage.

“We live in an age of neo-liberal globalisation – by which I mean the revival of free-market economic policy and its rapid diffusion around the world with enormous social-structural and cultural consequences” (McGuigan 2005 p229).

It is hard to identify who might contest this statement, whether they are for or against. This is a useful description of the dominant economic world

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25 See for example, John McDonald article, Sydney Morning Herald, 26.1.13 http://johnmcdonald.net.au/2013/anish-kapoor/ accessed 20.2.14
order, one accepted by many commentators who commonly refer to the promotion of neo-liberal policies by Margaret Thatcher in Britain and Ronald Reagan in the US in the 1980s as a process of “economic restructuring” that has taken place rapidly and internationally (Tallon 2010). Harvey’s (2005) definition is widely quoted and cited: “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade’ (p2). Neo-liberal policy is the shorthand for an enormous range of actions associated with promoting economic liberalism. Liberalism in economic terminology refers to state deregulation to promote free trade (“as opposed to fair trade” (McGuigan 2005)), open markets and privatisation of services. Associated with right-wing and Conservative ideologies that want to see the role of the State diminished and that of the private sector enhanced, along with greater perceived individual freedom, this ideology was revived in the 1980s and has been enormously influential since, “restructuring” the economies of many nation states (Peck 2011). Supporters of neo-liberal policy see it as a vehicle for increased employment, individual prosperity and quality of life gains at the micro-level, via a “trickle-down” effect (Tallon 2010). They may argue that the expansion of trans-national corporations and the movement of manufacturing to lower wage countries have contributed to significant employment and economic development in what where previously considered developing (‘third world’) countries, with the effects felt on a massive scale and to far greater effect than decades of State or international (charitable) aid (Youngs, G, 2013 interview with author). Critics see it as eroding hard-won workers’ rights and benefits, the shifting of responsibility and costs from the State to the individual, the institutionalisation of the for-profit motive above all other considerations, the promotion of trans-national corporations over individual entrepreneurial activity and small businesses, and as systematically institutionalising severe inequalities within societies (Brenner and Theodore 2002, 2005; Harvey 1989; McGuigan 2005, 2006, 2009; Peck 2005, 2011; Tallon 2010). Ideologically it is a vehicle of Western economic imperialism that is destructive of local culture and economies, and a homogenising of
the world to an extreme Western capitalist model (McGuigan 2005; Bauer and Hanru 2013 p21). Further, it is “plainly evident that the unrestrained operations of capitalism produced extreme inequality” (McGuigan 2005 p230), reasoning that led to the rejection of this ideology by nation states for most of the twentieth century (Peck 2011). Can biennials of art function symbolically and to an extent functionally to resist the free-market? Or do “creativity strategies”, as Peck (2005) asserts:

“License both a discursively distinctive and an ostensibly deliverable development agenda. No less significantly, though, they also work quietly with the grain of extant ‘neoliberal’ development agendas, framed around interurban competition, gentrification, middle-class consumption and place-marketing” (p740).

Culture-led regeneration and destination marketing is argued to be part of the neo-liberal trend, with its explicit dependence on the “trickle-down” effect to aid local businesses, employment and circulation of money in the local economy, but the reality is more nuanced. Much of the literature questions whether this actually happens, and indeed, whether the short or long-term benefits are even measurable. McGuigan (2005) uses the phrase “neo-liberal regeneration” to describe the processes already outlined in chapter two, making the connection explicit, as do O’Brien and Miles (2010). But the nuance lies as much in the “content” of the “iconic container” (Landry 2006) – the art programming in the building or festival, some or all of which could be socially and politically challenging, also providing a robust alternative activity to capital consumption - as well as the considerable additional activity that is carried out in the UK under the education - outreach – audiences – inclusion agendas. This may not cancel out the unwanted side-effects of neo-liberal regeneration, such as those associated with gentrification, but they bring significant and aesthetic social-cultural value in their own right. Even the highly critical neo-liberalism expert Peck, talking about Florida’s “creative credo”, accepts that it is “modestly disruptive of neo-liberal modes of development” (2005 p760).
But in expanding this argument, one difficulty in discussing neo-liberalism is the inability to definitively define it (Peck 2011; Hesmondhaigh et al 2014). A second is its all-pervasiveness: the local, regional and national environment has been structured around the notion and specific policies of neo-liberalism, but it can be hard to unpick exactly what they are, where they might begin, and where – or if – they end. Brenner and Theodore (2002) usefully suggest examples of “actually existing neo-liberalism” but acknowledge that any such list is necessarily partial and incomplete. O’Brien and Miles (2010) also note the limitations of accounting for “current cultural policies in British cities by reference to critiques of neo-liberal programmes for urban regeneration” (p3). They argue that this approach “have tended to offer something of a blanket critique of cultural policy without recourse to its local practice” (p3).

At an international level, it is reasonably easy to argue that biennials – particularly the newer ones - being part of competitive destination marketing initiatives and not necessarily closely linked to their exhibitions’ sites or local communities, are indeed servants of the neo-liberalisation doctrine. The use of three very specific biennial examples, however, allows me to examine local practice and therefore to challenge the “blanket critique” of neo-liberalism. In particular, in chapter four I focus on the local policy environments as they have effected and interacted with the Liverpool Biennial and the Folkestone Triennial, examining in what ways they might be complicit in neo-liberal agendas and identifying where it can be argued that they resist them. I suggest that the critical notion of biennials with “bloated art and bloated budgets” (chapter one) is not an accurate description of either the Liverpool Biennial or Folkestone Triennial, which are firmly sited within their specific locations even while retaining international aspirations.

3. Biennials, Enlightenment Values & Neo-liberalism

It should be noted that it is the Western capitalist model that is being referred to when discussing the “globalised economy” and neo-liberalism. Destination marketing agendas are therefore absolutely allied to the politics
and economic agendas of the west. Biennials of art have come to be seen by developing nations as one mechanism that can give them access to these agendas (Bydler 2004; Jones 2010; Marchart 2008). Beyond the economic benefits of tourism, a cultural agenda, frequently manifesting itself as participation in or establishment of a biennial of art, is considered to help confer a specific notion of Western enlightenment and therefore legitimacy on a nation (Vogel 2010). It is also no coincidence that the majority of the new biennials created during the proliferation phase are in Asia or Australasia, previously considered “peripheral areas” in terms of the international art footprint (Bauer and Hanru 2013 p20) that is, nations that have felt themselves to be marginalised from the dominant Western “centre”. According to The Biennial Foundation, there are sixty biennials outside Europe, America and Canada, from a total of 107 that correspond to my definition of a “contemporary biennial model” as defined in chapter one.26 The establishment of the Istanbul Biennial is one early example of this, with its “initial goal” of offering “the finest examples of art from around the world, while at the same time promoting the national, cultural and artistic assets of Turkey, by using arts to create an international platform of communication.” (http://www.iksv.org/english/ accessed 28/3/11). Dr Serhan Ada27, discussing the considerable private sector sponsorship of art presentation in Istanbul in an interview with me in October 2011, put it this way: “Families of industrial groups which needed some cultural capital for the brand, which also needed some cultural expressions to be integrated to their globalising practices. And then they have been followed by all the young entrepreneurs and young professional and executives who wanted to be accepted in such a milieu”. A more charitable analysis is given by Bige Orer (2013), director of the Istanbul Biennial, which is of course dependent on funding from these industrial groups: “the private sector utilises its support for biennials that have international bearing to publicise that it is assuming institutional social responsibility” (p155).

The creation of the Istanbul Biennial was primarily politically motivated,

26 http://www.biennialfoundation.org/biennial-map/ accessed 18.2.14
27 Dr Ada is Course Director of the MA Cultural Policy, Istanbul Bilgi University
intending to signify an alignment with Western European culture. In addition however, its founding organisation cites the desire for Istanbul to be recognised on the international arts stage as a motivation – another form of place-marketing, albeit on an ambitious scale. In relation to biennials, this is not unusual, in fact, quite the opposite – it has become a significant factor in the proliferation of biennials worldwide. This is made explicit with this statement from the Athens Biennial website (now removed in a site re-design):

"Biennials and large-scale periodic exhibitions constitute a sizeable part of the production and distribution system of artistic products, an instrument of the economic strategy of the world-wide cultural industry, and a vehicle for the development of cities."

(http://www.athensbiennial.org/pages/main_en.php accessed 17.6.11)

This is a rare public example that draws attention to other agendas surrounding biennials of art, agendas that are usually discreetly withheld from the visiting public. It refers to the big money of the international art market and the role that some biennials play within it. But it also makes clear the biennial’s co-option to other agendas, specifically, competitive place-making and cultural tourism, regeneration and economic development. Although this was unusually transparent, the co-option of art is not something new, but has been a feature of art production since at least the Renaissance. Alloway (1969), writing the history of the Venice Biennale, makes clear that its founding was motivated as a way to keep tourists coming to Venice after the demise of the Grand Tour tradition:

“Exhibitions are propaganda, not only for our transformed sense of scale, but for specific projects, mercantile in the case of the Great Exhibition, tourist in the case of the Venice Biennale” (p38).
Visual arts professionals reflecting on biennial proliferation relate the prominence of the place-marketing agenda to ‘the rise of the spectacle’; that is, to individual visual arts works that are often large-scale and expensive, and prioritise an intense and unusual audience experience over intellectual and artistic content. For example, Charles Esche and Francesco Bonami, two international “star” curators (both of whom have curated the Istanbul Biennial, and Bonami the Venice Biennale) participated in a public discussion in 2005 asking: “Are large-scale international shows sites for experiment and exchange, or little more than tourist attractions?” This question represents the two extremes of the discussion, but also presents an unsophisticated binary position. Festivals can, of course, be both sites for experiment and exchange as well as tourist attractions. For example, it could be argued that the Liverpool Biennial, with some of its “wow factor” commissions, successfully found the balance between spectacle and content. Examples might include, amongst others, “Villa Victoria” (Bashi 2004), “Web of Light” (Ai Weiwei 2008), “Gleaming Lights of the Souls” (Kusama 2008) and “Turning the Place Over” (Wilson 2007).

As an arts professional, I know from twenty years’ experience that for visual arts professionals, particularly in the curatorial field, the above discourses from Alloway, the Athens Biennial and the Esche/Bonami event inform and validate commonplace professional knowledge and expertise (see also Brenson 1998). But they are worth highlighting since the tensions behind the questions they are asking are ones that have become embedded nationally within UK cultural policy and other localised civic and public policy (see chapter two). The expression of these tensions have become mainstreamed but it is important to remember that the alliances and negotiations they refer to are ones that have been overtly constructed, and are not much more than twenty years old in the UK. As demonstrated in chapter two, over the last 15 years Arts Council England has become much more allied to these wider national agendas, and non-arts civic and economic agendas have recognised that the arts can be a useful delivery vehicle. There has been not just entent-cordiale between these previously distinct and sometimes antagonistic sectors, but increasing partnership and
exchange; see for example, the “Partnership Statement between Arts Council England and Visit England”, published in February 2013, which sets out how the two organisation will work together, “a key priority being to encourage and support destinations that have real potential to grow their economies by improving their cultural tourism offer”.

Until the late 1980s biennials of art were a rare occurrence in the world, with consequent prestige, glamour and desirability attached to them. The first Istanbul Biennial in 1987 was only the sixth biennial in the world. In this period, and prior, the six biennials exhibited a range of art, art practices and different cultural expressions in rare critical mass that could not be seen together anywhere else. They were only available for a limited period every two years. In an era before affordable and regular international travel and well before the internet was populated and in everyday use, only an elite of the art world and the very wealthy were able to travel to see them (Ferguson and Hoegsberg 2010). Catalogues, photographs, conferences, reviews and word-of-mouth amongst professionals was the only way to disseminate the content of biennials, and access to these mechanisms was limited, adding to the elite nature of biennials of art. Biennials were therefore special events, with limited access. From a sociological perspective, it was a small group of elite arts professionals whose established authority conferred legitimacy on the international biennial model (Ferguson and Hoegsberg 2010 p364). These biennials therefore spoke first and foremost to the high-end art world and to the wealthy, unashamedly representing Western notions of enlightenment values (Mosquera 2010; Turner 2013 p58; Vogel 2010; Jones 2010). These first biennials still benefit from this history, which ensures them international attention, reviews and respect to this day regardless of the quality of artworks or exhibition making (Sheikh 2009 p154). But more importantly, the perception of biennials as at the forefront of the avante-garde and as part of the embodiment of high Western enlightenment ideals, and the prestige and acceptance that attaches to this, is a powerful symbolic legacy that has been deeply attractive to many civic

and national authorities. The hope has been that by replicating the model of previous biennials the powerful symbolism of education, wealth, leisure and “civilised values” will accrue and attach themselves to these locations.

“Legitimisation” is a key concept here. Legitimisation is a contested term, but it is used in this research to suggest two meanings. One is the political definition, that is, the justification of an existing system of political authority (and the use of international manifestations of art culture, such as biennials, as a tactic within this strategy to suggest the political system is normative). The second use is in the sociological sense, referring to towns, cities, regions and nations that are perceived as marginalised and lacking authority, and their desire to be recognised by existing authority as legitimate; legitimacy to be conferred upon them by existing authority structures (with culture and specifically the creation of biennials, as a tactic to achieve this) (Lilleker 2006).

The creation of the Havana Biennial in 1984, at the time only the fifth biennial in the world, was intended to challenge the Euro-centric nature of biennials (Filipovic 2005; Baker 2004; Jones 2010; Mosquera 2010) exhibiting only artists from Latin America and the Caribbean (Mosquera 2010); this curatorial concept demonstrating evidence of geopolitical concerns and changes of thinking within the art world. But a neo-liberal and realpolitik interpretation suggests that the subsequent proliferation of biennials has been intent on metaphorically and literally buying into the symbolic values perceived to be embedded in the Western, established, elite and rarefied international art circuit (for example, any nation state can exhibit within the formal Venice Biennale programme on payment of a $20,000 fee (Verhagen 2005)). The real goal has often been to gain a particular brand of international acceptance, legitimacy and status, with the benefits that go with this, which are political but often framed in economic terms (Marchart 2008 p468; Vogel 2010; Jones 2010). In neo-liberal terms, a country that is recognised internationally as “legitimate” in this way is one that demonstrates itself to be aligned to Western values and capitalism, and
therefore open for inward investment and international trade. I have already used the example of the creation of the Istanbul Biennial as an early indirect manifestation of this idea; it is useful to see this in the context of Turkey’s persistent and failed applications to join the European Union and the economic reforms it has implemented over the last thirty years which are overt demonstrations of the desire for legitimacy and belonging on the (Western) world stage.

In the UK, part of the place making agenda is about conferring status – informal or symbolic legitimisation – on the cities and towns that are not London or Edinburgh. There has traditionally been a north-south divide, with the south-east of England considerably more wealthy than the north (Lupton and Power 2004); and a history of southern and London dominance in the UK. Many places are looking for what Phil Redmond calls “the badge of authority” that awards such as European Capital of Culture, or the current UK City of Culture, bestows. The same process is taking place with the proliferation of many new biennials around the world. Art legitimises better than sport, even though sport is massively more accessible and popular, because art, from Victorian times, has been associated with a tradition of being a “civilising” and educating influence, and is associated with middle-class self-improvement and a classical ‘good’ education (see Arnold for example, also Hunt (2004) and his discussion of the enlightened Victorian city). Biennials are perceived as one of the vehicles that can help to demonstrate the Enlightenment values of rationality, science, modernism and social and political progress at an international level and this is an important reason for their proliferation around the world (Vogel 2010; Jones 2010; Mosquera 2010). Vogel (2010) describes the symbolic value of biennials in this way:

“Biennials present not only enlightened and enlightening works. With their claim to ‘internationality’ the exhibitions also hold out the promise of being ‘cosmopolitan’…Biennials stand for the freedom of

30 Cultural Cities Research Network 2012 http://culturalcitiesresearch.net/
opinion and the press, and thus also for a democratic polis of politically mature and enlightened individuality. However the necessary break with traditional values that results from Enlightenment has proven highly controversial, in particular for biennials in Islamic countries” (p10).

A concurrent assessment of the role of biennials is that despite their symbolic promise of freedom of the press and political maturity, biennials are (mis)used to promote an impression of these things that does not exist in reality. In a number of examples, the construction of new biennials of art has been used to mask regressive political and cultural realities, in order to create the opposite perception: that the host nation is modern, progressive and has the necessary political and cultural freedoms, wealth and infrastructure to participate in Western-centric structures of international finance, trade and diplomacy. For example, in 2009, the United Arab Emirates participated in the Venice Biennale with its own pavilion. Sharjah has its own biennial, Dubai will host the internationally roving International Symposium of Electronic Art (ISEA) in 2014 and Moscow will host its fourth biennial edition in a stark contrast to its communist past. In relation to these examples, Jones (2010) points out that: “Emiratis are not citizens, do not have a democracy, cannot vote for their government” and makes the link between biennials and “rehabilitation – through the cosmopolitan city – of previously restrictive or totalitarian regimes” (p69). Curator Evelyne Jouanno (2013) notes that “the first edition of Moscow Biennale… was being used by Russian authorities as a cultural pretext to show the world a new and modern image of contemporary Russia” (p78).

This brings us back again to a clear association of some contemporary biennials of art with international politics, neo-liberal policy and trends, and this is at the root of the argument that biennials are “instruments of neo-liberal economic agendas”. As Basualdo (2003) writes when talking about various biennial events: “In all these shows, however, diplomacy, politics, and commerce converge in a powerful movement, the purpose of which
seems to be the appropriation and instrumentalisation of the symbolic value of art” (p129). But is this true of all biennials? As already pointed out, only a handful of biennials genuinely possess the level of symbolic and cash capital that makes them powerful enough to be players in this vision of the global neo-liberalism process - even though this ‘lack of influence’ is more likely to be through accident than design. That is, if this is the underlying mission of biennial funders and stakeholders around the world, then a considerable number of biennial projects have failed to fulfil it. Equally, it is impossible that a biennial event on its own can ever carry enough symbolism to lever change of this magnitude; however ideologically implicated they might be, they are simply one component amongst many that need to be present within this process.

However, as Harvey (1989) and O’Brien and Miles (2010) argue, neo-liberalisation does not only take place on a global corporate or governmental scale as just described, but also on a localised basis. This is the point where neo-liberalisation interacts with local, regional and national economic development policy and initiatives, where the presence of biennials are considered, and claim, to make a contribution. For this reason, it is necessary to examine biennials, and localised economic development, on a more individual basis, as I do in detail in chapter four, when I discuss my case study.

4. The Artistic Framework and Context
Having considered the phenomenon of biennials from an external perspective, that is, as expressions of international trends and domestic UK cultural policy, it is necessary to also look at biennials from the perspective of those who are closely involved with realising them, that is, the curators and arts professionals. These perspectives broadly fall into the two camps I outlined in chapter one. In one camp are those that consider biennials to be actively involved in perpetuating “pernicious” and “specious” activity (Filopovic et al 2010) of the type I have discussed above and in chapter two. In the other camp are those who maintain that the experimental, radical
possibilities, along with the non-institutional agility inherent in the contemporary biennial model, can be used for political good and social activism – what I refer to as the “Utopian strand” of biennial discourse. However there is another way of cutting the question that also needs to be addressed, and that is the role of human agency versus collective responsibility and analysis. As Verhagen (2005) notes, while biennials may be described as progressive overall: “works exhibited at biennials address globalisation, drawing out its connections with colonialism, highlighting its human and environmental costs or advancing alternative modes of cross-border exchange,” in the production and presentation of art, the role of individual agency is often key, and particularly so when discussing curatorial practice and artistic production. The individual cannot be removed from the equation. As I argued in chapter two regarding arts professionals generally, I suggest further that senior biennial organisers and curators in particular have a strong awareness of international economic, political and cultural trends; indeed, this “thinking role” is a crucial part of the curatorial job description (Brenson 1998). In their public press releases and interviews, biennial organisers and curators emphasise the artistic-intellectual framework for each biennial edition, and talk about the art that is being presented as having crucial importance beyond the individual works. This suggests a desire to have impact as an event, not simply as a collection of works. The period of self-reflection that currently characterises biennial discourse (Gardner 2011) acknowledges the pressure of various agendas including neo-liberalism, and suggests that in this awareness lies the seeds of resistance:

“The model of the biennial is currently being reconsidered; a search for its identity is underway with an attempt to maintain distance from the pressures of the globally operating art market and commercially driven criteria for evaluations. … If it is broadly considered that the autonomy of art is in crisis, biennials are often understood as sites of free expression, which indeed bear the potential to serve as sites of resistance against the dominance of hegemonic powers, whether political, ideological, or economic” (Bauer and Hanru 2013, p18).
Set against this is the view, by critic JJ Charlesworth, that the multitude of biennials are “globalisation's most powerful mechanism in the artworld” explaining: “That biennial.curators such as Boris Groys, Charles Esche and Okwui Enwezor see biennials as “counter hegemonic”... is merely self-legitimating, and obscures the fact that it is the global system of supranational curatorship, underwritten by the global elite for as long as its power remains unquestioned, that is now the defining institutional hegemony of art” (Art Review 2009).

That the systems are bigger than the individuals who work within them is a source of tension and while there are biennials to which this criticism can undoubtedly apply, it is a somewhat crude assessment to apply to all biennials. There are several examples of biennials that challenge this “hegemonic” view (including the UK biennials) even as there are biennials that confirm it. Equally, several biennials have challenged the dominance of Western perspectives of art, including the Havana Biennial, and the Asia Pacific Triennial (Mosquera 2010; Turner 2013). There is acknowledgement, also, that Asia is not “catching-up” with the West, but the other way around:

“The shift of gravity becomes visible in the ways in which the players of the Western hemisphere are eager to keep a seat on this fast moving train and to participate in defining future directions. It is no more the East looking towards the West; now the opposite is the case...Asian countries...are inventing new realities for the global art scene, artists and cultural entrepreneurs alike.” (Bauer and Hanru 2013 p19).

This movement represents not just a ‘shift of gravity’ but of power, and specifically of spending power and its influence. What is presented as morally correct is also a practical necessity as the European economy declines and parts of the Asia economy soar.31 This presents a slightly

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31 See for example comment by Nicolas Serota, director of Tate, regarding Tate Modern sponsorship by Hyundai: “these deals are essential.” http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-25802199 accessed 18.2.14
paradoxical position for international curators, some of whose professional opportunities may arise from the Asian “fast moving train” but who intellectually may also feel compelled to critique aspects of it. For example, Manray Hsu and Vasif Kortun took a “highly critical stance against ne-liberalism and by extension, globalisation” in their curation of the Taipei Biennial in 2008 (Chang 2013 p67). But this is not necessarily a straightforward story of expressing a definite political outlook or of having a professional identity as politically engaged. Kortun has also been guest curator of the Istanbul Biennial twice (in 1992 and 2005), a biennial that I have already implied is complicit with neo-liberal agendas. He has curated the Turkish Pavilion in the Sao Paulo Biennial in 1994 and 1998 and the Turkish Pavilion at the Venice Bienniale in 2007, implying an ease with the politics behind nation state representation in the biennial format. As an influential figure in international curating, these cannot be seen as neutral activities. By contrast he is now director of research and programmes at SALT, a large and high profile gallery whose mission is to aesthetically engage with the urban realities of Istanbul. Its programme holds many exhibition and consultation events relating to urbanism and decisions about the city’s future. Although privately funded (by Garanti bank), it is the most high profile – and possibly only – art institution in Istanbul that has an active social and political relationship to the city at the core of its programming and activity. These are complex and slightly uncomfortable arguments that add to the complexity of the debate about biennials. Curators can, and do, opportunistically use curatorial ‘hooks’ that do not necessarily provide a counterweight to the overall character of a biennial. For example, the Istanbul Biennial 2013 claimed to respond to the unrest and protest centred in Istanbul’s Taksim Square in the summer of 2013. The curator’s conceptual framework explicitly critiques neo-liberalism:

“Neo-liberal urban policies advocate the implementation of free market parameters that lead to socio-economic Darwinism, which in turn, creates a wilderness, where the powerful beat the weak. Can’t we imagine another social contract in which citizens assume responsibility for each other, even for the weakest ones, those most
But given the history and context of the Istanbul Biennial, this can only be seen as a one-off ploy unlikely to have had as much impact as the protesters themselves. Reinforcing this analysis is the view from curators Francesco Bonami and Anthony Bond (curator of the first Liverpool Biennial edition in 1999), who “agreed that art biennials, contrary to what their taglines might proclaim, are no utopia producers for hosting communities” (Afterimage 2009 p2).

But curator Carolyn-Christov Bakargiev confirms a curatorial concern within biennial exhibition making that can harness and expose the work of artists working within a politically-engaged context, to the extent that she argues that:

“Artists are often actively partaking in political struggles, and international exhibitions such as biennales have provided a place where these conversations can be articulated…there is a healthy decentralisation of the art world and multiplication of art centres that runs parallel to a thematic focus on socially relevant topics of most recent biennales (justice, ecology, contact zones)…” (L’edicola digitale delle riviste Italiane di arte e cultura contemporanea, 2007, 22).

If the artists’ work can be “harnessed” for relatively superficial purposes, such as the 13th Istanbul Biennial, what then makes the biennial form “full of redemptive and even utopian possibility”? (Filipovic et al 2013 p13). Does one answer lie in the individual curator’s belief in the power of art? Perhaps the most famous example of this thinking is the Gwangju Biennial “derived from the history of struggling for democracy” (Bauer and Hanru 2013 p20). It became a centre for the Gwangju Democracy Movement in the 1980s, which resulted in the Gwangju Massacre, an event of great trauma for the population. Trite as it sounds, the Gwangju Biennial was founded in 1995 to “utilise art’s function of healing” and to have a role in “ameliorating the city’s
traumatic past.” (Lee 2013 p89). While it is beyond the scope of this study to assess its effectiveness in doing this, it is a sincere founding principle.

A more contemporary example is that of the “Emergency Biennial” founded in 2005 and using radical methodologies to draw attention to the war in Chechnya “as an echo to the first Moscow Biennial and as a reaction to the destruction of a people and culture.” (Jouanno 2013 p179). This biennial was founded by one curator, actively responding to a political situation she felt strongly about. In his essay “Biennials of Resistance”, Ranjit Hoskote (2010) gives his definition of a “biennial of resistance” as “biennials located in transitional societies that mark the stake of these societies in the global scenario.” He argues that “a biennial of resistance marks its host site’s claim to the world-historical importance of its own dramas of consciousness and of its own regional modernity, which emerges from the local and yet is imbricated with global circumstances” (p310). He goes on to suggest that: “By inserting itself periodically into a given locale, a biennial can perform an interrogative and transgressive rather than merely ornamental function” (p318). This is a useful analysis of how a biennial could be enacted in a range of situations and countries as a source of disruption to the status quo. This theory is not applicable (to date) to any of my specifically studied biennial events, but there is potential here for some kind of organised resistance.

Curator Hou Hanru (2013) theorises, somewhat idealistically perhaps, that “biennials reveal the deep cultural history in every location, and such a historical depth somehow turns into new possibilities, either through industrial transformation, or through the migration of geographic positions” (p99). While there is some justification for this perspective, and aspects of it can be seen in the UK biennials of contemporary art, with their site-specific commissioning ethos and constant interaction with local communities, this must be seen as a particularly theoretical and utopian viewpoint not common to all biennials. However there is a strand of biennial discourse that genuinely thinks they can change aspects of the world, as illustrated by curator Ou Ning (2013): “The audiences I expect for biennials would be
ordinary people, opinion leaders, intellectuals and so on, so as to mobilise all the different forces in society to participate in an in-depth conversation…” (p75). There are, of course, obvious problems with this statement. But a more realistic middle ground might be that taken by Ritsuko Taho (2013), artistic director of the Kobe Biennale, who describes his biennial as prioritising artistic aims and judgements. Its aim is:

“to use the power of art to inspire people to reconsider and re-evaluate local resources; to serve as a gathering of creative talent; to serve as a forum for the interaction of arts and culture and an inspiration for a diverse range of projects for citizens’ participation; and to promote cooperation in the activities of arts and culture. The Biennale seeks to further invigorate the city and contribute to generating vital energy for the city, together with its citizens and artists…One of the major aims of these cultural events is to promote citizens’ interaction with arts and culture by placing a spotlight on traditional culture and lifestyle culture, as well as what is conventionally understood as art” (p69).

This quotation is notable for its emphasis on humanitarian values and its complete lack of reference to economic development, tourism or international profile. It uses a type of humanitarian framework that would no longer be effective to articulate in the UK to those formally concerned with measuring cultural value (for example, local authorities, non-arts funders, and the Treasury32). This quotation is taken from a presentation given to an audience of biennial organisers – professional insiders – allowing for curatorial and aesthetic considerations to be prioritised. While these types of statement made in this context should be acknowledged as part of an advocacy and self-legitimating framework, the values that it represents are extremely significant. My primary research suggests this type of humanistic understanding underpins the values and motivations of the directors and staff at Liverpool Biennial and the Folkestone Triennial. This came through

32 According to Ed Vaizey, in a speech made at Cr8net 2013, 24.4.13, attended by author http://www.cr8net.com/ accessed 1.9.14
very strongly in interviews with biennial staff in both places, who all cited the relationship with people – as specific communities, as neighbourhoods, as residents and the primary audience – as being extremely important to them, beyond the professional demands of their jobs or the international status of the events. Of similar importance but usually framed as a means of working with or reaching the people/residents/communities and audiences, were the specificities of physical location of artworks at a micro-level – where each individual artwork is placed and where each discrete project takes place, is carefully considered from a community-human perspective as well as from artistic and practical perspectives. My professional experience suggests that these values are present in many arts organisations that sit outside this study, such as the Whitstable Biennial, b-side Festival (Weymouth and Portland) and Glasgow International.  

33 This gives a strong indication of how and why the UK biennials, and specifically, the Liverpool Biennial and the Folkestone Triennial, have, in my judgement, maintained their artistic integrity – that is, maintained the ethos of being arts-led - in the face of considerable and varied external influences. This is argued more formally in the next chapter.

Nonetheless as this chapter has described, there are formidable pressures that put the “autonomy of art in crisis” and the implications of this are still playing out. There is no doubt that contemporary art has often been used in a range of different kinds of market-led practice, leading not just to implication but a dilution of its affect. Bakargiev (2007) makes this important point about arts’ use in sanitising city centres for corporations:

“Today public space – the outdoors – has become privatised over recent years to the point that art is being used to decorate, to gentrify and “aestheticise” (and anesthetise) corporate public arenas in many cities. Rather than provoke questions and disrupt accepted conventions, art is used to create consensus and control populations.”

33 For example, interview with Whitstable Biennial director Susan Jones in September 2012, for New Statesman http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/cultural-capital/2012/09/peculiar-kind-biennial
This can be seen in process with the relocation of the Open Eye Gallery in Liverpool, previously independently sited in Wood Street, to a new, privately financed building of high-end apartments on the “Waterfront” – a rebranding of the Dock Road at the river end of the city centre. The Open Eye Gallery has now become window dressing for the sale and re-sale of apartments, contributing to their maintenance of value and some sense of their desirability, as well as gentrification and privatisation of a previously public area. Whatever the quality of the art it shows, the Gallery has been co-opted into real-estate sales, literally and symbolically giving up its locational independence:

“Open Eye re-launched in a brand new purpose-built home in one of the city’s most prestigious and prominent new developments on the Liverpool Waterfront.” (http://www.openeye.org.uk/about-us/accessed 6/1/14).

The concern in the art world is that this co-option of art, regardless of ethical or subjective positions on how it is being used, is having the effect of making it less effective as art. “Art has become “successful” and a tool of propaganda in more and more contexts, thus eroding its avant-garde and revolutionary potential, its negativity and critical power” (Bakargiev 2007). This is echoed by Verhagen (2005) and applied to biennials of art:

“What emerges from the diversity of work on display at any biennial is that difference today is not a sign of ideological and aesthetic disagreement, as it once was. Different voices and strategies lose their polemical sharpness as they multiply. The global exhibition is the picture of postmodernist pluralism, which, as Hal Foster pointed out long ago, absorbs and disarms conflict” (p3).

This is not a clear-cut argument, however, given the existence of mass forms of communication and production, the crowded and competitive arts field, and the competition for media and audience attention. I also question
the notion that visual art has ever had genuinely revolutionary potential, even on an intellectual basis, given its traditionally limited audiences. The counter argument is that whatever the politics and ideology behind any biennial, artists, activists and interested others will find a way to use its platform for their own purposes, and gain more counter-revolutionary attention as a result of their marginalised status. “Wherever resources are available, they will be tapped by the unauthorized” (Marchart 2008 p468). There are many examples of this, from the creation of the fringe “Tracey” in the first Liverpool Biennial of 1999, which has evolved into The Independents, accompanying every Liverpool edition since; to the Emergency Biennial created as a counterpoint to the Moscow Biennial; to the Marxist protests at the 2009 Istanbul Biennial. The revolutionary potential is in the people, not the organisations or the legitimating mechanisms, which on the whole are invested in maintaining the status quo.

Conclusion
This chapter illustrates how biennials of art have become considerably more complicated than a straightforward presentation of artworks that are judged solely on the criteria of aesthetics and the internal logic of art practices. Although this is still a focus within the art world, there has been a considerable overlaying and even formalising of other agendas, and regional and macro politics, within an overall trend towards globalisation. These complex international trends and politics are often translated into national and local policy, both enabling operation but also asserting pressures on the realisation and continuation of biennials of art. It would seem that biennial organisers have a choice to negotiate these currents and pressures as best they can, as my original hypotheses suggested, or to allow themselves to be overly dominated by them. The extent to which they do either on an individual basis could provide a means to assess to what extent they are not just implicated but complicit in these agendas, that is, actively involved in perpetuating “pernicious” and “specious” activity (Filopovic et al 2010). Similarly, the extent to which they negotiate and even influence these agendas can provide a means to assess how they might work to resist overt marketisation by creating cultural spaces, interactions
and impacts that emphasise intense engagement with local people and specific location. It would appear that the most high profile biennial organisers and curators – those that have their views regularly published - have a strong awareness of these international economic, urban and cultural trends, and the implications of these within the biennial and art presentation scenarios. In discussing this, I have also presented the arguments for biennials generally to be considered as co-opted instruments to neo-liberalism, despite the exceptions that do exist. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that this is the case.

Chapter four looks in detail at the Liverpool Biennial, with the Folkestone Triennial and the Istanbul Biennial providing useful context and comparison. I hope to show that while the UK biennials may be a partial expression of non-arts based public policy and civic aspirations, biennials are varied in practice and do not necessarily fit simply and easily into the political and policy modes and critiques I have outlined here. Standard or “blanket critiques” cannot be unquestionably applied. I hope to show that the considerable aesthetic and social value of biennials in the UK, while influenced by prevailing trends politically and economically, can also stand apart, independent and even resistant to this dominant order. Using evidence based on the histories and operations of my case studies I argue that a number of very specific factors make UK biennials of art, within their limited sphere of operation, symbolically and to an extent functionally, moderately disruptive of, and in some ways resistant to neo-liberal practices.
Chapter Four: The Liverpool Biennial as Case Study

Introduction

This chapter analyses the Liverpool Biennial of Art as my primary case study, with reference to the Folkestone Triennial and the Istanbul Biennial as supporting and contextualising information. It unpicks the Liverpool Biennial’s relationship to and negotiation with public policy, in an effort to understand how well they have worked together, and presents the evidence for the conclusions this thesis comes to.

Profile of the Liverpool Biennial of Art

Given the diversity of biennial models worldwide, it is essential to summarise the key aspects of my case studies, beginning with the Liverpool Biennial of Art. In this description I concentrate on its practise and operation from 2002 – 2012, when the biennial was under the directorship of Lewis Biggs and there was considerable continuity to its vision and operations. A new director, Sally Tallant, came into post in November 2011, giving her little time to make changes to the already planned 2012 biennial edition. The fieldwork for this research was completed in January 2013, and this date therefore marks the end of the research period.

In chapter one, I proposed five basic elements of the biennial form that are derived from the grand international biennial of art tradition (pre-proliferation), but attempts to avoid the inference of national pavilions and prizes. The five elements are:

1. Large-scale;
2. Multi-sited;
3. International in ambition and scope;
4. Periodic;
5. Presenting contemporary visual arts and practices, often experimental or particularly new and unsuited to a museum or gallery environment.
This description provides the foundation elements for all three of my case studies, although (5) is not always present in every Istanbul Biennial edition (for example, the 2011 edition was particularly suited to a museum format, and indeed, the majority of works had already been presented in various of the world’s museums and galleries). The Liverpool Biennial has additional components, notably:

6. A strong commissioning ethos rooted in site-specificity and the Liverpool locality;
7. An outreach, participation and education programme to connect the artworks with specific city communities, before, during and in between editions;
8. An enduring collaboration with the other major visual arts organisations in the city;
9. An enduring alliance with two already established major periodic visual arts exhibitions, the New Contemporaries survey show for recent arts graduates, and the prestigious John Moores Painting Prize.

Liverpool has long had a particularly strong visual arts infrastructure, and the Biennial was born out of this. It was largely founded and driven by the Littlewoods millionaire James Moores, with the first edition taking place in 1999 financed with £1m from Moores. The directors of FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology), the Bluecoat Arts Centre and Tate Liverpool, amongst others, were part of the early discussions about initiating a biennial in 1997/1998. With the addition of the Open Eye Gallery, all have been curatorial partners and host venues since the second edition in 2002, with consequent beneficial impacts for each organisation and the visual arts generally in the city.\(^\text{34}\) Since each organisation was a curatorial partner, the benefits of profile, participation, audiences and additional funding were shared amongst them, removing aspects of the competition and ‘turf wars’ that so often exist between peer organisations in close geographical

\(^{34}\) Interviews with Lewis Biggs and Eddie Berg (director of FACT) in 2011; interviews with Bryan Biggs (director of Bluecoat), Sara-Jayne Parsons (exhibition curator at Bluecoat) and Karen Newman (curator Open Eye Gallery) in 2012.
proximity (author interviews with Berg 2011; Biggs, B. 2012; Biggs, L. 2011). This early, voluntary, and intelligent defusing of the competitive imperative, in favour of partnership, collaboration and strength in collectivity, can in itself be seen as a small local example of resistance to the ‘zero sum game’ of winner-takes-all market competitiveness that is a feature and effect of neoliberalist policies, as described in chapter three.

According to Lewis Biggs (interview with author) and corroborated by James Moores35, the Biennial’s original aims were to strengthen the John Moores Painting Competition, which at the time was losing profile, and to make Liverpool a better place in which artists might live and work. Its initiation with philanthropic funds, rather than public funding, meant it was independent of the types of public agendas discussed in chapter two, at least in its early stages. The first Biennial followed a common model of hiring in an international ‘star’ curator – Antony Bond in this case, director of international art at the Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia – and shipping existing works from international artists into the city, and shipping them out again when the show was over. But in evaluating, the Biennial board decided that this did little to develop the curatorial expertise already in the city, or the arts infrastructure. Bryan Biggs, artistic director of the Bluecoat and a Biennial board member for ten years, explained:

“We felt it was perhaps a tired model for a biennial, that you can buy in a star curator, as actually that could be any city, anywhere, and the artists would probably be the same, making similar work but in different places. So we thought, how can we make a biennial that is about this place, that is unique to here, that engages with its history, its infrastructure, its audiences?” (interview with author 2012)

This evaluation and the consequent decisions to follow a different model were a crucial point in the development of Liverpool’s biennial. It created a

35 “James Moores: The Visionary”, Collard, J 11.11.07
different and more distinct identity - it was no longer just another city biennial event – but it also embedded within its subsequent programmes and operations the principle that the city was important, and that actively locating the biennial in the fabric of Liverpool and the lives of its residents was a key and core principle. Following the first edition but before the second edition in 2002, the basic model for the Biennial’s next ten years took shape and has essentially remained constant. Its structure of four ‘strands’ is only possible within Liverpool. The four strands are:

1. The International exhibition, the aspect of the biennial that most closely follows the contemporary biennial model, in which approximately 40 ‘international’ artists were selected each edition and supported to produce new works that related to, or engaged with, the city and its residents in some form.

2. The John Moores Painting Exhibition, held biennially at the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool since 1957, the largest and most prestigious painting prize in the UK (of £25,000), timed to take place at the same time as each edition of the Liverpool Biennial.

3. New Contemporaries, the annual survey exhibition of work by recent art graduates, which takes place in Liverpool every two years during the Liverpool Biennial.

4. The Independents, a usually undirected and uncurated assortment of exhibitions that stand outside the formal programme and to which any artist, collective or organisation may contribute.

Lewis Biggs, previously director of Tate Liverpool, became Liverpool Biennial’s first director in 2000, a position he held until 2011. He made two decisions that shaped the Biennial for the next five editions. First, that as many artworks as possible would be new commissions. Second, that, as he describes, “the exhibition would go out to meet its audience rather than expecting the audience to come indoors at the gallery or museum”. Therefore, a significant number of artworks would be “on the street” and in the public realm, or in reclaimed and repurposed empty buildings. From the 2002 edition onwards, and until 2010, the Liverpool Biennial International
exhibition commissioned new works for every edition, and showed only these new works, often in public or outdoor locations, meaning that the Liverpool Biennial contained works never seen before in the world. This is significant for several reasons. First, it is noteworthy given the number of biennials that ‘recycle’ artworks and artists, leading to the criticisms of replication, lack of artistic and curatorial rigour, biennial fatigue and boredom. Second, and more importantly for this research, the commission of new and unique artworks resists the culture of mass production and mass consumption of homogenised products. Siting them in the public realm makes them available to residents as part of their daily (city centre) routine, possibly providing what Miles, M (2005) calls “art as interruption …working against the grain of cultural universalism,” and acting as a temporary counterpoint to the uniformity of the ‘clone high street’ (or the clone flagship art gallery). Chatterton’s (2006) concept of “autonomous spaces” may also have some relevance here: “temporary autonomous spaces have an important role to play... not just as a statement and intervention against landscapes of speculation and profit, but also as practical interventions to create not-for-profit spaces for encounter and difference” (p273). While artworks are not “autonomous spaces”, some of them could be said to provide spaces for encounter and difference, for example, Priscilla Monge’s “Football Pitch” (2006), Peter Johanssons “Swedish Red House” (2006), and “The Gleaming Lights of the Soul” by Yoyoi Kusama (2008), amongst other works produced over the years. Even when works were sited within re-purposed buildings or formal galleries, marketisation was resisted with the ongoing principle of free entry (excepting, on occasion, Tate Liverpool, which in some editions charged an entry fee).

Site specific commissioning is a particular form of biennial practice that is expensive, pressurised, high risk and labour intensive for all concerned. It is in many respects the hardest way to make a biennial. It can be seen as a signifier of commitment to art production and in the Liverpool Biennial’s case, to a specific location, as well as marker of ambition and to an extent quality (accepting that, in responding to artists' vision and taking risks, some works will inevitably be more successful than others). Certainly, an entire
biennial exhibition made up of approximately 40 site specific commissions every two years makes for an enormous organisational workload, and requires large budgets. It is therefore not common practice for most biennials, which prefer to use a “survey” model for intellectual, curatorial and practical reasons, with perhaps a few new works sprinkled in. This commissioning model in Liverpool has enabled production of over 250 new artworks (including performances, installations, interdisciplinary and moving image works), many of significant scale and ambition. (In comparison, many public art agencies and commissioning organisations can take two to five years to deliver only five or six substantial public realm works, for example, Artpoint Trust, Stour Valley Arts, Irwell Sculpture Trail, Artangel). It is hard to identify any other organisation within the UK that has commissioned anything near this number of new works, and on this scale. The only comparator is, possibly, the Folkestone Triennial, whose model has also been to commission new works (around 25 per edition), with the added benefit to the town of efforts to keep some of the works in-situ as permanent contemporary public realm works. This idea, of building up a collection of contemporary new public realm works, was never part of the original vision for the Biennial under Biggs (and is generally not on the agenda of most biennials worldwide). This lack of tangible legacy from the Liverpool Biennial, in terms of adding to and updating the permanent public realm artworks of the city, can be considered a criticism of its model, since to have permanently sited some works would have had major benefits to the city, as was recognised by the Creative Foundation in Folkestone. It would have extended the defamiliarisation and transformation of the city on a more permanent basis, embedding these types of aesthetic experiences into the daily urban fabric for visitors and residents. It would have significantly contributed to Liverpool’s architectural and visual distinctiveness; and in at least one case, it could have strengthened the physical cultural infrastructure in the city. For example, a commission for the 2008 edition was a small amphitheatre designed by artist group Atelier Bow-Wow. Sited on a long-derelict area of waste-ground, which in a more prosperous city would be considered a prime city centre site, the work provided an open-air venue for small-scale music and theatrical performance. Made to robust
engineering specifications, this could have become a longer term and unique addition to the city’s stock of performance spaces. Unfortunately, this and other works over the years were subject to lack of agreement between the Biennial organisation and Liverpool City Council over who would pay for ongoing maintenance costs. Each party insisted that they could not afford to do so (Biggs, L. interview with author 2011), and as a result, many potentially permanent works were lost to the city. There is real short-sightedness in this, from both organisations. It is a useful example – and marker – of attitudes within the City Council, pre-2008, perhaps demonstrating a limited understanding of other values art could catalyse. In later years, as the Biennial began to work between editions on public realm works, for example, “Turning the Place Over”, by Richard Wilson, and “Another Place”, by Anthony Gormley, the costs of maintenance and greater longevity were built-in to the business model for some specific pieces.

**Engagement with Place and Access Methodologies**

Unlike many other biennials, and indeed, many other arts institutions in the UK and elsewhere, the Biennial makes significant efforts to align the ‘world-class’ art it brings to the city with the concerns and interests of the local population. ‘Liverpudlians’ are known for their fierce pride in their city which is allied to an inward looking culture and “disconnectedness”, or a “sense of seperateness” (O’Brien and Miles 2010 p6). The siting of works in the public realm, often with an interaction with permanent landmarks or monuments, plays successfully to this culture for the local audience.
Villa Victoria (2002) by Tatsurou Bashi. The Victoria Monument in Liverpool City Centre transformed into a hotel room.


Caged lions outside St Georges Hall, by Riga 23 (2006)
My empirical research undertaken at the beginning of the 2012 edition with a cross-section of Biennial visitors, suggests considerable support for the Biennial. Of 229 visitors questioned, 50% were first time visitors – a high number – while 46% had visited at least one edition previously, again a high percentage. 72.5% were visiting the city centre specifically to see the art, and 53% intended to visit multiple venues. Qualitative responses were generally thoughtful, nuanced and positive, even from those – 64.5% - who had little or no knowledge of the arts. Not understanding the work was not necessarily seen by these respondents as a barrier or criticism. Figures from the Economic Impact reports commissioned by the Biennial (revised downwards to reflect the use of more accurate STEAM data) suggest 74,000 residents visited the 2006 edition, 129,000 residents visited the 2008 edition and 96,000 visited the 2010 edition. In a city with a population of 466,400 (2011 Census), these figures reflect considerable awareness and support for the Biennial.

Liverpool Biennial’s strapline has been “engaging art, people, place” suggesting that these principles – artworks with viewer impact (for want of a better short description), providing opportunities for communities and visitors to participate, and locating its programme in a specific relationship to the city of Liverpool – has been core to its practice. This focus has been apparent in several aspects of the Biennial’s operation and strands of work, and its emphasis over a significant period of time makes the Liverpool Biennial fairly distinctive in the context of the international family of biennials, where engagement with communities can be a shallow curatorial theme for one edition only (for example, Istanbul Biennial editions 2013 and 2009). There is considerable evidence that the organisation has been sincere in wanting to make positive and tangible change within the city, to be relevant and accessible to residents, and to impact positively on individuals. These core principles would seem to underpin the high-culture ideals surrounding the provision of ‘world class’ art that is encouraged by current cultural policy, and the benefits brought by manifesting this ideal for seven editions.
The Biennial has developed a considerable methodology of “ways in” to engagement with the Biennial for a cross-section of Liverpool residents. Since this type of sustained provision is rare in the biennial world and is central to my argument, it is worth examining in detail. This is another area where on a local basis, the Liverpool Biennial attempts to actively provide a cultural space that prioritises interaction with local people and place above art world status, homogenisation, and the marketisation of cultural products, and is therefore “disruptive” of neo-liberal trends. As a comparison, in Istanbul an education programme for schools accompanies each edition, but is limited to supported visits, and unless the guest curator decides that “participation” is the theme, as was the case in 2009 and 2013, there is no other programme.

The Biennial had an education programme from its first edition in 1999, and subsequently, from 2002 onwards, had a full-time permanent member of staff leading on this area. The postholder worked with specific communities and groups on learning and inclusion projects in the lead-up to biennial editions, during each edition and subsequently. Although this type of work was strongly encouraged within cultural policy and arts funding during this period, it is notable that the Biennial was involved in this work before it was in receipt of public funding, and before it became an Arts Council England Regularly Funded Organisation in 2004 (at which point, if it hadn’t already been addressing this area, it would have become obliged to). Inevitably, many projects concentrated on improving intellectual access and providing art-based positive experiences for very specific disadvantaged groups, in line with New Labour Social Inclusion policy, and the availability of project funding. However, the Biennial’s access and inclusion policy was not limited to these groups. Over the years, a considerable ‘access methodology’ to engagement with the Biennial was developed. The volunteer programme offered opportunities for residents to gain experience of working directly with the public within arts and other venues, and of the detail of tasks that are involved with exhibition maintenance, invigilation and ‘customer care’. While a number of each volunteer cohort were likely to be art students, the opportunity was open to all, and at least two graduates of the volunteer
programme, who were Liverpool residents and not art students, were later recruited to full-time posts within the organisation as a direct result of their involvement. Each year-group of students from the HND Fine Art and later Foundation Degree Fine Art at Liverpool Community College were involved in every edition of the Biennial from 1999, in a variety of ways. This included volunteering and invigilating exhibitions throughout the three months of each biennial edition; “buddying” with commissioned international artists, (shadowing, showing them around Liverpool and being “gofers” on their research, site and installation visits); helping to install specific artworks, in some cases, even helping to fabricate works, for example, “Labyrinth” by artist Sasha Hoyt in 2004. Students from my own course, a European funded NVQ4 in arts management, were offered a valuable placement opportunity to manage a community project in partnership with the Biennial in 2006.

On the curatorial side, selected artists were asked to propose works that related in some way to Liverpool as a city, sometimes also within a loose theme or theoretical framework. This could be as simple as proposing a work for a specific site, but often involved a work inspired by Liverpool’s history or stories on a macro or micro level. Artists might elect to work on a theme that was particularly relevant to conditions, politics, peculiarities or other aspect of the city. Selected artists were invited to the city for a research visit, often with at least one follow up site visit. They frequently chose to work with specific communities in the development of their commissions, and the Biennial organisation facilitated this contact and the

36 For example, Sally Lupton, who became Development Manager (interview with author 2012) and Lorna Wood Moses.
37 Interview with Geoff Molyneux, 2014, formerly Course Leader HND Fine Art and Foundation Degree Fine Art, Liverpool Community College.
38 To be an art student in Liverpool was not necessarily an indicator of socio-cultural background or of privilege (prior to the introduction of tuition fees). Liverpool at this time had three universities, a very large Further Education College with campuses throughout the city, and a surprising number of independent semi-formal programmes, often funded by European Objective One funds and catering specifically for the long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged groups. The vast majority of courses in this period were free at the point of entry or with a nominal cost at most, and the European funded programmes offered travel expenses and an extra £10 a week on top of unemployment benefits, and sometimes paid childcare costs for students. A considerable number of students in the city were local and disadvantaged. As a result the recruitment of students into involvement with the Biennial does not necessarily mean ‘giving privilege to the already privileged’ and may well have done the opposite – given advantage to the disadvantaged.
practical organisation required. There are several examples in each edition of works being made with the involvement of residents (people not professionally or vocationally involved in the arts). This has been a feature of every edition of the Liverpool Biennial. I emphasise that these projects were all undertaken by international-level artists, as ‘biennial class’ commissions, and not as “community art” projects, with their historical connotations of process being more important than end product. Examples of works that were made in this way are various, and a non-exhaustive sample includes:

- “Let it be known to all persons gathered…” by Ahmet Ogut (2012). A film that ‘starred’ a local resident, who was filmed riding a horse through the suburbs of Liverpool in the role of town crier.
- “Outside In” by Dora Salcedo (2012). Participatory project that set up a temporary interviewing and broadcasting station at the Bluecoat, inviting members of the public to drop in and be interviewed. Interviews later broadcast via the internet.
- “Touch and Go” by Cristina Lucas (2010). Featuring the long-derelict “Euroleasure International Ltd” building in the city centre, the video film documents a group of Liverpool unionists and their families (some of whom worked in the building, or knew people who had worked in the building) throwing stones at the façade, often with great glee.
- “Pavilions Project”, various artists and architects (2008). Created three temporary “creative spaces” in the Liverpool neighbourhoods of Garston, Kirkdale and Kensington. Members of these communities worked collaboratively with international artists and architects to embed their individual needs and aspirations into the spaces. For example, the Rotunda community in Kirkdale worked with landscape architects GROSS Max on designs to convert derelict land into a community garden.
• “Workers (leaving the Factory)” by Nancy Davenport (2008). Film shot at the Jaguar car plant on Merseyside focusing on the production process.
• “Obscure Moorings” by Matthew Buckingham (2006). Film shot in and around Liverpool’s Seaforth Docks, casting actors and extras from the city.
• “Liverpool A-Z” by Kelly Mark (2006). The artist attempts to get to know Liverpool by chatting with 26 people whose first names begin with the letters A-Z. Filmed with tenantspin (an ongoing digital community project hosted by FACT) in a flat, the 26 episodes were presented via webcasts, on the BBC Big Screen in central Liverpool and in the Media Lounge at FACT.
• “Beethoven, the Headbangers” by Amanda Coogan (2004). Orchestrated a group of 100 local people to headbang live to the stirring strains of the final ten minutes of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, in the open air courtyard of the Bluecoat Arts Centre.
• “Rolling Home” by Aleks Danko (2004). Performance involving three archetypal blue houses, made from foam rubber, being slowly rolled from different points in the city centre by students, and witnessed by shoppers.
• “Villa Victoria” by Tatsuro Bashi (2002). Transformed the Queen Victoria monument in Derby Square into a fully furnished and functioning hotel room, each night fully booked for the duration of the Biennial.

These examples suggest a genuine commitment not only to opening up the Biennial to the city’s residents in as many ways as possible, but also to making the artworks, and therefore the Biennial itself, relevant to the people of the city. It also marks an area of tension within the critical reception of the Biennial, in that various art critics (Searle 2002, 2008, 2010, 2012) and some arts professionals (Schlieker; Berg, interviews with author 2011; Hand 2006) felt that the repeated use of Liverpool itself as a subject in some cases lowered the overall artistic quality. An easy analysis could consider
this a site of conflict between the demands of world class art production and presentation, and that of UK access and inclusion policy. My research suggests otherwise. No-one associated with the Liverpool Biennial admits to any such tension, and the artistic director and other curators, interviewed individually, tell a story of being able to work with the artists, and realise the projects, that they were particularly interested in. There is an argument that as professionals, a process of internalising public policy takes place and conditions creative thinking about projects. This may have happened – many arts professionals genuinely believe in the importance of engagement and access - but it is hard to demonstrate that this lowered the quality of artworks, individually or collectively, to any significant degree, given the number of variables involved in realising new commissions, and the potential of each variable to influence the resulting artwork. Similarly, there are many examples of works with “wow factor” and significant critical support that have responded to Liverpool as a location of inspiration. Ultimately, such criticism can only refer to the subjective judgement of an organising principle, with even the harshest critics finding works to praise within each Biennial edition. Another complicating factor within this analysis is the London-bias of much of the international and domestic arts media (from whom critical judgements of this nature are derived by the sector), and a concurrent negative perception of Liverpool for many years by the same media (Impacts 08, Liverpool University 2005-2010; Biggs, B. interview with author 2012). Responsibility for the repeated use of Liverpool as an inspiration for the production of new works was that of the artistic director (Lewis Biggs). Whether this was successful for a time, or outlived its use artistically, is really a judgement of his artistic direction, rather than a comment on public policy influence on artistic direction. Either way, it supports my contention that the Liverpool Biennial placed great practical emphasis on its relationship with the city, a feature that is not standard in many other biennial organisations.

**Long term regeneration projects**

To further add weight to the argument - that the Liverpool Biennial provides a weighty cultural counter-point to free market economic development
interventions by bridging the local with the international – the Biennial has led or been involved in three long-term and very substantial regeneration projects within the city. These are:

- The Canal Project
- The Everton Park Project
- The Anfield Bakery

These three projects can be seen within two different contexts. One is the traditional UK culture-led regeneration model, as discussed in chapter two. The other is within a growing international curatorial concern, and even sense of obligation, that the visual arts should use their potential to engage with “urgent issues of urbanism” (Tallant 2012), geopolitical realities and economic situations. As Miles, M (2005) suggests: “It may be also that interventions of a more specific and localised kind... have a greater resonance for those who encounter or participate in them.”

The Canal Project was a two year consultation project undertaken in partnership with British Waterways, who wanted to improve the relationship between the Leeds-Liverpool canal which runs through some of the poorest neighbourhoods of Liverpool, and the people who live near it. In some places it had become a “no-go” area due to anti-social behaviour, crime and the fear of it. The environment along most of its stretch had been neglected for many years and it wasn’t considered an asset or positive feature of these neighbourhoods. Led by the Liverpool Biennial and using a number of creative techniques and artists, over a two year period, 2000 people engaged with the project and influenced the way this stretch of water was upgraded to become a more welcome feature of their neighbourhoods.

Both the Everton Park Project and Anfield Bakery projects are ongoing. The Everton Park project involves the creative consultation of residents in the physical regeneration of a large green area with spectacular river views, just outside the city centre. The history of this neighbourhood and park have
meant that it is significantly underutilised by the residents near it, and it had also become the site of crime and anti-social behaviour. Led by the Regeneration department of the City Council, the Liverpool Biennial is described as “an equal and valued partner” by Mark Kitts, Deputy Director of Regeneration, Liverpool City Council (interview with author 2012). Artist Fritz Haeg is working with residents to “reactivate and reimagine the future of Everton Park” (Liverpool Biennial website 2012), making a long term commitment with the project ‘exhibited’ in the 2012 edition as a full part of the International strand (not as a community art project). The Anfield Bakery project, (formally called “Two Up, Two Down”) has been running for more than 3.5 years. The artist Jeanne van Heeswijk has been working in the Anfield community within the context of New Labour housing strategy which has led to the demolition of streets of houses without re-building having taken place. Twenty young people have worked with architects and other design specialists to re-use a block of empty property comprising a former bakery building and two adjoining terraced houses. Other aspects of the project included the principle of “taking the community as their client” (Liverpool Biennial website 2012), designing an affordable housing scheme, shop, meeting and project spaces. A cross-generational group of local residents have set up Homebaked Community Land Trust, a co-operative organisation with its roots in the garden city movement, to enable the collective community ownership of the properties and to reopen the bakery as a social enterprise.

These are not projects with the three-month shelf life of a biennial edition, but demonstrate a very real and unequivocal commitment by the Liverpool Biennial (in time, people resource and cash) towards tangible social and to an extent physical regeneration within specific geographic locations in the city. Because there is a particular expertise attached, and project design and aims are very specific, these projects represent a very tangible and realistic contribution to regeneration by an arts organisation. It is an example at the opposite end of the spectrum, critiqued by Miles, M (2005) whereby an “arts bureaucracy” reproduces the status quo, so that “Arts publics are thereby rendered passive receivers of culture rather than being
empowered to shape cultures” (p896).

Counterpoints to Homogenisation, Marketisation and Consumption

Before I conclude this section, it is worth summarising the tangible methods that I argue the Liverpool Biennial has employed to provide a counterpoint, or form of resistance to, prevailing trends of homogenisation, marketisation and consumption. In brief, these are:

- Strong leadership and teamwork that has enabled the Biennial to remain arts led;
- The siting of artworks in the public realm, free to experience at the point of access, re-presenting the city to residents;
- The commissioning of new and individual works that relates in some way to the city of Liverpool and in many cases, involves residents as participants to realise the artwork;
- A consistent provision of education and outreach projects;
- A policy of sourcing local expertise and products where possible, and “buying local”.
- A volunteer scheme that provides access to art and artists, experience of venue management and invigilation, and customer care, leading in some cases to employment;
- Commitment to three specific long-term regeneration projects;
- Longevity – the Biennial is not a brief intervention made to service or market developer or other specific economic projects.
- Three long-term projects.

Liverpool City Council Cultural Policy and its Relationship to the Biennial

The activity of the Liverpool Biennial does not take place in isolation, and the concurrent story of the localised cultural and public policy context and ‘micro-climate’ in Liverpool is fascinating. It demonstrates why the Biennial could never have been initiated within the local authority or another public agency (as other biennials in the world have been), and why this has been to its great advantage. Liverpool’s designation as European Capital of
Culture 2008 is also hugely significant, since it created a cultural microclimate within Liverpool that also worked to the Biennial's advantage, in terms of its inclusion in 2008 strategy and the extra funding, profile and attention it received, all of which has contributed to its continued sustainability. It also usefully serves to illustrate the difficulties that municipal authorities can get into when they prioritise non-arts agendas within cultural projects (also see Mirza 2012). In Liverpool, the story of the Biennial is also the story of a City Council that made a hard journey from what could be hyperbolised as cultural ignorance to that of cultural champion. As Jones and Wilks-Heeg (2004) assert: “cultural policy has moved from the margins of the policy agenda to become its primary focus” (p346). It is also noted that there are elements of rhetoric within its championing that mask some gaps in understanding by individuals, and there are increasing financial constraints on the Council’s ability to deliver.

In 1997 and 1998, the years that the possibility of a first Liverpool Biennial of Art was discussed, the city was still very much in a regeneration crucible. There was considerable arts activity and the core infrastructure that exists today was mostly in place (excepting the Biennial and the development of the FACT building) but to a peculiar extent, this activity existed almost under the radar and beyond the interest of the local authority, Liverpool City Council. Writing about the local authority political history in 1993, Parkinson and Bianchini make the judgement that: “The story of cultural policy and urban regeneration in Liverpool is essentially one of missed opportunities” (p155). Their assessment is that at the time they were writing, the City Council “exhibits a set of political and ideological characteristics which have combined to keep cultural issues off the city’s policy-making... It failed to either support or lead other actors in the cultural sector in a search for a new strategy” (p156).

Although a reformed local Labour Party leadership produced the city’s first and fairly comprehensive cultural policy document in 1987 (“An Arts and Cultural Industries Strategy for Liverpool”), the Council struggled to implement the strategies it contained. The City had been “unable to harness
the potential of its considerable cultural vitality for place marketing purposes. One of the problems has been lack of co-ordination between the many agencies responsible for marketing Liverpool” (Parkinson & Bianchini 1993 p171). Objective 1 cash awarded from 1994 helped fund a range of what would become known as creative industries organisations that provided training in arts and media, with additional and various core and “soft” skills, for the long-term unemployed. This enabled projects like Hope Street Limited (theatre skills), the Ariel Trust (radio skills) and Centre for Arts Development Training (creative business skills), along with the Liverpool and Manchester Design Initiative (intended to stimulate the market for designers) and Axis (creative business support and grants). The core arts infrastructure was already established, with various building-based institutions operating in the city - the Bluecoat Art Centre, the Open Eye Gallery, Tate Liverpool, Everyman Theatre, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, the Playhouse, the Blackie and the Walker Art Gallery. Alongside these were a range of small galleries and other arts organisations, not necessarily building based, including Moviola (which later became FACT, with its own building). While there wasn’t a critical mass of artists in the city, there was a reasonable DIY culture with artist-led studios and experimental exhibitions. The staff at many of these institutions were, on the whole, people with connection to and a long history with Liverpool. In general, there seems to have been less staff turnaround at senior levels within these organisations than there is in other regions. 39 This may be one factor that contributed to the early collaborative nature of the Biennial, since professionals were already familiar with each other and the work of their respective organisations.

Although the arts and cultural industries were identified as one of the major sectors for employment growth in the Council’s Economic Development Plan for 1992-93, the Local Authority’s engagement with it, and its budget

39 For example, Lewis Biggs worked at Tate Liverpool from its opening; Bryan Biggs has worked at the Bluecoat for forty years; Eddie Berg was associated with Moviola before becoming director of FACT; I know various other arts professionals who have stayed in Liverpool for five and more years, “job-hopping” between organisations.
allocation, was extremely modest. The 1993 budget for revenue funding of the arts was just £100,000 (Parkinson & Bianchini 1993) and in 1999, discretionary funding of community arts initiatives was £20,000 a year.\textsuperscript{40} In 2001, at the time of applying for the 2008 European Capital of Culture award, the City Council was giving just £20,000 a year to the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra (RLPO). As a powerful illustration of how much has changed within the City Council, in the 2012-2013 budget, the overall Arts and Cultural Investment Programme budget was £3,670,015 with £1,242,083 being awarded to the RLPO (Liverpool Echo 12/6/12). James Moores, the driving force behind the Liverpool Biennial, described the climate as it looked to him: “While the city had great galleries – the best outside London – they were short of money and had become very inward looking. They were not appreciating that there was a bigger world out there that they should be engaging with, and that with proper engagement with that world, the resources would surely follow.”\textsuperscript{41}

This situation manifested in practice with poor support for arts organisations within the city. Lewis Biggs recollects: “The City Council didn’t know what the Biennial was, it had stopped funding VisionFest. When I had gone to the Council for support to get money for bidding for Tate to be finished, they said we don’t want another museum, we’ve already got one, why would we want another? There was no track record of involvement from the City Council that we could rely on. Looking back it seems curious, but at the time, there was no reason to go to them” (interview with author 2011).

The Biennial produced a publication in 2001, which looked back on the first edition and anticipated the 2002 event. The city’s visual art directors used it to advocate not just for the Biennial but for the arts generally within the city, with overt messages directed towards the politicians and City Council. In a printed interview, Eddie Berg (director of FACT) and Bryan Biggs (director of the Bluecoat Arts Centre) talk about the multiple benefits of the arts to the

\textsuperscript{40} Author interview with Phil Taylor, LCC Arts Officer, 1999
city. Biggs made it clear that greater civic support is required: “The challenge to the city fathers, the politicians, the media particularly, is to take this much more seriously than they’ve taken culture before.” (Biggs, B. 2001). In fact, the political situation changed dramatically during this period. In 1998 the Liberal Democrats had won control of the Council under leader Councillor Mike Storey and in 1999 they appointed David Henshaw as Chief Executive of the City Council. Under this team, the Council decided to bid for the award of 2008 European Capital of Culture. According to Eddie Berg: “That was the moment when there was a kind of a macro-transformation in the city… the cultural regeneration narrative had really begun to take off… the Libdems had begun to see some real possibilities of culture in terms of rebranding and modernising the Liverpool brand” (interview with author 2012).

As part of the bidding process, one-to-one consultation interviews were undertaken and the arts sector featured strongly within the final bid document. At the time, Berg was in the process of realising a capital new-build for his organisation FACT in the city centre – Liverpool’s first new arts centre in sixty years. His view is that Liverpool needed a strong cultural narrative and that a number of factors came together at that time to enable the Capital of Culture bid document to present a coherent cultural regeneration narrative that ultimately proved to be successful. Those factors included the strong artistic visions of the Biennial, Tate and Bluecoat Arts Centre (amongst other artforms and players) but also the manifestation of FACT in physical form:

“FACT articulated in physical form some idea about how Liverpool might see itself in the future... FACT in its way just seemed to be future-facing. It seemed to be saying you don’t have to rely on nostalgia and a particular kind of identity and character in order to be defined. You can do something that seems to be aspirational and future facing, and have a Liverpool accent that can also speak to the wider world” (interview with author 2012).
The surprise announcement in 2003 that Liverpool had been successful in securing the award of European Capital of Culture 2008 produced “a fantastic following wind”. According to Lewis Biggs: “Liverpool City Council may have given us a small amount of money in 2002 but they didn’t really begin to take us seriously till 2004, and what had happened in the interim, June 2003, was the winning of the bid to be European Capital of Culture so they bloody had to take it seriously by 2004!... So we were really lucky with the way the political wind blew.” Hindsight allows Berg to summarise what has proved to be a crucial period in Liverpool’s recent political and cultural history:

“So you’ve got the shift by Lewis from the formal to the independent\textsuperscript{42}, and the shift in thinking in Liverpool, the shift of the tectonic plates moving...That period, till about 2004, 2005, it could have gone any way. It could have just gone, and Liverpool would be something else, but that’s the period that defined, what happened then completely shaped what happened subsequently” (interview with author 2012).

Once the title of European Capital of Culture had been won, the City Council had to turn itself from a bidding organisation to a delivery organisation. The way it did this has been much discussed and criticised (Boland 2010; Jones & Wilks-Heeg 2004; O’Brien 2011; O’Brien and Cox 2012). In essence, the Council’s desire to control the project in order to ensure that it delivered measurable, large-scale, mostly instrumental outcomes meant that it created difficulties for itself; difficulties that might have been avoided if it had been more open to the expertise already available within the city. For example, academic Dr Meecham warned:

“It is to be hoped that Liverpool’s distinction will be to build structures that support the illegitimate as well as the legitimate, the tangible and the intangible. Public consultation is not enough if it is simply used as

\textsuperscript{42} Berg is referring to Bigg’s move from the secure base of Tate Liverpool to the Biennial, at the time, barely a constituted organisation, with no staff and no income, and independent of any parent body.
a means to buttress the status quo... Courting large-scale tourism that will generate cash is only a partial answer to regeneration... Culture, particularly in Liverpool, is often deeply subversive, perverse and uncomfortable. It is not destined to act merely as a glue to rebuild communities or create worthy citizens – and it is all the better for that” (Meecham 2009 p101).

Despite concerns from the arts sector and academic commentary regarding its actions, the City Council made a number of decisions that appeared at the time to jeopardise the likelihood of a successful 2008. In turning its attention to how to deliver the promises made in the bid document, the Council appeared to marginalise the arts sector by taking the organisation of the year in-house. Although the Council set up a supposedly independent limited company, the Liverpool Culture Company, to administer the project, David Henshaw, the Council’s Chief Executive was installed as Director, and many existing Council staff were seconded to work for it. Lewis Biggs (2009) commented: “The council decided to administer the event itself, despite having no experience or skills in this area. The failure to separate the cultural programme and funding from direct control by elected politicians also made every cultural decision open to political infighting” (p37). The emphasis from the Culture Company’s perspective was to use the title to increase and speed up the physical regeneration of Liverpool, attract private sector inward investment and re-brand and market the city as a tourist destination. A panel discussion at the Arts Council England organised event, Art 05, made this clear and was reported in Art Monthly (March 2006):

“It was left to Peter Mearns, North West Development Agency director of marketing, to fill the vacuum. “The Capital of Culture year” he said, “is the fuel that will drive the rocket that will lead the regeneration of Merseyside. We are interested in jobs and people’s quality of life. It’s not about the art nor culture at all.” Another deafening silence engulfed the auditorium, but of course - for reasons discussed by JJ Charlesworth see (AM243) - no one was prepared to
argue with this statement. Panelist Eddie Berg, ex director of FACT, could only thank Mearns for his “frank position statement” and sum up with the deeply cynical: “here in Liverpool, it is about what culture can buy us”.

An external artistic director for the year, Robyn Archer, was appointed, although she was unable to take up the post for eighteen months, causing some concern that she would not have enough lead-in time to programme a genuinely world-class year. In the meantime, Paul Domela, programme director of the Liverpool Biennial, writing in the 2004 Biennial catalogue, anticipated the issues and benefits for the city:

“There is real pressure to ‘finish’ the city before the celebrations as European Capital of Culture in 2008. The creation of such an ‘event horizon’ as if it were an endpoint is of course a contradiction in terms – but it does galvanise political and financial support. We anticipate its potential as a platform for cultural transformation, to be actualised and sustained in the practice and quality of cultural producers who live and work locally but whose work resonates globally… This is as much a project of physical transformation as a leap of the imagination twenty years forward. To break the ‘buzz to bland’ cycle, whereby successful regeneration is rapidly followed by homogenisation, the city needs to invest in diversity at the same time as taking into account difference, participation and sustainability” (p67).

It is noticeable that this passage shows awareness of the potential negative impacts of short-term regeneration initiatives. Embedded within this passage is advice on approach and acknowledgement of the expertise available locally, but not fully utilised by The Culture Company until it reached crisis point.

Although the title of Capital of Culture was highly desirable and even prestigious (for the reasons discussed in chapters two and three), in itself it
was not accompanied by sufficient funding to deliver the year\textsuperscript{43}. The Council needed to raise funds to make it happen, and the announcement of the title produced private sector investment to a degree that would have been unthinkable even twelve months previously. Property prices generally rose considerably within two years (Jones and Wilks-Heeg 2004) and private developers enabled several new landmark buildings for the city centre. A gentrification process that had previously bypassed the city began, with the Council promoting the “Baltic Triangle” area of light industrial units to the immediate west of the city centre as a creative industries hub, without noticeable success.\textsuperscript{44}

In the run-up to 2008, the Council also tied its own discretionary funding to themed years, for example, Year of the Sea and Year of Faith, in what appeared as an attempt at shaping art production in the city (see Jones and Wilks-Heeg 2004 and their comments on “whose culture” is prioritised by civic authorities in these types of situations). Established groups with highly-regarded professional artists as members, such as Eight Days a Week, which had a long-term exchange and residency programme with professional artists in Cologne, failed to obtain funding from the Council under this new regime\textsuperscript{45}. Reports of considerable difficulty within the Culture Company surfaced in the city and the national press during this period, with some high profile resignations, including the Operations Manager, Jason Harborow and several reshuffles of The Culture Company Board. Robyn Archer resigned before coming to Liverpool to take up her post, and there was a sense of disintegration and real concern over whether the City Council would be able to deliver the 2008 year. Bryan Biggs summarises something of the artistic versus public policy conflict that took place:

“We all worked with Bob Scott to get the bid together, and then the City Council said we’ve got it now. Henshaw got hold of it and made

\textsuperscript{43} The award was accompanied by only c. £100,000
\textsuperscript{44} There are many unoccupied units, and those that are occupied include companies that, for example, rent chairs for events, undertake car repairs etc. Author observation 2011 and 2012.
\textsuperscript{45} Author interview with Pete Clarke, 2007, founder member of Eight Days a Week and Course Leader MA Fine Art UCLAN.
it this thing that was purely about improving the image, all the policy things that didn’t really care about the art, just wanted the outcomes - inward investment, tourism. Robyn couldn’t deal with that culture. The thing we did last year, the Rebel City, City of Radicals - she was talking about interrogating that idea of Liverpool as a place that does things differently. That anarchic streak, she wanted to celebrate all that. But the City wanted to absolutely control it. They said we don’t want that, we want it to be stuff that everyone can enjoy, not to problematise it. She wanted to problematise the notion of culture, which I think is what that opportunity should have been about. But you come against a culture that says no, no way, we’re going to make it very simple, and sell it as a marketing exercise for the city” (Interview with author 2012).

Eventually the Culture Company Board coalesced as a smaller group under the deputy-leadership of Phil Redmond, and the situation was retrieved. O’Brien (2011) suggests “Liverpool transitioned from cultural government, whereby the local authority was the central, controlling organisation for cultural policy, to cultural governance, where cultural policy was the product of a fragmented network of shared decision-making”. Expressed more colloquially, the coalition of sector stakeholders who formed LARC (Liverpool Arts Regeneration Consortium)46 stepped into the delivery vacuum, and has since influenced cultural policy making within the city. Bryan Biggs describes his view of how this happened:

“In the vacuum that was created...LARC was getting going and we put ourselves forward. We said, we’ve got a programme, don’t panic about getting loads of new stuff in if you can’t afford it. Invest in us to deliver what we’re doing. And they did a few things on top like “the Spider”47 but there weren’t that many big things that were done on their own. They saw that we knew what we were doing - we were

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46 LARC consists of representatives from Bluecoat, FACT, Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Tate Liverpool, and the Unity Theatre.

47 A giant animatrix model of a spider that paraded through the city centre, made by the company La Machine, who had also done The Sultan’s Elephant in London.
talking to health people, and education people, and they recognised that actually LARC have got a lot in policy terms that could be useful. The fact that Clare McColgan\footnote{Head of Culture at Liverpool City Council} comes to the LARC meetings - it’s a very good relationship” (interview with author 2012).

This story illustrates my argument, articulated in chapter two, that arts professionals are not simply passive victims of flawed policy, but have agency to influence the policy environment in which they work, certainly at local level and on occasion at national level. In the event, the Impacts 08 research suggests that the Council got many of the quantifiable regeneration-type outcomes that it wanted, including a respectable artistic programme, with 2008 “having a generally positive impact on the city overall” (O’Brien 2011). Interviewed in 2011, having left the organisation, Lewis Biggs is quite clear that public policy and the regeneration agendas were “definitely an enabler” for the Biennial, although the original founding aims of the Biennial were formed around art rather than regeneration concerns.

Paul Domela, previously programme director with the Liverpool Biennial, writes in the 2004 International catalogue: “Liverpool Biennial is a witting accomplice to economic outputs and performance indicators” (p67). And in the Introduction to the International 06 catalogue, Lewis Biggs writes unequivocally: “The International exhibition embraces, overtly, enthusiastically, and with inexorable logic, the agendas of its funders…” (p9). Current director Sally Tallant has a similar practical attitude: “Whatever we need to do to help them support us, we will do. I don’t care what hoops we have to jump through. I’ll use whatever language is necessary. It’s absolutely essential” (interview with author 2012). This is not as straightforward as it seems; these comments suggest knowingness about the system and an ability and willingness to consciously “play the game” – without necessarily believing in the rules of the game. Biggs and his staff were aware of the need to publicly justify their funding in terms of the
instrumentalist agenda\textsuperscript{49} while continuing to be arts-led, and Tallant recognises the constructed performative element of engaging on this level. An instructive text in this context is from Andrew Brighton, a former Tate curator and writer, in his presentation “Why we should lie” given at the Third Ear Symposium in 2013. In it he argues that “in writing reports and applications to funders and other bureaucratic stakeholders, those culturally steeped in art should “lie ethically…We should pretend not to know that the discourse of public accountability is valueless, incompetent and antipathetic.” (http://thirdearsymposium.com/start-the-debate/ accessed 13.1.14). From my own experience as a working arts professional, I suggest that this represents a common perspective and practice within the sector.

A persistent area of concern and rhetoric within the city prior to 2008 was the notion of legacy. The arts sector at all levels was anxious that the considerable energy and funding that was applied to 2008 would stop on 1\textsuperscript{st} January 2009. The City Council, on the other hand, consistently promised that this wouldn't be the case. Sufficient time has now passed to judge that post-2008 cultural policy and activity in the city has met mixed fortunes but is generally in a better place than it was prior to 2008. There is less public funding and some short-term public programmes were discontinued, such as Creative Communities, created specifically for the 2008 year to involve residents of outlying areas in the arts. Other outreach and participation projects, largely delivered by the arts organisations, had been conceived on a longer-term plan and continued; for example, the Bluecoat’s “The Blue Room” project. Arts practitioners were generally disappointed not to have benefited more in terms of their working conditions and infrastructure, a perspective articulated by Liverpool-based artist Emily Speed:

“So there was a lot of bad feeling about where the funding went. None really went to local artists. It didn’t feel like OUR Capital of Culture. It felt like lots of stuff being shipped in, and lots of huge

\textsuperscript{49} Interview with deputy chief executive Paul Smith, 2012, where Smith explained that part of his role in the organisation was to present the instrumentalist business case, including economic impact reports, in order to allow Biggs to inspire with talk about the art.
circus … things like the Spider, which are monumental things, but there’s no legacy. The legacy from that is totally different to supporting grassroots. The whole thing was problematical to me, because that was a chance to put some money into local arts” (interview with author 2012).

But the key factor influencing arts and cultural policy in Liverpool was the growing national and international monetary and banking crisis that first showed itself in the UK in autumn 2008 as “the credit crunch” and a run on a national bank. The New Labour golden age for the arts came to a crashing end as a programme of massive public sector cuts was discussed, and, following the formation of a new Coalition Government, implemented from 2010. Nationally, Arts Council England had its treasury funds cut by 29.6% with the instruction that no more than 15% could be passed on to the sector; also therefore entailing a 50% cut in its own administration budget. As a result, the Arts Council moved from a system of Regularly Funded Organisations to a system of investing in National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs). This move reflected its policy that it would not give “equal cuts to all” (other than the in-year cuts it was required to make in 2010) but “properly” fund a portfolio of organisations that it judged to have strategic significance. The side-effect of this was to remove all its funding from 206 previously Regularly Funded Organisations. Additionally the national government decided on a “bonfire of the quangos” and abolished the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) from March 31st 2012. The RDAs were replaced with Local Enterprise Partnerships which have been allocated considerably lower funding as compared to the RDAs. This has had a significant financial impact on the Liverpool Biennial which received substantial year-on-year funding from the North West Development Agency, resulting in a reduction of 30% in its budget. However, the Liverpool Biennial was successful in making the transition from RFO to NPO funding, which ensures c £700k funding a year from 2012-2015. It had also reserved some of its 2008 funding which it used to subsidise the 2010 edition, and therefore was able to ameliorate the worst of the early funding cuts. Notwithstanding this, its budget for the 2012 edition was halved and Tallant expressed
Politically in Liverpool, the Liberal Democrats were in administration till 2010, after which a Labour administration was voted in under the leadership of Joe Anderson. In terms of its financial settlement from national government, the City Council was “the worst hit in the country even though we’re one of the most socially deprived” (Councillor Wendy Simon, interview with author 2012). It has been required to make savings of £140m over two years (2011 – 2013) with £90m having to be made in the first year. In 2010 this amounted to a 28% cut to the Culture and Tourism Portfolio, however efforts were made to protect the major arts organisations from the worst of this: “…the culture and tourism portfolio, there was as a whole a 28% cut, but the actual art organisations only saw a 15%. All the other bits of the portfolio actually took the load of that”. 50 On a political and policy level however, there is evidence that there has been a real step-change in arts policy learning and implementation from the City Council. The success of 2008 in terms of its attraction of tourists and inward investment, and the positive image change nationally, along with the realisation that “certainly, the arts and cultural sector are one of the main economic drivers of the city” (Councillor Wendy Simon interview with author 2012) and “the only sector with the potential to grow” (Biggs, B. interview with author 2011) appears to have convinced the current Labour administration of the benefits of the arts. The Councils Arts & Culture Investment Programme Framework 2012-2015 (ACIP) states the Council’s ambitions and policy, and explicitly links it to the cultural tourism and destination marketing agendas:

“ACIP supports Liverpool’s economy by providing an independent and distinct cultural offer that provides real authenticity and a strong sense of identity to the Liverpool brand. The quality of artistic activity has achieved (and needs to maintain) an international standard which enables it to compete with other cities…Liverpool’s burgeoning reputation as a cultural destination is reliant upon its cultural

50 2012 interview with Cllr Wendy Simon, Cabinet Member for Culture and Tourism.
programme” (p1).

Seen to be of equal importance is the sector’s contribution to the regeneration needs of the city: “The Council will seek to ensure this investment contributes to the regeneration of the city and offers value for money” (p2). Councillor Wendy Simon, Cabinet Member for Culture and Tourism, explains her aspiration:

“One of the things that I’m trying to do as well is look at how culture impacts as a whole across everything that we provide as a service within the council. So it’s not just about culture as a distinct offer of the city, but actually it’s embedded in the life of the remit of the city in how we use culture to achieve some of our other goals” (interview with author 2012).

This suggests the notion of being a “creative city” (Landry 2000, Florida 2003) appears to have currency within Council thinking:

“I think, certainly with this administration, it’s looking at, they are partners with us in the city, about driving economic regeneration, and part of that agenda is what people would want, whether they live here, they want to invest here, or they work here, they would want a good cultural offer and that is part of a place to live and invest and work” (Cllr Wendy Simon, interview with author 2012).

However familiar this rhetoric sounds, there are difficult side-effects. For example, FACT made many of its front of house staff redundant in 2014, justifying replacing them with volunteers as putting “talent development at the heart of the organisation” http://www.fact.co.uk/news-articles/2014/04/facts-response-to-the-precarious-workers-brigade.aspx accessed 30.5.14), in line with a City Council emphasis on skills development.

Advocacy backed up by external research by the University of Liverpool
(Impacts 08) and other research commissioned by LARC, has proved crucial in winning arguments around the Cabinet table. Again, Councillor Wendy Simon explains: “We know our numbers now, for each pound spent on culture as a city now, because of the increase in the take-up in tourism, we generally get £12 back”. She suggests that there has been a welcome breakdown in institutional ‘silodeath’, and attempts to work in more collaborative and holistic ways, with a unity in thinking from senior Authority management:

“The chief executive, the leader of the council and the cabinet fully understand the arts agenda. We’ve used it in virtually every portfolio that we’ve got, be it regeneration, in community safety, in looking at how we’ve joint funded projects, in education, in health. Every agenda. I think that the argument has been won in the sense that it’s up there, mainstream, with business investment, improving educational attainment, and skills opportunities…So it’s recognising that it’s culture, but it’s also business, and if you add it up, the amount of people in employment in culture and tourism and leisure in the city, not just those directly employed but indirectly employed, it probably is the biggest employer outside the public sector”.

The Council is quite specific about the agendas that the arts are expected to contribute to, paraphrasing the New Labour mantra within the local setting:

“When they bring in international or national artists in, or they’re doing national programmes, how they are selling the city as well as their own organisations. Also how they are helping us achieve issues around employment and skills, their engagement with the creative apprenticeship programme. And also about recognising the different skills in the arts and cultural sector that perhaps we need to be developing, within our own employment and skills agenda, so that we are training… because the employment opportunities are changing in the city” (Councillor Wendy Simon, interview with author).
On this basis, the Liverpool Biennial sits very comfortably within the Council’s international ambitions. “I think they’ve recognised that the biennial is the only international brand they’ve got in terms of cultural events” (Biggs, B. 2012 interview with author). In pursuit of these agendas, despite the “unprecedented” cuts, the administration has protected their financial support of the arts, keeping cuts to their revenue funding to 10% over three years.

Despite this new understanding and approach from the Council, it should be noted that this administration is only two years old and needs more time to follow through its ambitions; may or may not win a subsequent election; and that national public spending cuts are ongoing. Bryan Biggs still considers the situation for the arts in Liverpool to be “fragile”. As he wrote in the Introduction to Art in a City: “Liverpool is very much a barometer of the changing nature of UK arts funding.” Where arts policy in the city can still be developed – and appears to be behind other cities such as Manchester and even Brighton and Hove – is in integrating applied design and public art into the built environment on a regular and permanent basis. This is surprising given the major public art programme of the Biennial over the last thirteen years. Senior Council officials remember stand out public realm works from various Biennial editions\(^5\), but do not appear to make the connection between this and new built environment projects. Two examples illustrate this. The £500m Liverpool One shopping development, completed for 2008 by the Grosvenor Group, is underpinned by a high-quality public realm specification, but had no percent for art or Section 106 agreements attached that could have been used to integrate public realm artworks or applied design into its infrastructure, and therefore the fabric of the city. The second example is current, with the £150m Project Jennifer regeneration development in Kirkdale, one of many treeless urban residential areas in north Liverpool. This would provide a new neighbourhood centre consisting of new housing, a new shopping centre with Sainsburys as the anchor

\(^5\) Empirical research undertaken as part of this study by author. All Council interviewees were asked if they remembered any Biennial artworks and all, without exception, were able to name a minimum of two.
tenant, a new £15m building for Notre Dame School, a health centre and other commercial units. There are no plans to integrate public art or applied design in this development either, and when asked about the Council approach to this aspect of built environment development, the Deputy Director of Regeneration Mark Kitts gave the Council perspective as:

“Clearly we’re into good quality development, good quality design, but one thing we need to be mindful of this particular moment in time, given the economic climate, is that we can’t always promise that high quality. Going back to my earlier point, we have to make sure we drive forward economic development in the city and that’s a mixture of businesses and jobs, and I think it’s important that we don’t drive away the opportunities by insisting upon too high a quality or too expensive a scheme. Or even Section 106s in some cases. So we do have an approach, where we are creative and supportive of that, but we’ve got to balance it with deliverability” (interview with author 2012).

This suggests that, despite policy documents and rhetoric, the City is not able to fully deploy the potential of the arts for the people of Liverpool, and there is some indication of incomplete understanding. From this narrative, it can be seen that over the last twenty or so years, Liverpool has been through an intense cultural development process that has started to become embedded within civic thinking. The concluding chapter will reflect upon just how transformative for the city this process has been.

Profile of the Folkestone Triennial

In order to give some comparative context to the Liverpool Biennial and its circumstances, I present a brief overview of the Folkestone Triennial and the Istanbul Biennial.

Like Liverpool, Folkestone has also been a town in decline, albeit on a smaller scale than Liverpool. The opening of the Channel Tunnel in 1991 was detrimental to both Folkestone’s port and the tourism industry, with the
last cross channel service from Folkestone withdrawn and the port closed in 2000 (Kennell 2007). In 2007 Folkestone had unemployment of 3.2% compared with a national average of 1.7% in the South East. Four wards in the east of Folkestone were in the South East Development Agency’s (SEEDA) 120 most deprived wards, and the town was a priority regeneration area in SEEDA’s Regional Economic Strategy (Kennell 2007). Additionally educational achievement was lower than national and regional averages (Kennell 2007). It is against a backdrop of this nature that the Creative Foundation founded the Folkestone Triennial.

The Folkestone Triennial model also conforms to the “contemporary biennial model”, but to date on a considerably smaller scale than the Liverpool Biennial (although budgets for its first two editions are not dissimilar from the budgets for the first two editions of the Liverpool Biennial). But the most significant context for the Folkestone Triennial is its initiation by the Creative Foundation and its position within it. The Creative Foundation was set up by millionaire philanthropist Roger de Haan in 2002, with a mission to stimulate regeneration within Folkestone. It responded to two policy conditions, first, the lack of an overarching strategy for Folkestone within the public sector. Second, in formulating an overarching strategy, the organisation took care to research arts-led regeneration projects elsewhere, becoming aware of academic research into negative side-effects such as contributing to centre and periphery disconnections:

“It became obvious to me that there was a lack of any kind of strategic approach from the public agencies” (de Haan, in Ewbank 2011 p23).

“We were determined that, as far as possible, our approach would neither be unsure or piecemeal” (Ewbank 2011 p30).

Working with civic stakeholders, the local authority and other agencies, the Creative Foundation formulated a comprehensive and holistic “creativity-led” regeneration strategy for the town, of which the Triennial was an important
but relatively small part, expected to have considerable symbolic rather than tangible impact on the town ("Our intention was to generate widely-felt but largely intangible benefits through a series of interventions" (Ewbank 2011 p28). This was a highly realistic position to take, and is significantly different from the expectations of economic and regenerative impact that surrounds the Liverpool Biennial.

The holistic strategy that was decided upon by the Creative Foundation had four key strands:

1. A Creative Quarter that would regenerate the Old Town by encouraging creative businesses to locate there. This was done through significant property acquisition (80 plus buildings to date), refurbishment and a lettings policy that prioritised creative businesses and people, and is geared towards long-term investment.

2. Education, with the aim of improving educational attainment by supporting the move of a failing school to academy status; and establishing a university campus in Folkestone with Christ Church Canterbury, specialising in performing arts courses.

3. Exhibitions and Festivals – "a series of exhibitions, festivals and events designed to engage local people in the arts, and to raise the profile of Folkestone as a place where diverse cultural activity happens" (Ewbank 2011). This strand of work included the development of the Quarterhouse Arts and Business Centre. The Folkestone Triennial is positioned within this strand, along with a range of festivals throughout the year.

4. Arts and Health research and action projects.

The Folkestone Triennial has a strong commissioning ethos, supporting production and presentation of around 25 new works each edition. These are also shown in a mixture of indoor spaces and the public realm, but since
Folkestone does not have any formal gallery spaces, the indoor spaces tend to be found and borrowed - again, a method that contributes to defamiliarising and transforming the town for its local residents, allowing them to unexpectedly encounter a work within their daily lives. There has been a modest education programme accompanying its two editions to date, with two members of staff and a budget of £70,000 focused on this area for the 2014 edition.

Unlike the Liverpool Biennial, from its first iteration director Andrea Schlieker deliberately programmed artists of international stature, with a sprinkling of regional mid-career artists mixed in. She brought some extremely famous names to this otherwise internationally unknown depressed small seaside town, for example, Christian Boltanski, Jeremy Deller, Tracey Emin, Langlands and Bell, Mark Wallinger, Martin Creed and Cornelia Parker. This was a strategy deliberately intended to position Folkestone beyond its existing ‘cultural weight’. The intended benefits were that these experienced artists could be trusted to make quality works (ie that would help establish this Triennial’s reputation, as well as lowering commissioning risk); it signified the seriousness of the endeavor and its ambition and scale; and it was an astute marketing technique to draw media and art world attention to the project and therefore visitors to the town (Schlieker, interview with author 2011). In other words, it was a tactical deployment of a biennial for destination marketing and regeneration purposes. Roger de Haan commented: “Andrea took what we had been working on and moved it onto another level” (in Ewbank 2011 p94).

In Folkestone’s case, The Creative Foundation has made a significant difference in a town much smaller and more manageable than Liverpool. *Adventures in Regeneration* by Nick Ewbank (2011), former Director of The Creative Foundation, tells a narrative of a seaside town in severe decline since the 1970s, rescued – or in the process of being rescued – by a carefully thought-through strategy of creativity-led regeneration backed by very significant philanthropic funding and an alliance of stakeholders. It does not, generally, fit the mould and criticism of culture-led regeneration (see
chapter two), being more sophisticated in its analysis of problem and potential solutions, and more “joined-up” in its approach and implementation. It has also not become dependent on the private corporate sector. In this instance, the cultural component has not consisted of one flagship arts building, such as Guggenheim Bilbao, or Tate Liverpool, (or MIMA, or Hepworth Wakefield, or Turner Contemporary, or First Site Colchester – the list can go on). The Creative Foundation took a “creative industries approach”, deciding on a range of initiatives that would have long-term effects. The Foundation bought up and refurbished a significant number of rundown and derelict properties in the old town, renting them out to creative businesses as part of a business incubator and Creative Quarter approach. It now owns 117 studios and offices, 35 flats and 40 shops and restaurants across 84 buildings, with 77% occupancy in 2011. There are two points worth noting (1) the definition of “creative business” is fairly stretched from the DCMS definition (1998) and included, when I visited in 2011, a cake decorating shop. This and the number of voids implies that Folkestone does not yet have a critical mass of artists or “creatives” that can genuinely provide an economic and social boost to the town. (2) The purchase of so many properties has led to significant rises in property prices, generally an indication of gentrification. However the Creative Foundation, as ‘sympathetic’ landlord, is likely to protect the usage and rents for the creative sector for the foreseeable future, meaning that growing private sector development and businesses, and further gentrification, should not displace the creative sector:

“The De Haan investment will mean that the Creative Foundation’s properties are set to remain in charitable hands indefinitely – and well into the next century. Rents will remain affordable for artists and the surplus income that is generated will continue to fund a vibrant arts programme for the town. The quality of refurbishment work being undertaken ensures that the accommodation will remain in good condition for the long term” (Ewbank 2011 p53).

The Creative Foundation worked with Canterbury Christ Church University
College (amongst others) to set up Folkestone University Centre. The Creative Foundation also supported a failing school – the fifth worst in the country in 20013 – in its renewal as The Folkestone Academy specialising in European Culture, Media and the Arts. The Folkestone Triennial is part of the third strand of activity (“exhibitions, festivals and events”), taking its place alongside the Quarterhouse, a new arts, conference and entertainment venue, and an Arts and Health programme. From this summary of activity and achievement, it can be seen that Folkestone was coming from a particularly low base. But it was and remains an aim for Folkestone – via the profile raising of the Triennial - not just to stimulate entrepreneurial activity in the town, but to attract employers and members of “the creative class” to relocate there. As Andrea Schlieker, Director of the first two Folkestone Triennials, puts it:

“They really do seem to have this aim to make Folkestone the centre for people who work in the creative industries. And this is artists, designers, architects, filmmakers - you can see the difference from when I first came here in 2004, 2005. I hear from so many people in the art world, especially now with the high speed train, “well I have a one bed flat in Hackney but I can buy a four bedroom house in Folkestone. It’s a no brainer, I can move there and I commute three times a week to London’” (interview with author 2011).

The Triennial has only taken place for three editions, three years apart, and this is too short a timescale for it to be seen to make a difference on the scale that urban regeneration requires. Certainly the Triennial has brought the town positive national media attention that it wouldn’t otherwise have had, brought in tourists who may not have otherwise visited, and it has no doubt impacted on individuals in a variety of ways, from skills training and experience, to raised expectations and ambitions, to benefiting from Triennial spend, to exposure to artworks by artists with national and international reputations. It’s growing collection of permanent contemporary public realm works are also likely to add to its increasing distinctiveness in the future.
Like the Liverpool Biennial, the Triennial exhibits newly commissioned works that respond in some way to the town, its stories, its situation and, where possible, remain as permanent artworks for the town. In a town without a local visual arts institution (unlike Liverpool which has an embarrassment of riches in its six institutions, or seven if the Biennial is counted), this collection policy has greater importance and significance for the future. As de Haan describes it: “We now have the beginnings of a permanent collection of the best contemporary art that will draw people to Folkestone and over time turn it into an artistic mecca” (in Ewbank 2011 p102). Whether it becomes an artistic mecca remains to be seen, but what is clear from this and other statements made by those associated with the Folkestone Triennial, is an understanding of and willingness to take a long-term view, a position that is still only tentative in Liverpool.

A superficial understanding of this model of working could lead to it being described as compatible with destination marketing and the visitor economy. However a more accurate analysis is that this model utilises the benefits brought by the visitor economy and greater public profile. The Triennial is overtly and knowingly positioned as the “symbolic content”, contributing to a more positive counter narrative to that of the “failing seaside town” of popular perception. Because the Triennial is embedded within a much wider strategy that addresses the holistic regeneration of the town, it is not expected to “lead” the regeneration, but more realistically, to take its place amongst other initiatives. Does this event model resist neo-liberal type policies and its side-effects? Public policy and funding, as well as Creative Foundation support and funding enables its existence. It is judged successful or otherwise on its own and artistic terms. It provides significant alternative activity for residents and visitors and an unusual and growing permanent public art collection in the town. But my analysis is that it takes a passive rather than an active role (as Liverpool Biennial tries to do); providing something that is not specifically market-driven rather than actively resisting the effects of the market. The topic of resistance is discussed in more detail in the concluding chapter.
The Istanbul Biennial

Istanbul is a city of 15 million people, and late 20th century and early 21st century urban issues are urgent, but it has not experienced the type of cultural regeneration strategies and building-based arts initiatives that have been common in the UK, Europe and the US. Regeneration of sorts has taken place through an opening up of the economy to global business, but it has essentially taken the form of free-market capitalism. Although the Istanbul Biennial was initiated in 1987 through the philanthropic IKSV organisation, its stated aim was to provide a profile for the city through gaining a place on the top end international arts scene, rather than to contribute a mechanism of engagement with aspects of the city:

“The Foundation’s initial goal was to offer the finest examples of art from around the world, while at the same time promoting the national, cultural and artistic assets of Turkey, by using arts to create an international platform of communication.”


This approach self-evidently lacks the social elements of UK and other Western regeneration initiatives, and indeed, some strategies, (as reported in the Turkish Cultural Policy Report, Ada 2011) actively work against socio-cultural benefits for residents. The unrest of May 2013 may be one consequence of this, amongst other factors; see Adem Altan’s analysis on the influential Foreign Policy website, which he connects directly to the actions of an increasingly authoritarian and nepotistic government.52

The Istanbul Biennial operates a substantially different model to the UK biennials discussed here, and within a very different context. Its administration and fundraising is carried out by the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (IKSV), who also initiated the Biennial in 1987. Dr Nejat Eczacibasi established the IKSV foundation in 1973, while he was also the

52 (http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/06/01/here_s_what_you_need_to_know_about_the_clashes_in_turkey accessed 7.2.14).
director of the global Eczacibasi business which became the leading pharmaceutical company in Turkey and diversified into many other areas, making it one of the ten biggest corporations in Turkey. The IKSV foundation can therefore reasonably be said to be aligned from inception with the economic interests of the parent company, international destination marketing, the globalising economy and the desire to be associated with Western development concepts. But the artistic direction of each edition sits with an external curator, selected every two years by a committee lead by the IKSV, with very little in the way of education projects, concern with accessibility, or artistic continuity between editions. Early editions sited biennial works within historic Istanbul locations, a small area on the whole frequented by tourists rather than residents. There have been occasional works or performances sited in the public realm since, but otherwise, Istanbul Biennial exhibitions have frequently taken place in refurbished warehouses, sometimes with an entrance fee. The director, Bige Orer, told me that matters of inclusion and audiences “is not a priority” for them (interview with author 2011).

The IKSV itself is a private philanthropic organisation, set up as “a non-profit, non-governmental organisation founded in 1973 by seventeen businessmen and art enthusiasts who gathered under the leadership of Dr. Nejat F. Eczacıbaşı.” (http://www.iksv.org/english/ accessed 28/3/11). This initial set-up continues to set the tone and culture of the organisation, in that it is dependent on the corporate sector of Turkey and beyond. Dr Sirhan Ada, course director of the MA in Arts Management at Istanbul Bilgi University, compared the founding Eczacibasi corporation, and Koc (another substantial Turkish corporation that made a ten year sponsorship deal with the Istanbul Biennial in 2006) with the US Getty and Rockefeller families, which gives some idea of relative scale (interview with author 2011). The Istanbul Municipal Authority, and the Turkish Government “give very little” funding to the Istanbul Biennial (Orer, interview with author 2011), making it dependant on private sector sponsorship. Orer views this as a positive because this gives a lot of freedom. It uses this freedom to behave as an independent institution:
“We can do whatever we want, we don’t have to report to the public authorities that we have done this, we have done that. We are responsible to our audience, we are responsible to the art scene and we are responsible to ourselves to justify what we are doing. Not to justify to the government, not to the central or local government” (interview with author 2011).

However there is no obligation within this freedom to relate their exhibitions to its distinctive location, or to a particular proportion of the city’s fifteen million residents. Neither does it appear to be engaged with directly supporting or being involved in developing the city’s arts ecology, other than by its existence; and it employs curators who select artists who already have something of an international reputation. The implication would seem to be that the international focus is paramount. As a result, it prioritises: “the artistic discourse of the Biennial and to open up new debates about contemporary art and also to discuss what is new about exhibition making, about curatorial discourse, or about new trends, mediums.” (Orer, interview with author 2011).

The Istanbul Biennial’s key and critical audience then is during its ‘vernissage’, the opening week, when the international critics, curators, dealers, collectors, directors and artists fly in. Their opinion is important and it is this opinion, of an international peer group, that the Istanbul Biennial courts. It has done this successfully, with key people citing Istanbul as one of the top five biennials, after Venice, Sao Paulo and Sydney. The 2011 curators, Hoffman and Pedrosa, cite the following reasons for Istanbul’s critical success:

“Istanbul seems to enjoy a privileged position, given the attention it gets from the specialised international audience and the local scene. This is attributable to various factors: the city’s unique location in both Europe and Asia, the event’s 25 year history, and the prevalence of innovative and independent curatorial projects, many of which would be difficult to implement in other contexts. And then of course there is
the support of its organisers, who over the years have enabled much intellectual and artistic experimentation” (Remembering Istanbul p20/21).

The 2011 edition had only two education programmes, one for “young people” (“The biennial is happy to offer special programming for the duration of the exhibition that is intended to help them get acquainted with basic artistic terms and concepts. While strolling through the venues, they will talk about and put into practice what they have learned.” http://12b.iksv.org/en/bienal_etkinlikleri.asp?id=46&c=2 retrieved 12/12/11). The other programme was for two hundred art teachers. Both are minimal and unsophisticated in comparison to the types of education projects offered in this country and by, for example, the Liverpool Biennial.

As already noted, the audience of most interest to the Istanbul Biennial would appear to be its art world peers and critics, probably closely followed by sponsors and collectors. Allied to this is a sense that the intellectual and critical quality of the art and themes presented is of paramount importance. Within the literature published by the Istanbul Biennial this is frequently discussed in terms of relevance to global events, and within a discourse that builds on previous exhibitions and specialist knowledge. But there is little, if any, discussion on the arts’ relevance to the people of Istanbul, or impact on them, whether that is social, economic, educational or other. This type of discourse, which includes issues of access and is so prevalent and dominant in the UK, appears to be completely absent within the model of the Istanbul Biennial. The Istanbul Biennial has focused on venues for presentation, with no consistent philosophy or emphasis on the public realm or city footprint, unlike both Folkestone and Liverpool. Where public realm work has taken place this is described as “satellite sites” that is, not intrinsic to the main biennial exhibition. Previous catalogues show that some works sited in the public realm are installation and performance pieces, rather than public sculpture, the more dominant (and perhaps accessible) form of public realm art shown at Folkestone Triennial and the Liverpool Biennial. Ozge Celikasman, Dr Ada’s administrator, told me that there are occasional (non
biennial) projects with local communities but in general: “it is always been
an issue in Turkey, elitism, from the beginning of the Turkish republic. Art is
something higher … not for ordinary people” (interview with author October
2011). Staff at the IKSV office noted that the cost of education and
accommodation in Istanbul were becoming unaffordable for many people,
with free public education being “very bad”, and that the gap between what
working and middle class people could afford was widening. In this context
in Britain, public policy turns to the arts and asks what it can contribute
towards liveability, problem solving, engagement with civic structures, local
issues, and quality of life. This does not appear to be the case in Turkey
from either the public or private sector (with the exception of the SALT
organisation, run by former Istanbul Biennial director Vasif Kortun). In their
2003 paper “The Digestible Other”, Atagok and Platt summarise the Istanbul
Biennial as follows: “Far from nurturing contemporary art in Turkey or
introducing Turkish and other Middle Eastern artists to international
audiences, the Istanbul Biennial has increasingly become an event with
predictable Eurocentric parameters” (p109).

Before the 2011 biennial, the IKSV organised a conference called
“Remembering Istanbul”. Previous curators and directors of the Istanbul
Biennial gave talks about their experience and these were collected in the
Remembering Istanbul publication. This publication is striking for its
concentration on what could be called “insider concerns”, with a focus on
international curating. It appears to acknowledge that beyond their peers,
they are targeting a middle class, educated, interested in art audience. This
quote is striking in how simplistic some thinking is in comparison to the
sophistication of the accessibility debates in the UK:

“While it is very important we think of ourselves as intellectuals and
see ourselves as artistic producers, our primary obligation is not just
to other practitioners in our field, but to people who do not have an in-
depth relationship to contemporary art. People… can understand and
appreciate and involve themselves fully in contemporary art if you
help them, if you work with them and are willing to meet them
halfway. As a curator, one of my most important functions is to make art clear, comprehensible and understandable to the viewer” (Cameron 2011 p153).

According to Dr Sirhan Ada, in Turkey, the arts as a public good “is not in the state consciousness anymore. It used to be in a different way, in a very nationalistic way, but it was there. With the liberalisation and integration into the local market it totally evaporated. What is being done is just a mimicry of what should have been done. Unfortunately it is left to either the mercy of some private philanthropists or some NGOs” (interview with author 2011).

It appears there is still an absence of a meaningful public sector policy for the arts in Istanbul, and reliance by the municipality on the private sector to step in, particularly for landmark projects. “Public funds are not being allocated for direct support of cultural and artistic productions nor for dissemination channels to address areas where market mechanisms fail” (Cultural Policy Report 2011 p277). Sponsorship of major events and galleries appears to be far more generous and encompassing than it is in the UK. In addition to “an extensive range of tax breaks” (Cultural Policy Report 2011 p276), Dr Sirhan Ada describes the motivation for sponsors as:

“Families of industrial groups which needed some cultural capital for the brand, which also needed some cultural expressions to be integrated to their globalising practices. And then they have been followed by all the young entrepreneurs and young professional and executives who wanted to be accepted in such a milieu” (interview with author 2011).

What seems clear from my research is that Istanbul as a city is “a nexus for all sorts of neo-liberal currents” (Youngs 2013 interview with author). According to Gezici and Kerimoglu (2010): “Neo-liberal movements have strongly affected Istanbul in defining its vision to be a world-global city” (p257). This is reflected in how the Istanbul Biennial operates. In his essays for Remembering Istanbul, Vasif Kortun presents a city that has travelled in
the opposite direction to that of Liverpool; from public to privatisation of buildings and services. He locates Istanbul almost as a case study for neo-liberal economics, a phrase he refers to several times, and identifies an ongoing process of “privatisation of knowledge and culture that is generally regarded as pretty much irreversible” (Kazma p263). The Liverpool Biennial and Folkestone Triennial are largely protected from this erosion of the public in favour of the private and inaccessible, by the existence in the UK of cultural and other public policy with associated substantial public funding. The Istanbul Biennial illustrates what can happen when this buffer between art and the private sector is removed: an event that has no impact on the city as a site, or on its residents; that is content with closed communication only with an international wealthy elite; that does nothing to reinforce or develop the arts infrastructure of the city, or to provide opportunities for the next generation of artists, curators or arts administrators. It is hard to escape the conclusion that it exists in a secluded bubble from the mass of society, and benefits only the already wealthy and privileged.

Conclusion
There are several factors that have been crucial in the creation and sustainability of both the Folkestone Triennial and the Liverpool Biennial, and their proven ability to remain “arts-led”. Their independence from municipal and other bureaucratic structures at inception, backed by significant philanthropic support, enabled them to focus on their artistic aims as they established themselves, with a high degree of organisational autonomy. Both have sustained this ethos over the years since, despite changes in their funding, boards and relationships to external agendas. The appointment of highly experienced and knowledgeable senior arts professionals as directors, with clarity of artistic vision and sufficient clout and operational know-how, allowed each to organise themselves according to what they wanted to achieve artistically, with minimal requirement to engage in the more tedious aspects of local politics and bureaucracy. The management boards of each were composed of handpicked individuals with specific skills, knowledge and experience, but also importantly, were supportive and understanding of the projects. Equally important
subsequently, however, has been a largely favourable external political and economic climate for most of their history to date; a climate which came to an abrupt end in 2010. The public policy climate became more influential for the Liverpool Biennial from 2004 onwards, when, as an organisation, it was able to take full advantage of Liverpool’s designation as European Capital of Culture 2008. Equally, the astuteness of its director, Lewis Biggs, meant that while maximising the benefits made available by public policy, the organisation was also able to minimise, circumvent or negotiate potentially troublesome disadvantages. The Folkestone Triennial, situated as it has been since inception within the Creative Foundation, itself dedicated to the creative regeneration of Folkestone, is also intimately wrapped up with public agendas, but simultaneously shielded by the independence of the Foundation and the enormous influence it has within the town. The advantages for both organisations that these circumstances have given should not be underestimated.

In this chapter I have attempted to do two things:

1. Present a coherent narrative that illustrates the effects of localised strategies and policy (or lack of), national policies, and philanthropic and public funding on my case studies and how they have interacted with them.

2. Identify some of the tangible ways that biennials, when supported by public funding, are able to operate in ways that provides a counter-point, or form of resistance to, prevailing trends of homogenisation, marketisation, and consumption.

My professional background, and existing knowledge of the Liverpool Biennial, perhaps makes me pre-disposed to find the arguments that reflect well on the Folkestone Triennial and the Liverpool Biennial. To counter this possibility, I add that I am also known professionally as an opinionated critic, who has on several occasions published articles that are highly critical of organisations or policy where I think this is deserved. Indeed, within this
thesis, I am critical of the Istanbul Biennial based on the evidence as I have interpreted it. Bearing this in mind, I hope that within my exploration of three biennial events and organisations, I have presented robust arguments. The crucial point I make is that in avoiding marketisation, the Liverpool Biennial and the Folkestone Triennial have developed a humanist approach that prioritises the art, the specifics of their location and their various relationships with the populations of each area. They have been enabled to do this over significant periods of time through the presence of public funding, which in the UK effectively responds to market failure in the arts, ensuring that production and presentation is still possible for non-commercial and potentially risk-taking art and associated events; and which largely safeguards freedom of expression in the arts. This type of cultural space is not necessarily available where public funding is not present, as is shown by the example of the Istanbul Biennial, which is reliant for 97% of its funding on corporate sponsorship. The obligation to deliver worthwhile education, outreach and inclusion programmes of both quality and quantity that is embedded in UK public funding, has been enthusiastically embraced by the Liverpool Biennial, and to a lesser extent the Folkestone Triennial; and can also be seen as a function of public funding, along with charitable trusts and foundations. Again, this emphasis is almost completely absent where such funding is unavailable, for example, in the practice of the Istanbul Biennial. Even where public policy, cultural or otherwise, has been flawed or misguided, as has been the case at various times in both Liverpool and Folkestone, I have suggested that both biennial organisations have been able to work with, around or otherwise effectively, in order to mitigate its flaws and ensure their operations and missions have continued. Overall, I have demonstrated that despite flaws, the existence of cultural and other public policy, with associated funding, has been at the least “a great enabler” of each UK biennial, and at best, essential to their continued delivery of ambitious new art production and presentation to wide audiences in the UK.

Regarding my second aim for this chapter, I have identified some ways in which these UK biennials go against the “grain of extant neo-liberal
development policies”. There are other tangible ways in which they do this that do not quite fit into the narrative, for example, the fact that each biennial pays the artists it commissions on a flat rate regardless of international profile\textsuperscript{53}; that extra activity from artists, such as workshops or projects that have a longer development time are paid for\textsuperscript{54}; that the Liverpool Biennial since 2002 has had a policy of buying locally – that is, of employing local designers and design companies, fabricators, freelance educators, artists, and using other local small businesses to supply their needs. While this is likely to account for only a small percentage of their overall spend, it does demonstrate a willingness to support the local economy, and an awareness of the potential ‘trickle down’ effect of spending externally sourced funds within the city.

In this context, the concluding chapter takes an overview of the theory, arguments and evidence presented so far, further elaborates on the problematic role of biennials in regeneration, and suggests that a nuanced approach is more realistic.

\textsuperscript{53} £10,000 per artist in the first two editions of the Folkstone Triennial, £2000 per artist by the Liverpool Biennial.

\textsuperscript{54} This is in a context of an increasing international trend of not paying artists at all. For example, the curator of Documenta 13 (in 2012) Christov Bakargiev, admitted on film that exhibiting artists did not receive payment, since the opportunity to be part of the event was considered sufficient.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

In chapter three I asked what makes the biennial form “full of redemptive and even utopian possibility” if the artists’ work can be “harnessed” or manipulated for relatively superficial or purposes? I detailed some responses to this question, but my own response is formed by the theoretical and empirical research I have undertaken in light of my case study approach. Consequently, I believe there are grounds to suggest that the Liverpool Biennial and the Folkestone Triennial are sites of at least some resistance to the overall trend towards marketisation of society, and that they are at least “moderately disruptive” to “the grain of extant ‘neoliberal’ development agendas” (Peck 2005 p740). This final chapter draws together the thinking behind this position and further clarifies the importance of this point.

My research question sought to understand in depth the policy context in which biennials generally, and my three studies in particular operate; and to gain an understanding of how they affected one another. Having analysed the domestic political, economic and cultural context of my UK biennials, and understood how they manifest themselves in practice, it appears that my biennials are generally consonant with the aims associated with the cultural and other public policy of the past several years (with caveats that are detailed below). This in itself is not surprising; what is perhaps counter intuitive is that despite public sector bureaucracy and the emphasis on instrumentalism, this same public policy and funding has been greatly enabling of the Liverpool Biennial and the Folkestone Triennial. Despite considerable critique of policy from both left and right viewpoints (for example, Mirza 2012; Jancovich 2011; Belfiore 2002, 2007, 2009, 2011; Stevenson 2004), within the terms of this thesis, cultural policy and its influence has succeeded in its most basic aim – that is, of enabling and safeguarding the production and presentation of art in the biennial format in two locations in the UK. Further, I argue that this production and presentation within Liverpool and Folkestone, within their small sphere of influence, provides a metaphorical space that challenges the homogenising
effects of neo-liberalisation in these places; that it resists the marketisation tendency of neo-liberalism; and that each event positively contributes to a periodic re-presentation of the city and town to its residents, defamiliarising the mundane, and presenting a rich and accessible counter-offer to the usual leisure activities. At the risk of sounding hyperbolic and overly romantic, I argue that the Liverpool Biennial and Folkestone Triennial have succeeded in prioritising the humanistic values of art, utilising policy potential to achieve this specific aim, rather than being constrained or overly dominated by the ultimately economic aims of public policy (see McGuigan 2005 p238). That this can be argued is not entirely to praise the policy context, which, as has been well-rehearsed, is problematic in many ways. It is equally an acknowledgement of the human agency within the two event organisations, whose staff have had the professional experience, astuteness, skill and commitment to work in ways that have utilised policy and funding, peer networks and their own expertise to enable a consistent emphasis on the art and access to it by a wide range of visitors.

In suggesting that the Liverpool Biennial and the Folkestone Triennial “resist” neo-liberalism, it is helpful to define what I mean by the use of this word. Resistance within sociological study has contested meanings. While there is consensus when it refers to active political resistance, for example, via revolution, (“actions involving consciousness, collective action, and direct challenges to structures of power” (Rubin 1996 cited in Hollander and Einwohner 2004 p538), there is disagreement regarding its use in describing symbolic actions or behaviour. In their paper Hollander and Einwohner (2004) summarise the debates: “Although there is virtual consensus that resistance involves oppositional action of some kind, there is considerable disagreement about whether resistance must be intended by actors and whether it must be recognized by targets and/or observers” (p544). They present a typography of seven types of resistance (p544), of which the three I consider most relevant for this research are reproduced below:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is act intended as resistance by actor?</th>
<th>Target?</th>
<th>Observer?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overt resistance</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covert resistance</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Externally-defined resistance</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

They usefully define “covert resistance” to refer to “acts that are intentional yet go unnoticed (and therefore unpunished) by their targets, although they are recognised as resistance by other, culturally aware observers” (p545). They note the acknowledgement of “cultural resistance” as the “minority communities attempts to preserve the minority culture against assimilation to the host culture” (citing Moghissi 1999 p536). This concept, could, I believe, be applied to the UK biennials, if the biennials – that is, the production and presentation of art – are seen as the minority culture, and policy and actions by public agencies that may threaten the arts are seen as the “host culture” (with legitimate authority).

There is a strong case to suggest that the Liverpool Biennial has been engaged in “covert resistance” to neo-liberal trends since its inception, and throughout this thesis I have presented evidence that suggests this is the outcome, if not the intention. In my interviews with him, Lewis Biggs has consistently talked about his belief in the power of art to affect people, not for instrumentalised reasons, but because that is its nature. I have not asked him if this belief translates into a direct intention to resist policy and political trends that are antithetical to his motivations and beliefs, and doubt that I would receive a clear answer if I did. Hollander and Einwohner (2004, p542) in any case represent intention as virtually unknowable – “assessing intent is difficult if not impossible” for fairly obvious reasons. However my interviews with various staff members of each UK biennial strongly suggests that in their commitment to art they recognise a range of values it has
brought to Liverpool and Folkestone, from the humanitarian through to the economic. However there has been a stronger articulation of the humanitarian values and knowingness about the requirement to justify the organisation and event in economic or marketing-type terms. It is also possible to view “The Independents” strand of the Liverpool Biennial in terms of Malcolm Miles’ (2012) proposition of “a possibility for local self-reliance rather than gentrification when citizens are sufficiently mobilised.” Because of the power – that is wealth and influence – of The Creative Foundation, it is more likely that in the case of the Folkestone Triennial, resistance is overt and intended by key staff in The Creative Foundation and the curators they have brought in to realise each Triennial edition. Because of the nature of how it was set-up and its ‘enlightened’ management, although it participates in a form of destination marketing, its host organisation recognises that its value is as much symbolic, and accrued via the nature of the art, than as a tool for economic development (Ewbank 2011).

Many artists and arts organisations position themselves in opposition to neo-liberalism, although not necessarily via an academic analysis of why they consider it desirable to do so. Examples range from individual artworks: Ai Weiwei’s appropriation of a Ming vase, on which he painted the Coca Cola logo. Rather than destroying the value of the vase, it became worth more as a work of art. Weiwei was drawing attention both to the power and wealth of this global multi-national corporation, as well as commenting on the commercial realities of the art market. Grayson Perry’s pot “This pot will reduce crime by 29%” (2007) is decorated with this sentence and others related to the instrumentalist aims required of art, such as “this artwork will boost tourism by 22%” and “this artwork will improve the health of one in ten poor people”. Since this single artwork by itself manifestly cannot do these things, he was drawing attention to the absurdity of these external agendas, as well as the ridiculousness of some of the art sectors’ claims to meet these agendas. There are many other examples of art being used directly or indirectly as a form of resistance to neo-liberalism (see for example, “Art and Activism in an Age of Globalisation,” de Cauter, de Roo,
Vanhaesebrouck 2011); from agitprop to Guerilla Girls to socially-engaged art practice, with some examples of street art cited as “Creative Resistance to Neoliberal Globalisation”.

However, it is impossible to say that neither UK biennial organisation is affected by the pervasive neo-liberal context which currently exists; and logic dictates that both must be implicated since they work within these policy frameworks, albeit indirectly. Hollander and Einwohner (2004) also note the complexity of resistance behaviours in a variety of contexts, most usefully stating that the literature acknowledges that: “resistance is not always pure. That is, even while resisting power, individuals or groups may simultaneously support the structures of domination that necessitate resistance in the first place” (p549). In other words, actors may well be complicit or implicated in the very system that they are resisting. Certainly this is the case with the UK biennials, who work within a cultural system allied to other public agendas, benefit greatly by doing so, but are also implicated in the perpetuation of these systems and agendas. They have made this work for them more or less on their own terms, but can also be said to be very successful at “playing the game”.

In the arts funding game, both organisations have been winners. They may hold their position with grace, and make some practical efforts to share the benefits of winning (for example, by buying locally where possible) but it still needs to be noted that they are dominant in their regional landscapes. Bearing this in mind, it is worth restating the conditions that have enabled this outcome for the Liverpool Biennial and the Folkestone Triennial. I have located the arguments within these three areas:

(1) The policy conditions into which these biennials were born as discussed in chapters two and three.
(2) The conditions of their founding and subsequent operation as discussed in chapter four.


“Play up, play up and play the game!” From Vitai Lampada by Henry Newbolt, 1892
(3) Analysis of how each biennial has functioned since inception.

To take the first point, there has been an evident compatibility between UK public policy and biennials, but this does not tell the whole story: the policy context alone has not been enough. For a contrasting UK example, where the outcome of instrumental policy with intended artistic outcomes has been at best problematic, despite the favourable external climate, see Mirza (2012) and her analysis of the Rich Mix project. She argues that the artistic direction and programme of the project was confused and compromised from the project’s inception by public policy intended to address issues of inclusion, multiculturalism and diversity. The result was that Rich Mix suffered for several years from the worst of both worlds - both a lack of local community support and engagement, and a lack of artistic credibility (Mirza 2012 p161). This has led it to have a troubled history, several changes of management, a poor reputation and considerable injections of extra public funding to enable its continuation. Mirza’s research shows that instrumental public policy allied to arts funding for a new project can create difficulties leading to a lack of vision and a weak organisation, supporting my original hypothesis. That Liverpool Biennial and Folkestone Triennial have avoided this supports my argument that the circumstances of their inception had considerable positive impact in their developing reputation, organisational cultures and management strengths. This brings us to point number two. Their common factor in this respect is their founding via charitable philanthropic finance, outside of civic institutions and independent of specific external policy. This enabled both organisations to develop a clear vision not only of what they wanted to achieve but how they would achieve it, without being unduly influenced by external requirements. As independent organisations they had the time to work through their ideas, identities and processes in collaboration with their Boards but otherwise without reference to non-arts agendas. In itself, this does not constitute “resistance”, but the third crucial contributing factor lies in what can in retrospect be seen as highly appropriate staff at all levels of each organisation. As important as the policy context and their early independence, was the individual agency, expertise and experience of the staff and board management in utilising
policy to ensure the artistic aims were met as a consistent priority. Each director recruited the key staff within their organisations, and it can be seen that systems of operation were generally consistent and productive, from the beginning, and particular values and principles were built into each organisation. While over time each organisation adapted to the public policy context as they became more reliant on other sources of income, neither organisation seems to have lost a sense of its ‘art first’ mission, or come under pressure to change the core of what they do.

In “Were New Labour’s Policies Neo-Liberal?” (Hesmondhaigh et al 2014) the authors conclude that “Neo-liberalism is shown to be a significant but rather crude tool for evaluating and explaining New Labour’s cultural policies…. It does, however, usefully draw attention to the public policy environment in which Labour operated” (p1). In accepting this position, I suggest that in addition to the specific situations, management and favourable climate for the Liverpool Biennial and Folkestone Triennial, there is a further, crucial factor at play: in these two locations, the implementation of neo-liberal ideas and policy has been only partially successful; or as Miles, M. (2012) pithily notes: “the cultural train has broken down in the train crash of late-capitalism”.

This is particularly clear when examining how the Liverpool Biennial and Folkestone Triennial contribute to regeneration, for which there are mixed results. While a strong argument can be made for the social impacts of the Liverpool Biennial, the economic impacts remain less clear. While neither organisation is expected to “carry” the regeneration load for either location – and in Folkestone, there has been genuine acknowledgement of the symbolic nature of the Triennial, and its place amongst other more tangible regeneration initiatives (Ewbank 2011) – at least in Liverpool, the Biennial is expected to justify itself largely in economic terms which is tangibly demonstrated by the production of an Economic Impact Report for every biennial edition57. These reports present very positive figures, but should

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57 Deputy chief executive Paul Smith told me: “We are judged by how much we contribute to
also be seen within a context of ongoing general debate regarding the methodological rigour of these types of reports; the marginalisation of artistic content; and the suspicion of “over-claiming” (Evans 2005; Robinson 2012). However despite having a biennial for fifteen years, a Tate for sixteen years, and a well established arts infrastructure; indeed despite being awarded European Capital of Culture 2008, with the accompanying rhetoric of supercharged regeneration, the economic figures for Liverpool are grim.

The long-term economic effects of the Capital of Culture year are debateable, even while other benefits are very evident. Certainly it remains the case that Liverpool and Folkestone are both still places suffering from significant inequalities in health, education and income, and contain significant urban areas that require attention. According to “The Index of Multiple Deprivation, A Liverpool Analysis”, issued by Liverpool City Council in 2011: “Liverpool remains ranked as the most deprived local authority area in England on the ID 2010, with its position unchanged from the 2004 and 2007 Indices” – a fairly startling indictment of just how little impact on the city thirty or so years of regeneration policies and over £3bn cash has had. In 2012, Liverpool is in the bottom ten of cities for “No formal qualifications” and “High level qualifications”, 16.4% of Liverpool’s working age residents have no formal qualifications, well above the UK average of 11.6%. Liverpool’s employment rate, at 62.1%, is the joint fourth lowest of 64 cities and is significantly below the British average of 70.2%. It also has a high ratio of public to private sector jobs, with 13,800 of these public sector jobs forecast to be lost by 2016 due to spending cuts. It has already lost 5,100 jobs between 2009 and 2010, an amount four times higher than the national average. The city is among the bottom 10 of 64 cities for Job Seekers Allowance claimants, Youth claimants and long-term claimants. (Liverpool City Council Economic Briefing February 2012 http://liverpool.gov.uk/Images/economic-briefing-feb-2012.pdf accessed 13/11/12). For me, this evidences the futility of justifying arts projects economic regeneration. That’s why we produce an economic impact report for every edition” (interview with author 2012).
primarily in economic terms. Despite steadily scaled-up waves of culture-led regeneration projects, from the establishment of Tate Liverpool to the enormous European Capital of Culture project in 2008, the issues at stake are too intractable for “culture” in even its broadest definitions to address.

The limited success of neo-liberal type policies can also be seen in the level of private sector investment in Liverpool, which after an initial “goldrush” from 2003 has proved to be short-term. It is another reason why the side-effects of “neo-liberal regeneration policy” are therefore reasonably well contained. In Liverpool, while some artist-led activity has been priced out of the city centre, the areas immediately surrounding the centre are still manifestly ungentrified and affordable, and likely to remain so for quite some time. (The Baltic Triangle, an area immediately to the west of Liverpool city centre, has been designated a “creative industries area”. The Liverpool Biennial relocated there “because it was cheap” (Smith, interview with author 2012) but there are a considerable number of vacant properties, and many that are occupied by small “uncreative”, light industry). In Folkestone, lessons have been learned, with the Creative Foundation positioning itself as a ‘sympathetic landlord’, targetting creative businesses as tenants, and controlling rents to remain affordable “well into the next century” (Ewbank 2011). By contrast, Istanbul city centre has developed a strategy that formally encourages the relocation of commerce, manufacturing and industry out of the city centre in favour of keeping the historical city for tourism and its service businesses. However what is clear is that these limited negative side-effects, along with the limited positive effects of recent policy in Liverpool, is by accident rather than design – see my earlier discussion regarding the failure of many biennials to meet the boosterist aims of their backers.

So despite the many lengthy and expensive economic impact reports commissioned, the question as to how biennials contribute to economic regeneration is still complex and unresolved. In this analysis, the interventions that carry most weight, and can be seen to have had positive social impact in areas of most need are without doubt the three long-term
projects of The Anfield Bakery, Everton Park and the Canal Project. These are overtly positioned as regeneration projects, and planned to be such. Their use of art techniques to achieve very specific aims denotes a voluntary and clear instrumentalism that is entirely consistent with the use of art within regeneration aims. There is clarity of intention within these projects that will enable a holistic evaluation of their impact in due course, in stark contrast to the verbiage and statistics of economic impact reports or discussion of anecdotal and symbolic impact. But notwithstanding these projects, the question remains about the significance of the Biennial’s direct economic contribution to regeneration on Merseyside. The regeneration process is by no means complete in either location, regardless of current and previous initiatives and funding, and despite the presence of Liverpool’s biennial and Folkestone’s triennial.

Implications of this Research

If it is accepted that there has been limited success – or implied failure - of neo-liberal culture-led regeneration, this is not restricted to Liverpool and Folkestone or specifically rooted in their individual contexts. As I mentioned in chapter two, the ideas proposed by Florida (2002) in *The Rise of the Creative Class* and subsequent publications gained considerable currency with many cities adopting his ideas; the notion of attracting “creative class” residents to cities has become inextricably linked with regeneration initiatives. Peck has written a lengthy rebuttal of Florida, as has McGuigan (2009). Enough time has now passed for evaluation of the effectiveness of the implementation of Florida’s ideas, and several texts have been published examining how “creatives” and “creative cities” have fared in the economic crisis of the last few years. There is a suggestion that “the creative class idea” is becoming discredited, with evidence that it has limited effect in revitalising cities, and that as both McGuigan and Peck predicted, it increases inequality (Kotkin in The Daily Beast58; McGillis in New Republic 201359; Kratke 2010). Florida himself is reported as acknowledging the

limitations of his own analysis: “On close inspection, talent clustering provides little in the way of trickle-down benefits” he wrote on The Atlantic website in January 2013. “The rewards of the “creative class” strategy”, he notes, “flow disproportionately to more highly-skilled knowledge, professional and creative workers” since the wage increases that blue-collar and lower-skilled workers see “disappear when their higher housing costs are taken into account.” Even Demos, in an article ostensibly defending Florida, suggests that he never set out to decrease inequality, and, in an oversimplification and denial of the influence his ideas have had, says: “The challenge is fully cutting the poor in on the new prosperity generated by creative class urbanism.”

It can be seen from this, and associated texts, that the limitations of this approach is more widespread than the specificities of Liverpool or Folkestone. Within the academic literature, the difficulty of measuring arts’ contribution to regeneration either quantitatively or qualitatively is well rehearsed and accepted. “…the proposition that people talk about culture helping regeneration but that there’s no real evidential data…” (Phil Redmond, Cultural Cities Research Network, http://culturalcitiesresearch.net/uk-city-of-culture-2/ accessed 6/11/12).

Given the system requires it, and shows no sign of being adjusted, the accumulation of information from several arts organisations makes for a stronger narrative and more compelling case, not just for artistic value but for economic and regeneration values – see, for example, the bidding process for Capital of Culture awards, or accumulated figures for employment, the attraction of external cash investment and consequent spend, or audience figures for “spectacular” events. Consequently, there is a strong case that arts organisations should always produce collective rather than individual figures in order to create not only more persuasive

belt accessed 8 August 2014.
61 http://www.demos.org/blog/12/30/13/creative-class-enemy-urban-equity accessed 8 August 2014
arguments, but also more useful ones. By doing so, there is also the possibility of encouraging more coherent and less competitive working.

This thesis highlights again the limitations of the systemic approach that prioritises the measuring of cultural value on economic terms. Beyond this, it emphasises the experience, skills and resourcefulness that senior arts professionals bring to their roles. It calls for the role of individual agency to be recognised more in discussions of cultural policy, since at their best, arts professionals are committed to realising numerous arts projects and events that are embedded with rich humanistic and artistic values that transcend quantitative measurements while also mitigating against some of the worst aspects or side effects of cultural and other public policy. In total, this research contributes to a clearer understanding of how biennials of art and public policy can interact to provide cross-cutting benefits, while questioning their operational contribution to economic regeneration, and promoting a more nuanced understanding of the contexts in which they are best enabled to benefit their local environments. It is clear that biennials can be mobilised to contribute to neo-liberal aims, and this constitutes the contested ground they occupy. However within this ground, and in particular conditions (as I have argued in this thesis), there is a genuine and I suggest, a sincere space for resistance within the individual artworks shown, their collective identity, and their experience by residents and visitors. Neo-liberalism does not so much “allow” this as display a kind of metaphorical ignorance and disinterestedness to the “on the ground” operation. Its aims function on a cruder, larger scale, but it is this very crudeness – and unresponsiveness to the specifics of place – that make it only partially successful in achieving its aims. The creation of biennials or other large scale visual arts events with aims that are primarily about civic and economic boosterism are therefore unlikely to be entirely successful; while allowing for and enabling an “arts first” approach and a variation of the “arms length” policy is likely to greatly increase the probability of success on a holistic, local, experiential, consistent and ultimately, a more valuable basis.
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Appendix 1

LIVERPOOL BIENNIAL 2012: Research questionnaire for PhD student.

Dear Visitor,

I would be very grateful if you would take 5 minutes to answer the following questions to help me with my research. There are no right or wrong answers, and everything you say is valuable. If you are unsure, go with your gut instinct. If you have any questions, please ask a Biennial staff member. Your response is anonymous. Many thanks for your time and help.

1. For what reasons are you visiting Liverpool city centre today? (tick all that apply)
   - To see works in the Liverpool Biennial 2012
   - Business or professional trip
   - Visiting an attraction *(Which attraction/s?)*
   - Shopping trip
   - Visiting friends or relatives
   - Other: *(Please say what)*

2. How would you describe your knowledge of visual art?
   - Specialist knowledge
   - General knowledge
   - Little or no knowledge

3. Have you visited or seen the Liverpool Biennial before – and if so, when?
   - First visit
   - Came in 2010
   - Came in 2008
   - Came in 2006
   - Came in 2004
   - Came in 2002
   - Came in 1999

If you have visited before, what is it that has encouraged you to return?
4. Which of the following best describes your approach to visual art?

- I have a professional or academic or vocational interest in the visual arts
- I enjoy contemporary visual arts in my leisure time
- I don’t have interest in visual arts but came across this exhibition by chance
- Other

5. Which of the following best express what you think of the artwork(s) in this exhibition or public space? (please tick all that apply)

- Not keen
- Don’t understand the work
- Neutral – neither like nor dislike
- Interesting
- Relevant
- Visually striking
- Exciting
- Like it a lot
- Absolutely love it
- This makes me want to see other exhibitions

If you would like to name or comment on individual pieces, please do so here:

6. Having seen work in this location, will you intentionally visit other works or locations in Liverpool Biennial 2012?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Don’t know ☐

If yes, which other works or exhibitions?
If no, why not? (Please use the box below).

7. Were you aware before today that the Liverpool Biennial takes place for 10 weeks every two years?
   Yes ☐    No ☐

8. In your opinion, does this make it more or less exciting as an event?
   More exciting ☐    Less exciting ☐    Neither ☐

9. Generally, what would you prefer to see?
   • Art made by international artists ☐
   • Art made by UK based artists ☐
   • Art made by regional artists ☐
   • A mixture of all these ☐
   • No opinion ☐

Please give reasons for your answer:

11. Which of the following statements, if any, do you agree with? (Please tick).
   • I think art is elitist ☐
   • I don’t experience a lot of art but I think it’s important that it’s provided ☐
   • Art is what makes us human ☐
   • Self expression through art is important ☐
   • I really enjoy experiencing art ☐
   • I really enjoy making art ☐
   • Art enhances my life and makes Liverpool a better place to live ☐
12. Which of these statements, if any, do you agree with? (Please tick)

- Art is expensive. There are better things to spend scarce resources on
- There's a lot of rubbish spoken about the value of art to society
- Art makes the city distinctive. It raises its profile nationally and internationally
- Liverpool is known for the quality of its arts provision
- Art attracts tourists who spend money in the city
- Art organisations provide employment for a lot of people
- Art exhibitions and performances makes the city centre more interesting so I visit more often
- For each £1 the Council spends on art, the city gets £12 back from tourist spend

And finally, about yourself:

How would you describe your main activity?

- Full time work
- Part time work
- Self employed
- Govt Training Scheme
- Unemployed
- Looking after home/family
- Retired from paid work
- Long term sick/disabled
- Student
- Other (please specify)

How do you describe your Ethnic Group?

- White British
- White Irish
- White other
- Mixed White & Black Caribbean
- Mixed White & Black African
- Mixed White & Asian
- Other Mixed Background
- Asian/Asian British – Indian
- Asian/Asian British – Pakistani
- Asian/Asian British – Bangladeshi
- Other Asian Background
- Black/Black British –Caribbean
- Black/Black British – African
- Other Black Background
- Chinese
- Other Ethnic Group
- Prefer not to answer

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME AND HELP.