



Knowledge Works  
National centre  
for cultural industries

rapport 5/2018



# Breaking the Fourth Wall: Proactive Audiences in the Performing Arts







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Address: Kunnskapsverket C/O Høgskolen i Innlandet,

Postboks 400, N - 2418 Elverum

[www.kunnskapsverket.org](http://www.kunnskapsverket.org)

[kontakt@kunnskapsverket.org](mailto:kontakt@kunnskapsverket.org)

Title: Breaking the Fourth Wall: Proactive Audiences in the Performing Arts

Editors: Lluís Bonet and Emmanuel Négrier

The publication of this book is a collaboration between  
Kunnskapsverket, the BeSpectACTive! project, the University of Barcelona  
and the University of Montpellier.

Project manager: Giada Calvano

Design: Júlia Ruiz Soto

Rapport no. 05-2018

ISBN 978-82-93482-27-7 (Print)

ISBN: 978-82-93482-26-0 (PDF)



Kulturdepartementet

Kunnskapsverket is funded by the Norwegian  
Ministry of Culture.



Co-funded by the  
Creative Europe Programme  
of the European Union

BeSpectACTive! is a cooperation project co-funded by  
the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union.



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*“The cover of the book reflects the open process of breaking the fourth wall. The holes are windows letting the reader have a peek on active citizen participation practices. The white spaces are remaining unbroken bricks in the wall, symbolizing the unfinished and ever-changing experience of deconstruction.”*



# Breaking the Fourth Wall: Proactive Audiences in the Performing Arts

Edited by  
Lluís Bonet  
Emmanuel Négrier

# Contributors



**Ricardo Álvarez** is a music business and cultural consultant and Phd Candidate in Culture and Heritage Management at the University of Barcelona, Spain.



**Franco Bianchini** is Professor of Cultural Policy and Planning and Director of the Culture, Place and Policy Institute at the University of Hull, UK.



**Alessandro Bollo** is Director of Polo del '900 cultural centre in Turin, and teaches cultural marketing, economic assessment of cultural activities and cultural management in several Italian universities. Until summer 2017, he has been Head of Research at Fondazione Fitzcarraldo in Turin.



**Lluís Bonet** is Director of the UB Cultural Management Program and Full Professor at the Department of Economics of the University of Barcelona.



**Alice Borch** is a PhD Candidate in Cultural Policy Studies at the University of Warwick, UK and Research Fellow at the Culture, Place and Policy Institute, University of Hull, UK.

**Giada Calvano** is a Phd Candidate in Culture and Heritage Management and Research Fellow of the Cultural Management Program at the University of Barcelona, Spain.



**Luisella Carnelli** holds a PhD in Theory and History of Theatre, and a Master in Entrepreneurship of Performing Arts. Since 2004, she works as researcher and consultant at Fondazione Fitzcarraldo and collaborates with the Cultural Observatory of Piedmont, Italy.



**Giuliana Ciancio** is co-curator and project manager of the Be SpectACTive! Project and PhD Candidate at the Culture Commons Quest Office at the Antwerp Research Institute for the Arts of the University of Antwerp, Belgium.



**Jaume Colomer** is a cultural consultant and Professor at the Department of Theory and History of Education of the University of Barcelona, Spain.



**Félix Dupin-Meynard** is an independent researcher in social, cultural and territorial policies. Besides working at the Centre d'Études Politiques de l'Europe Latine (CEPEL), he is also involved in several projects of action-research, evaluation, training and teaching.







**Jean-Louis Fabiani** is Senior Professor of Sociology and Social Anthropology at the Central European University (Budapest, Hungary) and Director of Studies at the Centre d'Études Sociologiques et Politiques Raymond Aron (CESPRA) of the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (Paris, France).



**Bruno Maccari** is Expert in Performing Arts Administration and coordinates a MA in Arts Management at the University of Buenos Aires (FCE-UBA Argentina).



**Dafne Muntanyola-Saura** is Tenured Associate Professor at the Centre d'Estudis Sociològics sobre la Vida Quotidiana i el Treball - Institut d'Estudis del Treball (QUIT-IET), Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain. Her research is on artistic practices, visual ethnography and cognition.



**Emmanuel Négrier** is Head of Research in Political Sciences and Sociology of Culture at the CNRS-Cepel (Centre d'études politiques de l'Europe latine), Université de Montpellier I, France and Director of Pôle Sud - Journal of Political Sciences.



**Luca Ricci** is Founder and Artistic Director of Associazione Culturale CapoTrave/Kilowatt Festival in Sansepolcro, Italy and Coordinator of the Be SpectACTive! Project.



**Arturo Rodríguez Morató** is Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for the Study of Culture, Politics and Society at the University of Barcelona. He is former Vice-President of the International Sociological Association.

**Janina Suárez Pinzón** is a PhD Candidate in Sociology at the University of Coimbra, Portugal and Lecturer at the Jefatura de Nivelación Emblemática of the Universidad de las Artes, Guayaquil - Ecuador.



**Kinga Szemessy** is a PhD Candidate in Arts at the University of Theatre and Films Arts of Budapest and Faculty Member at the Budapest Contemporary Dance Academy, Hungary.



**Jaroslava Tomanová** is a PhD Candidate at the School of Performance and Cultural Industries of the University of Leeds, UK and Curatorial Assistant at Thyssen Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21) in Vienna, Austria.



**Rafael Valenzuela** (Social Psychologist, Ms in Leisure Studies, and PhD in Cultural Management) is Associate Professor of the Department of Social Psychology at the University of Barcelona and Professor at EUNCET Business School (Terrassa, Spain).



**Ben Walmsley** is a tenured Associate Professor in Audience Engagement in the School of Performance and Cultural Industries at the University of Leeds, UK. He is currently leading the International Network for Audience Research in the Performing Arts.



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# Introduction

*Lluís Bonet*

*Emmanuel Négrier*





# Context and organizational challenges for citizen engagement in the performing arts

*Lluís Bonet and Emmanuel Négrier*

This book is not a conference proceedings, although we organized in Barcelona, at the end of 2016, a congress on the issue entitled “The Proactive Role of Live Performance Audiences”. This book gives an important place to the controversies surrounding the question of participation in the cultural and artistic fields. This debate gathers researchers who have developed through their work an original and documented point of view on the issue. Then, it brings together those who have been active in Barcelona among cultural, academic and artistic actors. Thus, this book proposes a dynamic state of the considerations that accompany the Be SpectACTive! project since its launch, at the beginning of 2015. Before presenting the problematic of this book, it is proper to thank all the actors who made the organization of this international congress possible: those who participate in the Be SpectACTive! adventure; the researchers (Dafné Montanyola, Jean-Louis Fabiani, Arturo Rodríguez Morató, Franco Bianchini, Ben Walmsley) who have agreed to contribute to this publication, bringing from outside their expertise on the issue of participation; the Catalan and Spanish, French, Hungarian, Norwegian cultural actors who shared their experience on this subject; and PhDs, PhD candidates and students who have made possible, through their oral contribution and/or volunteering in the organization, that this meeting reached and even exceeded its objectives.

If we considered useful to make this book a book of debates, it is because researchers, like practitioners, express radically different visions and experiences about participation. We will first show these differences presenting the controversies on the origins of participation as a major theme in the artistic field. We will then demonstrate, based on empirical research experience from the Be SpectACTive! project, that participation is very dependent on specific contexts and is based on distinct, if not contradictory, values. The participatory project, according to these differences, induces changes in organizational, political and procedural terms. These findings lead us to propose a typology of participatory practices (see Figure 1).

For public policies, participatory practices represent a considerable challenge. But do they fit in as a new paradigm of cultural policy? Or should they be considered as a set of practices that depend on the dominant paradigm of their time and space?

We will show in the next pages how the contemporary issue of participation implies artistic decentering, namely questioning the centrality of the artist in the philosophy of cultural policy. This debate around artistic centrality is one of the major subjects of controversy around participation. The other concerns the instrumentalization of projects.

## Origins of participation

As Jean-Louis Fabiani clearly demonstrates in his chapter, the novelty of cultural participation is only an appearance. It can be traced back very far in history, and gives many historical illustrations. As Jacques Rancière (2009) suggests, spectator's participation and the question of his/her emancipation are consubstantial of the history of performance, which has its roots in ancient Greece and remains lively in the most contemporary "Society of the Spectacle". Whether it concerns its functions (enlightenment of the masses, exaltation of power or its challenge, building a community, etc.) or its goals (education, legitimation, identification, etc.), participation is at the heart of any cultural agency (Gell, 1998), whether related or not to performing arts. The relationship with visual arts, music and heritage are subject to similar considerations, even if the participatory narrative does not involve the same forms and sensitivities.

Being participation a permanent dimension of culture does not mean that it has an intangible place in history or space. It is obvious that conditions for cultural participation in a democratic society are not the same as those prevailing in a feudal or totalitarian one. It is also clear that our contemporary societies are developing a discourse and practices of cultural participation that are singularly different from those carried in the 1970s. As Franco Bianchini and Alice Borchini show in their chapter, the revolutionary power accorded to participation almost half a century ago today seems far removed from concrete practices, while new instrumental approaches emerge. They constitute the new framework in which participation is offered as a tool, as an emblem of today's cultural policies. This emergence corresponds to three major trends that give it, in their own way, a proper value in history.

This is not the only "social" explanation. The other comes from the side of artistic production. The recurrent discourse on the failures of cultural democratization is not just a matter of participation statistics. It is also based on a critique of the artistic offer and its adaptation to the challenges of contemporary societies. From this perspective, criticism is at the same time the negative one of a certain dangerous

self-legitimation of art in today's society, and the positive one of the project of reintegrating the question of art into a new social issue. Regarding the first aspect, Nathalie Heinich's analyses show how an artistic elite is constituted over the long term: its characterization of "aristocracy in a democratic regime" is precisely linked to certain specific traits and privileges, which transforms it into a "caste" (Heinich, 2005). Sociologically and artistically, what illustrates a growing gap between the world of art and society is also the main criticism founding a new vision, or a new social use, of art. Here, the *Nouveaux Commanditaires* program promoted by the *Fondation de France* (Négrier, 2013) can be cited as one of the projects most explicitly focused on a renewal of the social issue from and within an artistic perspective. The idea of offering the possibility to citizens to commission an artist to answer to one of the issues experienced in their context, with the help of a mediator who works on all different relationships (technical, financial, political, artistic, etc.), constitutes a radical break with the model of the socio-aesthetic closure of art on itself. On the contrary, this program postulates reconciliations, mutual fertilization between art and social life and the questioning of all established hierarchies. Beyond this program and its ramifications outside the French territory, many initiatives emerge today in the form of groups of spectators, citizens' commissioning of works, co-creation through artistic and participatory residencies. In their chapters, Franco Bianchini and Alice Borch, on the one hand, and Ben Walmsley, on the other hand, cite several examples from the English-speaking world. In the context of the Barcelona conference's debates, which are reproduced in the second part of the book, we can see many examples of these attempts to thwart the fatalism of reproduction and artistic elitism.

Technical changes therefore affect the conditions and meaning of cultural or artistic participation. But they do not have the strength of determinism. This is why this "technical current" should be considered together with what we can call the "social current". The contemporary social challenge of cultural and artistic participation corresponds to two very different dimensions. The first concerns the audience and builds on the evolution of sociological literature. The discussion of Pierre Bourdieu's model of structural homology (Coulangeon & Duval, 2013; Glévarec, 2013) shows that the influence of hierarchical and vertical bonds is less and less susceptible to analysis in terms of social determinism (Peterson, 2004; Lahire, 2004). At the same time, the development of horizontal relationships (peers, friends, spouses, etc.), which are less hierarchical, even though they may be the object of sociological criticism (Pasquier, 2008), emphasizes on the capacities of autonomy, or interdependence of individuals in a multiplicity of relational circles. Cultural participation gains in singularity - since everyone has a wide range of possible influences - what it loses in collective conditioning. The spectator can be seen less and less as the "ventrilo-



quist of the programmer”, made of good cultural intentions and symbolic inferiority, since he-she navigates in an eclectic array of tastes and networks that gives him-her a certain degree of autonomy. Symmetrically, the absence of cultural practice belonging to the dominant registers expresses less and less a perceived “lack” and more and more a “choice”, even if it is negative. Naturally, this autonomy does not mean the end of sociological influences due to “hard variables” (age, social class, gender, environment, etc.). Some have considerable weight, defeating most cultural democratization policies (Donnat, 2009). Nevertheless, it helps to understand the current diversification of cultural policy instruments towards participation.

This is not the only “social” explanation. The other comes from the side of artistic production. The recurrent discourse on the failures of cultural democratization is not just a matter of participation statistics. It is also based on a critique of the artistic offer and its adaptation to the challenges of contemporary societies. From this perspective, criticism is at the same time the negative one of a certain dangerous self-legitimation of art in today’s society, and the positive one of the project of reintegrating the question of art into a new social issue. Regarding the first aspect, Nathalie Heinich’s analyses show how an artistic elite is constituted over the long term: its characterization of “aristocracy in a democratic regime” is precisely linked to certain specific traits and privileges, which transforms it into a “caste” (Heinich, 2005). Sociologically and artistically, what illustrates a growing gap between the world of art and society is also the main criticism founding a new vision, or a new social use, of art. Here, the Nouveaux Commanditaires program promoted by the Fondation de France (Négrier, 2013) can be cited as one of the projects most explicitly focused on a renewal of the social issue from and within an artistic perspective. The idea of offering the possibility to citizens to commission an artist to answer to one of the issues experienced in their context, with the help of a mediator who works on all different relationships (technical, financial, political, artistic, etc.), constitutes a radical break with the model of the socio-aesthetic closure of art on itself. On the contrary, this program postulates reconciliations, mutual fertilization between art and social life and the questioning of all established hierarchies. Beyond this program and its ramifications outside the French territory, many initiatives emerge today in the form of groups of spectators, citizens’ commissioning of works, co-creation through artistic and participatory residencies. In their chapters, Franco Bianchini and Alice Borchì, on the one hand, and Ben Walmsley, on the other hand, cite several examples from the English-speaking world. In the context of the Barcelona conference’s debates, which are reproduced in the second part of the book, we can see many examples of these attempts to thwart the fatalism of reproduction and artistic elitism.

Social and technological changes, therefore, have a major impact on how participation is today at the center of the cultural agenda. But this impact depends not only on the contexts in which they take place, but also on the representations and strategies that are put in place by the various actors involved. These act from within cultural venues and events, forms of local citizenship, and types of local or sectoral political leadership. The political current thus expresses, first of all, a sort of operational synthesis of the social and technological currents. It gives them life and concrete form at the local level. According to this first vision, the political dimension is not necessarily linked to the presence of professional political actors: a balance of power within an organization, or between this artistic organization and its neighborhood environment constitute a political interaction.

A second political dimension is more explicitly linked to the changes that affect the political world, at the governmental level. The debate on the cultural democratization model directly reaches the positions of power and the beliefs of the actors that dominate most ministries of culture. Despite the questioning of its foundations and results, the model of democratization remains dominant in these administrations. However, one of the outcomes of cultural democratization is to provide goodwill guarantees to other models of cultural policy, such as cultural democracy or cultural rights (Lucas, 2017). In these cases, the experiment can be more or less extensive, and more or less explicitly directed to participation. One of the clearest examples of this discursive and instrumental reorientation is given by the Arts Council England's strategy, quoted by Franco Bianchini and Alice Borchini, and Ben Walsmley in their chapters.

A third political dimension concerns the evolution of relations, in respect to culture, between citizens and local political leaders. In a classic model that is still in use in many contexts, local (but not only) politicians have an elitist, mirrored relationship with artists. The elitist construct of Artist/Prince assumed an overhanging relationship with the population. This vision has strongly evolved, and technological and social transformations have an influence in reorienting the initial Prince/Artist legitimization towards a Prince-Society-Artists relation.

## Empirical lessons from Be SpectACTive!

The Be SpectACTive! project has been an excellent laboratory to evaluate the achievements and difficulties in implementing the objective of empowering audiences carried out by some performing arts venues and festivals from different parts of Europe. The evaluation exercise has not been easy because, as has been said, the concept and practices of audience engagement in the artistic field are polysemic, since they are the result of complex processes that respond to specific contexts, values and heterogeneous strategic objectives. The actors involved are also highly distinct, ranging from artistic directors of theaters and festivals to artists in residency, government officials and spectators (involved in different facets of the creation-production-staging process).

Several authors have analyzed the diverse forms of active participation of audiences (Brown, Novak-Leonard & Gilbride, 2011), understood in a broad sense or as audiency, according to the proposal of Ben Wamsley in the conclusions of this book. It should be borne in mind that, as Jean-Louis Fabiani reminds us in his chapter, spectators react autonomously, or in a more or less mediated context, to the diversity of stimuli of the artistic proposals. The emergence of the Internet and other forms of digital interaction has transformed the expectations and practices of citizens, with direct and indirect effects on live entertainment. In summary form, as illustrated in Figure 1, we can describe six typologies of active participation in this field, according to their interaction with different parts of the creation-production-staging process.

The first form consists of the ability of laypeople, amateurs, to create, interpret and enjoy together a community work. This form of collective creation and enjoyment is as old as the history of humanity (let's think, for example, of traditional dances performed by the members of a tribe). Today it is usually external or interacts marginally with the professional circuit, although there are many exceptions (e.g. amateur choirs with professional conductors, or amateur groups receiving professional fees). The empowerment of these individuals is total, because they decide in what, how and when to participate, and the border between the process of creation/interpretation and that of consumption/participation is almost non-existent. A second more modern form of amateur autonomy, facilitated by available digital tools, consists of the *prosumer* phenomenon. Training and available hardware and software devices allow to create and share all kinds of artistic expressions. Its transposition to live performance is aligned with the hybridization of the artistic genres, to the extent that a show can be performed and transmitted via digital media, complementing the real physical experience with the virtual one. Another alternative form is co-creation, which is often the result of the proposal of a professional artist interested in socially experimenting with amateur collective creation processes.

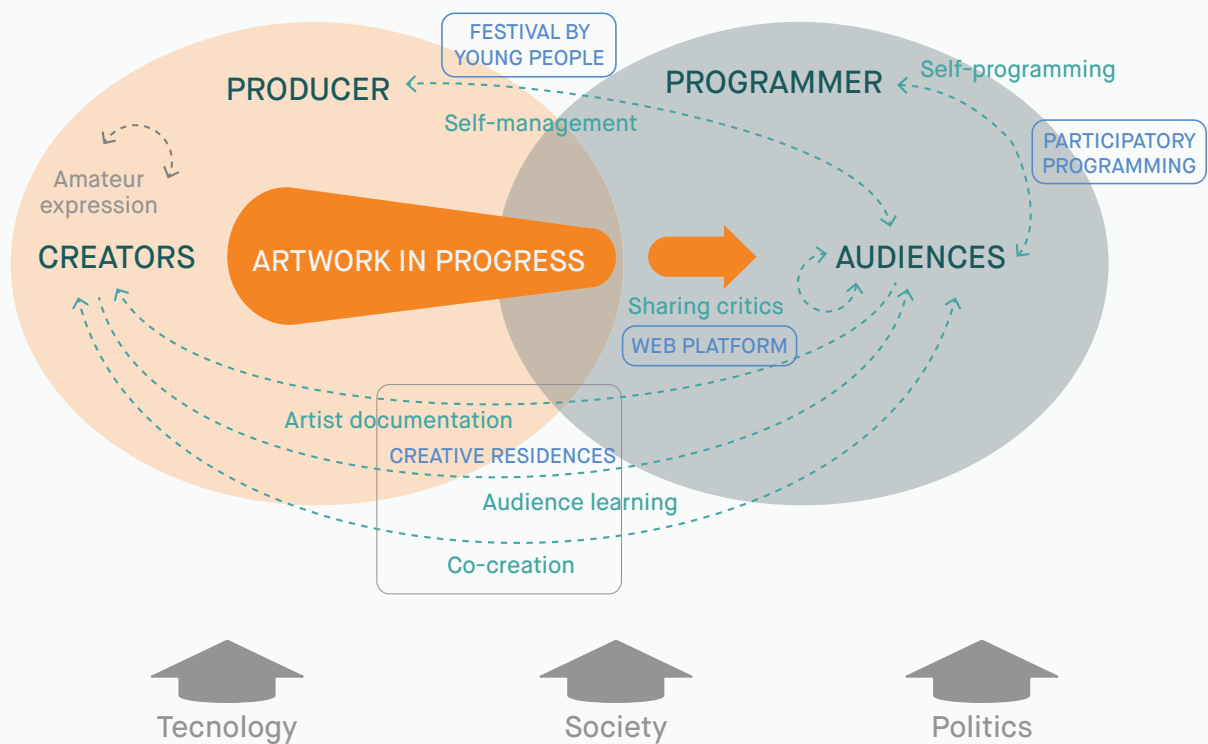


Figure 1. Interaction between proactive roles of cultural audiences and Be SpectACTive! project platforms.  
Source: Elaborated by the author



The Be SpectACTive! project has focused its analysis on the participation dynamics marked in violet in Figure 1. In these processes, the mediation mechanisms and their implementation - in particular, the personality of those who carry them through - are fundamental. The concepts of *active spectator*, *audience empowerment*, *prosumer* or *co-creation* are complex. The use of words in the field of cultural politics is transmuted ideologically and semantically to the point of transforming the essence of the original paradigms (Simonot, 2016), in our case primarily that of cultural democracy. It seems that most academics and cultural professionals use the same language, undoubtedly influenced by fashions that go through the action and cultural policies from one Western country to another, from one cultural sector to another. However, the social values on which the political cultures and management strategies of cultural operators are founded change much less quickly than fashions on paradigms. There are mimetic processes resulting from an evolution influenced by shared factors such as the economic crisis, the digital revolution, the need to socially re-legitimate cultural action, or the globalization of cultural markets. Nevertheless, each interest group exploits these concepts in its favor, more or less explicitly in relation to its mission and strategies, depending on the position in the changing sectoral value chain. Its objective is to strengthen this position regarding aspects of the status quo that benefit it or to try to change those that harm it.

Audience empowerment, as part of the last wave of cultural democracy, is a minefield where many of the contradictions that characterize contemporary cultural action are reflected. In this sense, the influence of the geographical context is fundamental to understand the form and depth in which strategies such as audience development are incorporated in the discourse and praxis of cultural projects. As just described, there are many ways to empower audiences, but all ways involve a change in relationships and forms of mediation. The tradition of critical questioning and giving citizens the freedom to decide what is best for them is not the same in all Europe. The educational systems show that in some regions the transmission of knowledge, from the expert (the teacher) to the students, dominates the teaching systems, while in others the educational model focuses on knowing how to independently raise pertinent issues and find ways to answer them (Niemi et al., 2014). In the countries that suffered totalitarian political systems, the decision on which works stand out artistically and which ones should reach the population was in the hands of few professionals. In order to gain access to such positions of responsibility, it was necessary to be part of the established academic artistic knowledge and to have the ability to survive in a system of hierarchical political fidelity. Although many of these professionals committed themselves politically to foster the democratization of their countries, not all were able to break with a system of rigid artistic and professional recognition, based on the paradigms of artistic excellence and cultural democratization, but structurally contrary to the implications of cultural democracy (Hope, 2011). On the other hand, the narrowness of the labor market explains the difficulty

of the younger generations, more flexible and better trained, to develop new forms of management and cooperate internationally, in order to compete on equal terms with the “old dinosaurs”. In this context, the very idea of empowering audiences and sharing decision-making power (be it in the creative and production process or in artistic programming) requires greater commitment to the goal and generosity to others than in other political and management cultures, where competition is based not so much on knowledge and artistic reputation as on the capacity for innovation and social change.

Another factor to take into account is the level of subordination to new ideas and strategies, more or less innovative or fashionable, determined by the economic (or political) dependence on those European programs that require it. Operators from southern or eastern European countries are very adept at adopting these key concepts - sometimes more their rhetoric than the deep change that their practical implementation implies - with the aim of securing economic resources for issues considered more fundamental to them (such as launching local artists in the international circuit, co-producing and staging internationally prestigious shows, or gaining external reputation and legitimacy to better compete on a national scale). In any case, the simple fact of having to comply with a policy-driven program helps to spread the new strategy and to change habits of artistic mediation. We could say that, when projects are really successful, virtue stems from the scarcity of resources. In contrast, in the case of institutions located in countries with better allocations, the incorporation of these concepts and strategies is given more by conviction than by strict necessity. But this is not always the rule.

The main resistance to implementing programs of audience empowerment comes, in part, from the romantic sacralization of the function of artistic direction. In its origins, the defense of the autonomy of art sought to avoid instrumentalization by extrinsic interests and logics, fundamentally political and economic ones. It is necessary to take into account the emotional and symbolic risk, as well as the economic one, that every artist (producer or programmer) assumes when he-she presents his/her proposal to the public and critics. This tension tends to encourage powerful egos, often fueled by the fear of failure. Besides, the role of the mediator between creators and audiences is much less proactive, except for particularly innovative cases. The ability to implement projects of this type requires strong personalities, because they have to deal with convincing all types of stakeholders to take part in experimental processes that may fail. This is the reason why, sometimes, some innovation exercises in this domain present obvious contradictions between genuine goodwill and actual praxis.

## Audience empowerment: policy and political implications

Since we are in the midst of a participatory turn in the arts and culture sectors, the political implications are obvious. Any change towards empowerment touches, etymologically, on the powers already established on other logics or standards of action. However, there is a need to take a close look at this relationship between power and empowerment for two reasons. The first is that the authorities involved may have very different attitudes towards the prospect of changing established relations of power. These attitudes differ according to their nature (political power, artistic power, institutional power), depending on political cultures and individual strategies. While some institutions have included participation as a priority in their programs, in a more or less ambitious and sincere way, others are more oriented towards maintaining “classical” democratization policies.

The second reason for looking closely at this relationship between power and empowerment is that the emergence of participation does not come out of the blue. We have expressed this idea at the beginning of this introduction, recalling the chapter of Jean-Louis Fabiani: the issue of participation, the power of the spectator and his/her autonomy are as old as performing arts. Consequently, we must ask ourselves whether participation - in the sense of the spectator’s takeover of power on programming, creation, artistic recognition - represents a new paradigm for cultural policies, or - conversely - if it is only an instrument at the service of one of these paradigms. It seems clear that while participation as it stands today (as a lever for transforming cultural policies) represents a political turning point, it does not constitute a new paradigm. However, as a permanent challenge for any cultural action, participation has a special meaning for each of the different cultural policy paradigms.

According to the paradigm of excellence - historically the first to have justified public cultural policies - participation appears in its simplest and most limited form. Excellence is what a select group of experts decrees and spectators cannot intervene in this evaluation. As a vertical model, excellence is also a model of an elite who conceives participation only as a consequence of its proposals. This is why it was subject to criticisms of professional inbreeding (Urfalino, 1996; Alexander & Rueschemeyer, 2005) and unsuitability to the contemporary world (Bonet & Négrier, 2011). Despite criticisms, excellence continues to be replicated in the strategies of professionals and in some aspects of cultural policies.

The paradigm of cultural democratization - according to which the widest possible access to a set of identifiable cultural goods is the key objective - still forms a large part of the political agenda of the Ministries of Culture. Participation is receiving increased attention. Although the model is vertical, the political tension is on the

demand side. If excellence does not - ultimately - need the public to justify itself, cultural democratization instead implies real participation of the public. But this participation does not imply any active role in the definition of culture. The audience does not take decisions on programming, for example. For this reason, the model of cultural democratization has been criticized for its falsely democratic, or even ethnocentric, nature. Like in the case of excellence, the model survives the criticisms, some of which date back in time (Bourdieu, 1979; Rius Ulldemolins & Rubio Arostegui, 2016), like those emerging from the field of economic analysis (Babeau, 2018).

According to the paradigm of creative economy, the main purpose of cultural policies is development, a polysemous notion. First proposed to justify cultural spending in the name of economic externalities (Girard, 1978), it is intended today as support to active industrial policies, especially in the field of cultural industries and new technologies and at the city level (Byrne, 2012; Landry & Bianchini, 1995). The meaning of participation is again different, as it is based on the idea of consumption. As in the model of cultural democratization, participation is decisive for evaluating the success or failure of politics. But instead of being considered qualitatively, participation is evaluated quantitatively and correlated with levels of consumption.

The paradigm of cultural democracy, which can be associated with that of cultural rights, is the one of the four that proposes the most developed version of participation. It postulates an equal dignity of cultures, following the UNESCO convention on cultural diversity (UNESCO, 2005). Based on this equal dignity, participation is the essence of the whole model of action. Not only does it give legitimacy to a variety of cultural objects and practices, but it also provides the audience with decision-making power. With the rise of the notion of cultural commons (Barbieri, 2014), we started to talk about audience participation as “empowerment”: the capacity of citizens to become actors of cultural policies (Polityczna, 2015). This paradigm seems to be the most favorable for participation. However, it should be examined in practice, confronted with the other three paradigms. In theory, it is in direct opposition to them. But in practice, it is in a constant balance of power and compromise.

According to these paradigms, cultural policies have distinctive features. In other domains, the emergence of a new paradigm implies the substitution of the old one. This is why we are talking about a paradigm shift in public policy (Hall, 1993). For example, the agricultural modernization policy of the 1960s radically changed the content of the discourses and actions of agricultural policies. Here, the former paradigm is only a nostalgic reference. In the cultural field, rather than replacing one another over time, paradigms tend to accumulate. They remain active, permeating one another. This is the reason why, in Figure 2, we present the stake of participation at the crossroads of several paradigms, rather than identifying a “pure” form of participation, as originally described.



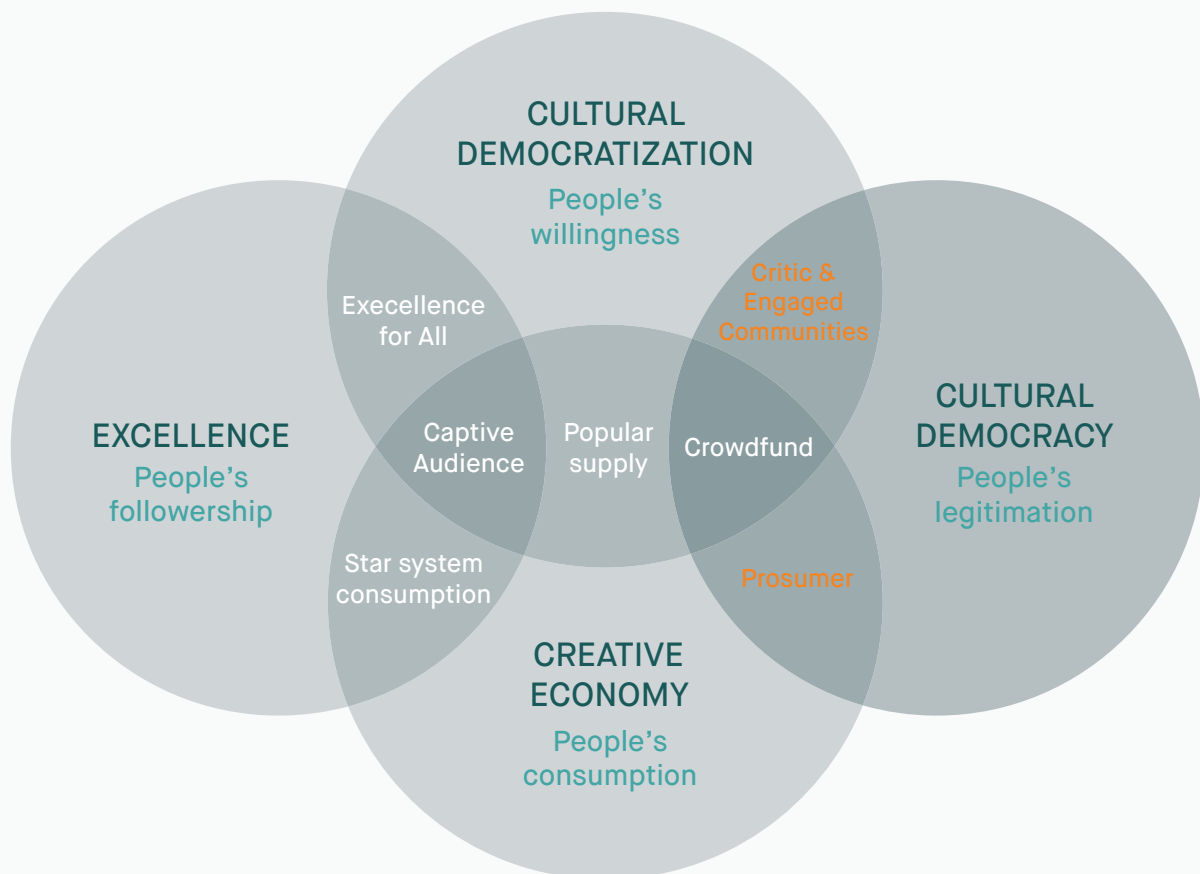


Figure 2. Participation in cultural policy paradigms.  
Source: Elaborated by the authors.

## A variety of practices

In Figure 2, we can see the four cultural policy paradigms overlap, resulting in different forms of participation. Each paradigm starts from a different vision of participation. But in practice, the forms that are actually implemented are those that are at the intersection of two or three paradigms. We see that the only paradigms that are not intertwined are excellence and cultural democracy, whose philosophy and practice are radically opposed. But all other relationships are possible.

For example, the “followership” behavior of the model of excellence (typical of audiences with high cultural capital), when in contact with cultural democratization strategies provides and results in “excellence for all”. This corresponds well to the discourse of many leaders of major artistic institutions.

The creative economy paradigm considers the citizen mainly as a consumer of cultural products. But in practice, it gives rise to different participation behaviors according to the combinations with the other paradigms. A high-quality star system market is the result of the combination of the paradigms of excellence and creative economy. The interaction between cultural democratization and creative economy results in “popular supply” models of consumption. And, at the intersection between the three paradigms we can find “captive audience” behavior, typical of groups of highly engaged people, as a result of long-term target actions related to excellence, cultural democratization and creative economy.

With regard to cultural democracy, where participation is at the heart of the whole model, the interactions with the other paradigms (with the exception of excellence) is the result of a balance of power and compromise. In the blurring of creation and consumption are prosumer behaviors, discussed further in this book, emerging as a combination of the logic of the creative economy and cultural democracy. The digital revolution brings about an economic change, which in turn results in a social change. In the field of culture, the result of this sequence of changes is the emergence of new forms of participant empowerment: bloggers, YouTubers, or co-audiences, among others.

At the crossroads between cultural democratization and cultural democracy, there is a diversity of activities with engaged communities requiring a more critical approach. This critique can lead to active behaviors, such as crowdfunding, for example, which is at the crossroads of three paradigms: cultural democratization, cultural democracy and the creative economy.

Reality is more complex than a chart. But the model helps to reflect the reality of participatory practices in the context of cultural policies and strategies. Therefore, it represents the diversity of meanings given by actors and institutions. These are not semantic quarrels: they are authentic power struggles in the battle to dominate

the political agenda. Indeed, if cultural democracy seems to be the most recent benchmark of cultural policy, it still needs to cement its position.

## A variety of instrumentalizations

Figure 2 reflects the plurality of participation practices in the cultural field, but also implies that several forms of instrumentalization of participation are possible. This is what happens when implementing cultural rights in public policies. In theory, the philosophy of cultural rights postulates that the hypothesis of cultural democratization is no longer tenable in a society marked by diversity. This philosophy then considers that policy advocating access to participation refers to a questionable hierarchy between cultures. Finally, it considers that it is necessary to move from the notion of “lack” (associated with need) to that of “capacity”. The proposal of cultural rights can thus be schematically defined as recognizing in equal dignity the cultures experienced and chosen by the people, and strengthening their capacities of expression, access and exchange. That is the coherence of cultural rights, or cultural democracy. Now let’s look at the discourses on their concrete implementation. There are four approaches to understanding how cultural rights affect the content of cultural policies.

The first approach, which should never be discarded in public policy analysis, is denial. Nothing is happening. The actors concerned bury their heads in the sand, pretending to already do what they are asked for to reaffirm their action. “Cultural rights - that’s what we’ve always done”. By denying any specificity and novelty of the notion of cultural rights, the elite of cultural policies neutralizes their transformative effects.

The second approach is focalization. Cultural rights are targeted at specific sectors of cultural policies; usually the weakest or most recent ones: circus, urban cultures. This option may lead to a contradiction in cultural policies: giving the responsibility to protect cultural rights to sectors that end up doing nothing more than socio-cultural activities, in many cases against their own artistic aspirations. This focus on weak actors (from the point of view of established cultural organizations) allows artistic institutions to avoid any constraint in this respect.

The third approach is populist reinterpretation. In this case, one relies on the discourse of cultural rights to feed a populist discourse of “true” cultural needs of “real” people, whereas the notion of cultural right postulates the overcoming of the notion of need, replaced by the concept of capacity. The effect on cultural policies can be catastrophic because it all depends on how one interprets people needs. The risk is to destroy any prospect of creation, social bond, civic concern of cultural diversity, and to align cultural exchanges with a purely commercial logic, or with the manipulation of popular tastes.

Finally, the fourth interpretation concerns the spirit of cultural rights, which is widespread among all cultural facilities of a given territory. It leads to discussions about the nature of these rights in the context of a specific field (heritage, visual arts, books and reading, live performance, urbanism, scientific culture, etc.). And multiple links thus combine, rather than oppose, democratization and democracy, creation and citizenship, economy and diversity.

When we relate participation to cultural policy, we stress the contradictions in representations, powers and practices that are in a relationship of conflict and unstable compromise. We will see in this book that many testimonials evoke the polysemy of participation, and the need to work on the definition of common issues, to avoid misunderstandings, to know in which direction it is possible to go together.



The book is structured in two parts. The first contains the contributions of researchers who develop their vision of what participation means in culture, each one in his/her field and disciplinary environment. Jean-Louis Fabiani analyzes participation in its historical context and shows the possible resulting sociological and political ambivalence. Franco Bianchini and Alice Borchì highlight the forms that participation policies in contemporary cities can take. Dafne Muntanyola-Saura focuses on ethics and aesthetics of participation in the field of visual arts. These three different contributions enrich our vision and open up a critical perspective.

The second part of the book extends this perspective to seven main goals of participation in the cultural sector. Each theme was proposed to be discussed during specific workshops at the Barcelona conference on the proactive role of live performance audiences. We commissioned to the conductors of each session to write their own reflections on the issue. At the same time, the synthesis of the debates was made by a second group of experts. These are the titles of the seven workshop sessions and the names of the authors in order of appearance: “Artistic quality and audience empowerment” by Jaroslava Tomanová and Giada Calvano; “Risks and opportunities of active spectatorship from a management perspective” by Giuliana Ciancio and Ricardo Álvarez; “The interactive role of participatory creative residencies” by Félix Dupin-Meynard, Bruno Maccari and Rafael Valenzuela; “The challenges of artistic programming with active spectators” by Luca Ricci, Ricardo Álvarez and Janina Juárez Pinzón; “Prosumer Experiences in Performing Arts” by Luisella Carnelli, Jaume Colomer, Giada Calvano and Janina Juárez Pinzón; “The organizational challenge of audience development and engagement” by Alessandro Bollo, Bruno Maccari and Kinga Szemessy and, finally, “Real democratization: involving audiences with different cultural capital” by Arturo Rodríguez Morató and Rafael Valenzuela.

In conclusion, Ben Walmsley, one of the very first thinkers about participation in the cultural sector, will provide his original contribution to this debate.









# Aesthetics and politics of participation in the Arts

*Jean-Louis Fabiani*

*Franco Bianchini*

*Alice Borchì*

*Dafne Muntanyola-Saura*

# The participatory public

*Jean-Louis Fabiani*

## Crisis in Avignon

In 1968, Jean Vilar, the founding father of the Avignon Theatre Festival in 1947, invited the Living Theatre of New York, directed by Julian Beck and Judith Malina. Less than two months after the May 68 unrest, the festival was full of political tensions. Vilar was under fire. The Living were to give their performance in the yard of the Lycée Mistral. Today, it is still painful to watch the founder, with an emaciated face, talking to Julian Beck on television archives. Beck was surrounded by young spectators who claimed free entrance to the show. The play was named *Paradise Now*, but it was clearly Vilar's hellish hour. Vilar was quite moved by the event. He suffered from a serious heart attack in the fall and died less than two years after, truly desperate. Why was he so disrupted by the American artists?

The Living Theatre had changed the spectators into actors, first provoking them from the stage with invectives, then inviting the spectators to cross the line between the hall and the stage and to mimic love acts with the actors. The local legend goes on saying that some spectators crossed another line, the one between participant observation and a participation non-observant of the rules of bourgeois behaviour. Television footage rather shows women closing their eyes and their ears in disgust of what was going on.

Here, we are confronted with a paradox. Vilar was a pioneer in theorizing the turn of the spectator into a "participant", and he was not satisfied by the Living experience. There was a misunderstanding about the very meaning of participation. By that word, Vilar did not mean the space of representation, but the national political space, particularly at the time when France was reconstructing itself after the great divide of World War II between resistance and collaboration. The spectators were invited to take part in a political process, but not to mingle with the actors on stage. What was requested from them was an active participation in the daily debates about the festival, but also the state of the nation, that multiplied during daytime and became almost as famous as the festival itself. A malicious mind might infer that the public was invited to approve of Vilar's artistic proposal rather than participating. As a matter of fact, Vilar was extremely sensitive to criticisms as well as not very opened to theatrical innovation. He presented only one contemporary author under his direction in the whole festival: Jean Pichette. The man is totally forgotten today, and he was mocked during his lifetime. The more legitimate writer Jean Cocteau even nicknamed him "pipichette" (peepeecheet). Perhaps the most interesting thing in the festival was the construction of a civic space conceived as a producer of citizenship.



## A generated audience

At this point, one can say that Vilar was the inheritor of a long historical process aiming at a social definition of the audience as generated and assembled by a cultural policy. The Avignon festival is the best example, at least in France, of an alliance between a state initiative and an artistic mobilization. In 1936, France experienced a leftist government, named the Popular Front, that put educational and cultural endeavours at the heart of political action (Ory 1994). This was a peculiar form of claim that had a rather long history. Access to culture was seen by trade-unions and progressive movements as a key to political emancipation. The stress was not on bourgeois culture, but on the universal tools that cultural literacy allowed for. Theatre was the most advanced part of a cultural sector that should be developed by public action. Public action also meant action on the public, as the audience had a good chance to be a “non-audience” in front of cultural products unheard of among the working classes. Thus, the government must embrace two different projects: first, supporting the cultural players, by guaranteeing their rights as creators and by funding their projects; second, creating future audiences, since legitimate culture must be shared by the whole population as a common good. This means that culture must be an element of the public service. “Theatre as public service” was the motto of the post-war playwrights and directors in a reconstructing France. It was grounded on an older idea: theatre is in itself the vivid representation of democracy.

From the Enlightenment to Romain Rolland, a French writer devoted to cultural issues in the first decades of the 20th century, theatre is the best way of seeing the assembled people, represented as public in the hall and as characters on stage. The people could witness its collective strength and power as well as experiencing the meaning of its existence within the time and space of an intensely emotional event. Actors played outdoors under the stars. This was a requirement in Avignon: its meaning was highly symbolic. The open spaces meant the refusal of the snobbery and hypocrisy of court theatre as well as the dismissal of bourgeois entertainment. Vilar’s position was more political and ethical than truly artistic. Theatre was a very serious thing: it was a condition of democracy. The very idea of audience development stemmed from that political understanding of the festival. The gathering of spectators under the clear skies of Provence became the metaphor of political association. A representation of united people could be seen, or at least envisaged, as a promise of the future.

## What is the meaning of popular?

Should we conclude that the “people” must involve the members of the political community, including its less culturally integrated members (the peasants, the working class, the migrants)? This is not absolutely clear. If we try to sketch

a genealogy of what came to be called “popular theatre”, we must say that the association between aesthetics and politics it involved did not induce automatically the association of everybody in the theatre. In the first decades of the 20th century, popular theatre was indeed a political movement, but it was centred on the cultural producers rather than the audience. The young playwrights and directors aimed to change the rules of the game. Paris was full of entertainment theatre catering for bourgeois audience. *Popular* meant the production of a new public with new demands adjusted to the new offer, but it was not necessarily connected to all social groups. Perhaps, decentralization from Paris was as important as democratization. Bourgeois theatre was scorned because it failed to produce an actual public conceived as an active community. On the contrary, it was based on the ephemeral aggregation of individual short-lived pleasures. Paris, with its Italian theatres and corrupted social life, was unable to care for an ascetic artistic proposal. However, the anti-bourgeois stance must be understood more as the wish to have a better understanding audience than as a political commitment. It should not come as a surprise that the new public was found more among the educated groups and the academics than among workers and peasants. Frugality and asceticism became the symbol of a new theatre, that was not aiming at easing the digestion of spectators but, on the contrary, at increasing their aesthetic-political ambitions.

The basic assumption of French popular theatre was the following: a public does not exist as such, but needs to be produced in a way that makes spectatorship analogous to actor or director’s practice. Jean Vilar kept a very sharp eye on the actual public: he commissioned one of the first sociological surveys on festival attendance and he knew that the whole social spectrum could not be seen in Avignon. The word *popular* certainly implied an effort to reach out, but the most important thing was an active conception of the public as a way of creating an assembly. The theatre was turned into a utopic space where the conditions of communication were excellent, perhaps for the first time in history. There is something of a pre-Habermasian dimension in this conception. The public is the consequence of a mix of emotion and reason: if the roots of the created community are emotional, as the rituals performed clearly show, the spectator is not submitted to a mental turmoil, and remains on her/his seat. His participation is quiet, disciplined and silent. All the principles of the new aesthetics can be derived from that myth. First, the stage must remain bare. Second, the ethics of the director, the actors and the public must be ascetic. Third, theatre must stay away from Parisian-bourgeois corrupted values. Fourth, the development of a participatory public through the refusal of entertainment as well as of architectural and stage props.

## Consensus and contradictions

Vilar's theory presupposes that the public is homogeneous: it is an entity that can be conceived as a "community", a word widely used in his writings. It is not necessary to produce or to co-produce anything; the civic dimension of the process is more important than the aesthetic one. Consensus and accord are the main goals of the theatrical experience. Of course, Bertolt Brecht had a quite different point of view. He considered that a politicized view of theatre should bring about the end of consensus and make visible the contradictions within the public as an effect of wider social contradictions. Greek tragedy as well was designed to produce an existential experiment of the relationships between individual autonomy and social contradictions on stage: as shown by Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet (1972), theatre represents simultaneously the social and its critique and provides the public with resources to reconstruct the disrupted social link.

The theatrical space ties and unties people. This does not concern only links that are represented onstage. It is at the heart of the spectator's position too. Attaching people together for a moment of time is not enough to define the spectator's contract. A mass, or any religious assembly, is more than sufficient for that type of purpose. There is a constitutive ambivalence in the spectator's position, torn between the desire to belong to a collective endeavour and the temptation to get rid of social routine and mandatory links. Being a spectator thus means being tied and untied in the same process. This statement is valid only if we envisage the public sphere as a liberal order where there is a competition among cultural producers and among social preferences. The ultimate affirmation of individualism through cultural preferences goes along with the development of cultural institutions which aimed to reach the whole community. As shown by Dominique Poulot (2003) in the museum sector, the original constitution of the modern public is based on the claim of individual aesthetic enjoyment: the museum grants direct access to artworks, as if the spectator were a connoisseur visiting an artist's studio. In a democratic order, direct access to art, without any other mediation than the individual quest for aesthetic pleasure, is increasingly threatened by the development of interpretative schemes and interpretative mediators that produce the "right" meaning of art.

In this respect, the historical process of public production can be analysed as one of the most powerful machines designed to discipline mind and body that we encounter in social life. Through the generalization of silent listening and of guided tours in exhibitions, canalizing and homogenizing devices of aesthetic pleasure have been

developed. The price to pay for the coexistence of the individual amateur's free relationship to masterpieces and the democratic access to heritage and cultural values may seem exorbitant. Paul Veyne (1995), the noted French historian, remembered his first encounter with classical music, the weight of the cultural machines:

*I was nineteen years old, and for the first time in my life I listed a concert in the Gaveau Hall. There I was exceedingly surprised to see, on the one hand, the huge objective organization need by a concert, the orchestra, the music performed, the public habits, the complex ceremony and, on the other hand, in the heart and spirits of the listeners, the moderate pleasure given by the audition of a great musical piece, perhaps interrupted by moments of boredom, or seldom by moments of enthusiasm or of daydreaming: all that was very weak. The discrepancy between institutions grounded on values, here the musical ones, and the inner gains was so stupefying that I wondered what the discourse on values really meant (pp. 182-183).*

The actual public is quite different from the “theoretical” public defined by modern cultural institutions. What is left then from free aesthetical pleasure, claimed by the constitution of a public sphere in Habermas' terms if institutions allow such a small space for it? In other terms, is the democratic social link compatible with the logic of the connoisseur or the amateur? One can find here the “unsocial sociability of men” according to Kant (1963, p.15). It seems that we belong to the public only to free ourselves from our insertion into a collective that we consider as an obstacle to our pleasure. The forms of sociability developed by modern cultural institutions have been analysed over and over: what is at stake is to see and to be seen, to throw oneself into the competitive arena of aesthetic judgments and to increase one's social capital by spreading exclusive information and gossip. The show is in the audience too. Here, the social link is manifested through the spectacularization of relationships and interactions and the dramatization of connivance and rivalry that make the social fabric. The public may be an obstacle to aesthetic pleasure. Consider this spectator:

*He did not sleep a wink. Some guys played drums all night in front of his hotel. «A good example of the confusion in Avignon», he said, ordering his third espresso, that will not enlighten his mood. All started with the Danaïds show. Two young people bothered him in the shuttle. In the Redland Quarry, a chubby man shoved him to the side. He claims that he said: «I can't see anything because of you, motherfucker!». Another man took his reserved seat at the Gibert lély show by Christian Rist in the Celestine Church: the squatter was an arrogant type of guy, a friend of a high-ranking organizer, no doubt, who kept talking about “France-Cul” (the national public radio). He saw Solomonie la possédée standing up, his*



*body twisted. Anyhow, the spectators were given kids seats and the woman seated next to him during the first part did not stop talking to her friend while browsing a huge bag. Under the circus tent of Montfavet, where he went to watch the "Fin des monstres", a girl hit him with her elbow trying to catch a sweet dropped by the fattest woman in the world (Fabiani, 2002, p. 266).*

Anton Webern is famous for having said: "The public is mainly useful to improve the acoustics of the hall". But as we can see from the example above, the public worsens the conditions of vision. The question of the relationship between the public and the social nexus is trapped in an insoluble contradiction, if we want to circumscribe it in the classic space of representation. Today, cultural consumption takes place mainly in the private space, through an array of technological devices changing frequently. For younger generations particularly, it can be the only form of contact with cultural goods. Nevertheless, the claim to belong to an entity constituted by a relationship to an art form and the claim to ensure a singular space of delectation are indissolubly tied in the process that creates a public. This remains relevant even when one gets out from the architectural space of representation. A public is a methodological fiction. Unlike a community defined on common (social, religious, ethnic) grounds, a public must leave a space for the stranger, the unknown. It is a space of sharing. The spectator who leaves in the middle of the play has her/his place in it, as well as the enthusiastic fan throwing flowers to the diva. This means that the link that constitutes the public can be composed and recomposed at will. The artwork presupposes an address to the unknown spectator, to the passer-by who might not stop and enter.

The work is open, we have known it since Umberto Eco (1989) told us: the openness requires the absence of any fixed link. All the contemporary supporters of social cohesion through cultural participation ignore this fact. They seem to believe in a sort of crude Durkheimian form of mechanic solidarity turning the public into automats. The modern forms of spectatorship have something extremely coercive in terms of bodily discipline, but they always allow to withdraw, more by exit than by voice, but also to tie and to untie, to cut and to paste. Contrary to purely ritual forms, they do not presuppose an overwhelming emotional community as a condition of participation. The public is a complex assemblage of social relationships and refusal to join. That is the reason why a public is always precarious and ephemeral, keeping at a distance both community enthusiasm and narcissistic vacuity. The participatory public is thus quite far from the fusion proposed by the Living Theatre in 1968. It is not the production of an abstract community in Vilar's sense either. The construction of a theatrical public space rather means the development of an original form of participatory democracy.

## Republican rituals and their discontents

Let's go back to Avignon. One can consider the Avignon festival as a huge republican ritual. It is part and parcel of a political project: theatre is conceived as a public service in charge of a civic mission. It does not matter if Vilar's dream did not come true. The festival remains one of the main ceremonies of a secularized country, and giving a religious connotation to the notion is far from being necessary. If we take some precautions, we may develop an analogy with the revolutionary *fête*, brilliantly analysed by Mona Ozouf (1976). The historian noted that the enactment of the concept was a partial failure, with respect to the efficacy of rituals. The Revolution men aimed to create a tool to demonstrate the strength of the new social order and its inviolability. They called the ceremonial ensemble "the sacred theatre of the social contract" and they wanted to create a new form of social temporality and new categories of public speech.

In Avignon, we find an analogous type of time scansion and the same taste for civic speech. The "debates" have contributed to the creation of a specific atmosphere and temporality. The festival is characterized by the sedimentation of various discursive strata. The lack of consensus about plays, actors and directors is the best engine of public cohesion. The divisions are clearly part of the game. Debates induce proximity between actors and spectators and they end up shaping the imaginary construction of the event. The spatial and temporal density of the encounters remains the organizing principle of the festival. Discussions produce a kind of moral sphere centered on the ideal of a common public culture. Cultural industries have increased the opportunity to consume culture in the private sphere conceived as a comfortable bubble and have created the means to virtually cancel the public space with mobile and individual devices. Having access to culture seems more and more synonymous with going solo in the contemporary world. Festivals remain an exception in this movement since they presuppose an archaic form of sociality, the outdoor agora, the amphitheatre under the stars. One can compare them to Greek theatre with the concern for public issues and the actual gathering of dialogic people. There is a great difference though: former slaves are now admitted to the ceremony. People agree to disagree publicly.

The festival form is not a way of maintaining old folk traditions aiming at keeping contemporary individualism at a distance. It is rather a way of shaping a possible future through a utopic space by using images, sounds and texts that embody the most advanced form of contemporaneity. Besides the production of a specific form of sociability, debates matter for activating the memories of the festival and for archiving the event. They constitute a kind of archetype of the public sphere: physical proximity, reciprocal respect and centrality of speech are used to redefine and to re-activate permanently the conditions of possibility of collective life. One could laugh about the huge difference in numbers between the few hundred people who

gather to debate in Avignon and the billions of globalized consumers of electronic culture. The laughter could be misleading; if the festival has survived for more than seventy years now, it is because the discursive space, that is one of its major features, has accumulated symbolic capital through time. The debates remind us that culture is a public and civic affair, and not only an encounter between an individual and cultural industries. Although the social and ideological conditions prevailing after World War II do not exist any longer, public debates have succeeded in reshaping the main issues regarding citizenship. The myth of the spectator-citizen is both a myth and a significant political tool.

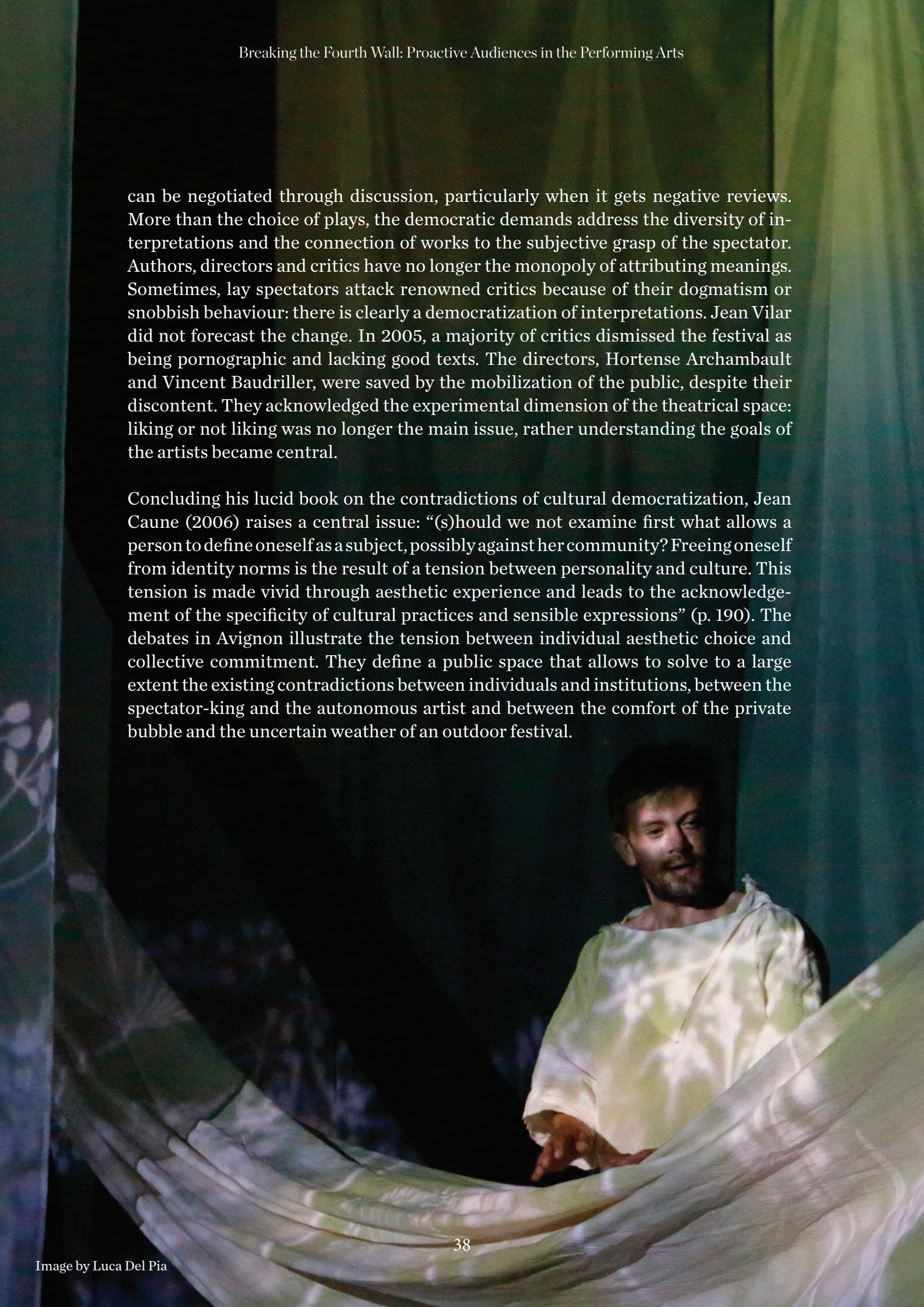
As Jean-Pierre Gaudin (2007) clearly showed, the ancestor of participatory democracy is direct democracy: “(c)itizens discuss and decide together, by-passing elected representatives. They meet in order to deliberate directly and make their choice. That is the ancient democracy of the agora” (p. 9). There are no decisions made in the festival debates properly speaking; there is no evaluation in the strict meaning of the term either. In some ways, it is speech for speech’s sake. This does not mean that the audience appreciates all the plays, but that a negative judgment is less important than the demand for a clarification on the part of actors and directors. The absence of pleasure is thus related to a possible misunderstanding of the artistic intention. The festival presupposes the good will of the spectator as condition of felicity. Of course, the modes of adhesion have change notably since the time of Vilar. First, spectators are now more “individualized” than they used to be in the 1950s and seem less ready to be lectured on the meaning of artworks; they look increasingly for a personal quest of sense. Second, the public is no longer the audience of the tradition of popular education, willing to acquire the tools of emancipation through culture; the political dimension has not disappeared but is stated in quite different terms. The educative dimension yields to the participatory dimension. The debates now constitute the frame for self-expression, understood less as the flow of a free subjectivity than a reflective work on the spectator’s position.

If we go back to the conditions of participatory democracy, we must notice, with Jean-Claude Gaudin, that the first request is access to information. “(People want first) to participate in a consultation. In sum to have access to information concerning a public project or problem; to get files opened, to have precisions, to understand the justification of an action” (Gaudin, 2007, p. 13). The Avignon debates share the same characteristics, although the crisis of political representation is not an equivalent of the crisis of theatrical representation. There has been clearly a demand for a discussion on the very ends of theatre and its connections to the political world since the Vietnam War. Theatre is no longer as obvious as it used to be in public life in the aftermath of World War II. It is challenged by other means of communication and gathering. The debates call for a democratization of critics. Professional critics are often contested in their interpretation of the plays. The meaning of an artwork



can be negotiated through discussion, particularly when it gets negative reviews. More than the choice of plays, the democratic demands address the diversity of interpretations and the connection of works to the subjective grasp of the spectator. Authors, directors and critics have no longer the monopoly of attributing meanings. Sometimes, lay spectators attack renowned critics because of their dogmatism or snobbish behaviour: there is clearly a democratization of interpretations. Jean Vilar did not forecast the change. In 2005, a majority of critics dismissed the festival as being pornographic and lacking good texts. The directors, Hortense Archambault and Vincent Baudriller, were saved by the mobilization of the public, despite their discontent. They acknowledged the experimental dimension of the theatrical space: liking or not liking was no longer the main issue, rather understanding the goals of the artists became central.

Concluding his lucid book on the contradictions of cultural democratization, Jean Caune (2006) raises a central issue: “(s)hould we not examine first what allows a person to define oneself as a subject, possibly against her community? Freeing oneself from identity norms is the result of a tension between personality and culture. This tension is made vivid through aesthetic experience and leads to the acknowledgement of the specificity of cultural practices and sensible expressions” (p. 190). The debates in Avignon illustrate the tension between individual aesthetic choice and collective commitment. They define a public space that allows to solve to a large extent the existing contradictions between individuals and institutions, between the spectator-king and the autonomous artist and between the comfort of the private bubble and the uncertain weather of an outdoor festival.





# Participation in arts activities in the context of European urban cultural policies

*Franco Bianchini and Alice Borchì*

## Introduction

Culture in Europe is facing some challenges that undermine the very core of the European integration project, the more progressive manifestations of which are based on the values of openness and diversity. First, economic inequality is on the rise: according to an OECD (2017) report, the 10 % of richest households in Europe hold 50% of total wealth, whereas the 40 % least wealthy own slightly over 3 % (p. 6). This is an all-time high: since the 1980s, the average income of the richest 10% increased from seven times higher than that of the poorest 10% to 9 ½ times higher (ibid).

After the economic crisis of 2007-2008, austerity measures provoked a continuing “withdrawal of the state” (Bramall, 2013, p. 84) in favour of neoliberal, market-oriented politics. Such policies were adopted in Europe since the 1980s, but their consequences in terms of social inequality were especially serious since the late 2000s. The job market was increasingly deregulated, giving rise to a new and unstable social class, the “precariat”. Indeed, more workers faced insecurity in all aspects of their work, from employment to income (Standing, 2011, p. 17). This sense of insecurity fostered a sense of precariousness not only in the workplace, but also at emotional and social level (idem, p.33).

Growing disparities in the distribution of wealth fomented a rise in popular distrust of political, economic, academic, media and other elites: the division between the so-called “99%ers” and “1%ers” has been growing since the protests of the #Occupy movement of 2011. Indeed, we are living in what journalist Roger Cohen (2016) has named “the age of distrust”. After all, as stated by Cohen, it is impossible to think that “the political, economic and financial elites who brought you the euro crisis, the war in Iraq, the Great Recession of 2008, growing inequality and (at least until last year in the United States) middle-class income stagnation” (ibid) could keep their reliability intact. What surrounds us is an increasingly complex society where the spheres of public and private, personal emotion and objectivity, opinion and fact are constantly blurred. The challenge that lies in attempting to comprehend reality is reflected by the condition of “post-truth”, that has been taken on board by politicians, journalists and academics.

As a reaction to the contemporary complexity of reality, many people (including many of the victims of current processes of economic change) distort and idealise the past as a golden, simple era (Nougayrède, 2016). As explained by Joseph Tainter, “they choose simplicity and locality over complexity; identity over internationalism. Politicians promote themselves by giving voice to this” (in Harris, 2016). The rejection of complexity has brought about a sense of distrust towards experts and critical voices, including artists and academics. A study conducted by Freemuse (2017) in 78 countries reported that in 2016 188 total serious violations of artistic freedom (including assassinations and attacks), and 840 acts of censorship took place (p. 8).

The mistrust towards elites fostered a resurgence of populism in contemporary political discourse. The term “populism” has several different interpretations. Revelli (2017) states that it is a “catch-all word” (p. 4), since it can be used in a variety of geographical and historical contexts. As reported by Benveniste, Campani and Lazaridis, the term can refer to a political style, an ideology, or a certain position inside politics (Lazaridis, Campani & Benveniste, 2016, p. 6). As an ideology, one of the fundamental values of populism is nationalism. It tends to be an exclusive concept of nationalism, that focuses on the ethnic nation and does not allow difference and pluralism (idem, p. 7). It also tends to be a nationalism based on the idea of “the people as family” (idem, p. 9). Indeed, the idea of family at the heart of populist nationalism is often a hetero-patriarchal one that presumes anachronistic gender relations. Misogyny and anti-feminism are in many cases at the core of extreme-right wing populist movements. In the words of Ulf Mellström (2017), “what we witness is in many ways a restoration of classic patriarchy where various conservative and neo-fascist forces unite and form a backlash against progressive gender politics, liberal democratic practices and deepened democratic values concerning race, gender and sexuality” (p. 1). In particular, for what concerns race and religion, as pointed out by Hafez (2014), a common aspect of different right-wing populist movements and parties is Islamophobia. It is a complex phenomenon that includes racial, religious and political trajectories (Tyrer, 2013) that isolates Muslim people as ‘the Other’ par excellence and that opposes them to white, Christian native populations. Right-wing populist parties and movements characterised the recent waves of migration from Northern Africa and the Middle East towards Europe as an “invasion” that threatens the survival of Western culture. This is why these parties and movements often promoted a “culture war” against migrants. In such times of division and distrust, what could be the role of participatory cultural practices in fostering social and cultural inclusion and dialogue, and what are the challenges for participation-oriented urban cultural strategies?

## Some issues in urban cultural policy today

Urban cultural policies in Europe today present an uneasy coexistence of policy rationales from different historical periods. The intrinsic and civilising value of access to culture was at the core of cultural policy at city and national level in Western Europe in the late 1940s and in the 1950s. This was based on the belief that ‘high culture’ could elevate the moral sensibility of the people and thus strengthen democracy and avoid horrors such as the ones of the Second World War (Bloomfield & Bianchini, in Stevenson, 2001, p. 12). The civilising mission of culture had been advocated since Aristotle’s times and found particular fortune in the 19th century, promoted – among others - by English educationalist Mathew Arnold. This concept was still well alive in the 20th century thanks to thinkers such as Leavis, Scruton and Nussbaum (Belfiore & Bennett, 2006, p. 140). Civic identity was at the core of the concept of citizenship implicit in these cultural policies. Their mission was to form educated citizens that could make informed choices and act according to their civic conscience. A top-down, paternalistic approach to urban cultural policies prevailed during this period. Narrow elites of experts (usually white middle-class men) defined what constituted “cultural value”. The main task of cultural policy was to make such narrowly defined cultural activities more widely available to people. The emphasis was on education and civilised spectatorship, and not on participation or co-creation.

Between the mid-1960s and the early 1980s, socio-economic changes included the reduction of average weekly working hours, the larger availability of disposable time and income for leisure and cultural activities, mass literacy and the large growth in access to higher education. This moved the focus of cultural policy towards the transformative potential of “cultural democracy” and towards popular participation in cultural activities as a way to foster social inclusion. The rise of social movements - such as the mobilisation of students in different European countries in 1968, the rise of feminism and the long wave of protest against the war in Vietnam - created the conditions for a critique of previous approaches to cultural policy, which were often seen as paternalistic and outdated. The definition of culture broadened to include cultural forms such as photography, popular music, comics and video. In the early 1960s, one of the first examples of community arts festival took place in Craigmillar, a village in Scotland: along with a group of other local mums, Helen Crummy organised a music and drama festival to contest her son’s school’s decision not to teach music (Crummy, in Jeffers & Moriarty, 2017). Forms of participatory and community arts events aimed at tackling the shortcomings of traditional urban cultural policies evolved through time, until they bloomed in the 1970s. They were associated with movements including “community arts” in Britain, *Sozio Kultur* in

Germany and *animation socio-culturelle* in France. The idea of cultural democracy at the time had a political value, as participation by citizens in cultural activities (not merely as spectators but also as cultural producers) was seen as a way to alert people's consciousness of situations of injustice and subordination, and to trigger wider processes of potentially revolutionary social and political change. From the late 1970s, radical, participation-oriented urban cultural policies became in some cases associated with the idea of "cultural empowerment", to give disadvantaged social groups opportunities to produce their own cultural representations of themselves. New understandings of culture that encompassed social and economic dimensions underlined the creation of new cultural spaces: for example, the Musée de l'Homme et de l'Industrie (Museum of Mankind and Industry), now Ecomusée du Creusot-Montceau, established in 1972, was the first museum that connected the local community to the locality's industries and schools and to the local environment and environment more generally (Ecomusée du Creusot Montceau, 2017). Another example was the foundation in Vienna in 1979 of the WUK association "Verein zur Schaffung offener Kultur und Werkstättenhäuser" (Association for the Creation of Open Culture and Workshop Houses). Activists from this association occupied a former museum in 1981, creating an "open culture house", which was later officially recognized by the city of Vienna (WUK, 2017).

Indeed, urban cultural policy makers started engaging more systematically with issues raised by activists: for example, the 1970s "Reclaim the Night" marches, organised by feminist movements, raised the issue of women's safety in the city at night. In connection to these events, between 1977 and 1985 Rome City Council organized the Estate romana ("Roman summer"), a night-time festival of free cultural events, one of whose aims was making going out at night safer for everyone (Bianchini, 1995, p. 122). Cultural policies for participation and inclusion were often paired with urban policies that made access to the city easier, such as the "Fares Fair" public transport policy advocated by the Labour administration of the Greater London Council in 1981. The rationale for these cultural policies was an idea of citizenship as empowerment, aimed at giving people equal opportunities and to enable disadvantaged groups to take part in local cultural life (idem, p.14). These policies also encouraged the more socially excluded citizens to widen their mental and spatial horizons, by exploring, for example, parts of the beautiful historic centres of their own cities which had often previously been regarded by them as too exclusive, or too difficult and expensive to access.

A third phase of urban cultural policy-making in the post-war period was characterised by the "economic turn", in which the previous social and moral rationales for



cultural policy were substituted with a new approach to culture as a tool for economic development and place marketing (idem, p.15). Between the mid-1980s and the late 2000s the aims of many urban cultural policies in Europe were increasingly oriented towards economic competitiveness and growth, with a new emphasis on flagship projects such as the construction of “iconic” museums (like the Guggenheim in Bilbao, which opened in 1997), arts complexes and other cultural buildings. This kind of urban cultural policy was aimed at improving the external images of cities (particularly industrial and port cities which has suffered from processes of economic restructuring), attracting inward investment, developing the creative industries and tourism sectors, and encouraging property developers to regenerate derelict or underused former industrial areas (particularly in or adjacent to city centres), by taking advantage of the potential of cultural activities to rebrand such places. These policies were often connected to an idea of citizenship as “consumership”, that is limited to “a right to consume without regard to questions of unequal market access and distribution” (Bloomfield & Bianchini, in Stevenson, 2001, p. 10). This conception is based on a passive idea of citizenship and a reductionist approach to society and the State. The citizen, in this case, is a consumer that moves through a world that obeys to the laws of the market, and makes choices according to them.

The 1990s and 2000s also saw the parallel rise of another tendency in European urban cultural policies, that designed cultural actions aimed at changing the behaviours of individuals and communities. The politics of the time were characterised by a lighter bureaucratic approach, offering incentives to people for achieving economic or social results. Foer and Scheiber (2009) call this kind of politics “nudge-ocracy”, after “nudge theory”. The term refers to the behavioural economists Thaler and Sunstein, who state that “nudges”, that is, small incentives, are particularly effective in shaping human decision-making. Community arts programmes, far from their revolutionary intents of the 1970s, were seen in many cases as an inexpensive way to tackle (at least in part) the more blatant fallacies of market societies, such as inequality and social exclusion (Matarasso, 2013). Participation in community-based cultural activities by socially excluded or disadvantaged citizens was seen as a way of “nudging” people, for example to combat anti-social behaviour, ranging from crime to vandalism, homophobic bullying and drugs addiction. One example of this approach to urban cultural policy was the “Creative Communities” programme developed by Liverpool City Council in the 2000s.

In the contemporary context, after the financial crash and subsequent economic downturn of the late 2000s, urban cultural policy-making encompasses rationales, aims and practices from all the above mentioned periods, but the rise of populism and

nationalism contributed to take in different directions its objectives and challenges. As Peter Duelund (2011) observes, European cultural policy has been affected by the discourse of new nationalism: from the “Danish cultural canon” project and its focus on Danish identity (p. 4) to the law that prohibits to offend the Turkish nation (p. 6), collective identity politics and nationalism have penetrated cultural policy and its discourse. However, it must be noted that in some cases urban cultural policy makers have developed strategies to counteract nationalist narratives: for example, the city of Izmir, in Turkey, resists the national government’s nationalist tones in favour of its cosmopolitan, pro-Europe creative tradition (Driessen, 2015).

## The value of cultural participation

The impact of cultural participation has been analysed from different points of view. Claire Bishop (2016) identifies *activation*, *authorship* and *community* as the three main concepts that lie at the base of the rationale for participatory cultural practices: the aim of cultural participation is to emancipate participants and make them able to determine their own socio-political reality, to foster non-hierarchical modes of artistic production and to restore a sense of community and collective responsibility (p. 12). Matarasso (1997) argues that participation in arts activities produces social benefits on several levels (p. 119), including personal growth, the acquisition of transferrable skills, and a renewed sense of community and social inclusion for marginalised groups (ibid). This view, however, has been challenged by Merli (2002), who critiques the conceptual and methodological framework of Matarasso’s study and states that participation in arts activities is an insufficient means to tackle important societal issues such as deprivation and conflict (p. 112-114). Nevertheless, participation in artistic activities appears to be linked to civic participation (WolfBrown, 2009) and neighbourhood stability (Taylor, 2008). Another benefit of cultural participation lies in how it fosters creativity, which, according to Gauntlett (2011), can help us “increase our pleasure in everyday life, unlock innovative capacity, and build resilience in our communities, so that we can face future challenges with confidence and originality” (p. 245).

Recent studies have also established a clear link between artistic participation and wellbeing. For example, a recent report by the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing (2017) states that “after engaging with the arts 79% of people in deprived communities in London ate more healthily, 77% engaged in more physical activity and 82% enjoyed greater wellbeing” (p. 8). The benefits of cultural participation are not limited to the participants, but they also include the

artistic milieu of a country. For instance, as recounted by the Director of National Endowment for Arts Research and Analysis, Sunil Iyengar (2017), some studies that analyse the cultural scene in the US (Moriarty, 2004; Hirschman, 2013; Novak-Leonard, 2016; Novak-Leonard et al., 2014) point out that the participation of migrants to the arts brings about artistic innovation, also through hybridization and technological advancements.

## Urban cultural policies in the context of the economic downturn

After the economic crisis that started in the second half of the 2000s, many European cities faced a shift in the availability of resources and in the rationales for cultural policy. First, reductions in public funding (which formed part of austerity policies) led to the closure of community spaces such as libraries (Kean, 2016) and youth centres (Thapar, 2017). Austerity also led to a decrease in funding for cultural activities, included culture-led regeneration projects. The education sector was hit hard by the economic crisis. In higher education, this caused significant increases in university fees (Bolton, 2016). The extreme example was the UK, where in November 2010 the UK-Liberal Democrat coalition government (led by David Cameron) approved an increase from £3,290 to £9,000 per year. For what concerns the role of the arts and in the educational curriculum, school systems in different European countries gave lower priority to artistic and creative practices, and introduced a new focus on science, maths, coding and digital skills. For example, the final report of the Warwick Commission for the Future of Cultural Value states that in the UK between 2003 and 2013 there was a drop of 50% in the GCSE numbers for Design and Technology and of 23% for Drama. Furthermore, despite a remarkable increase in Media and Film (70%), there was a significant number of pupils who do only take STEM subjects at GCSE (idem, p. 44). The low importance assigned to artistic subjects in the curriculum and the economic barriers in accessing higher education put into question the opportunity to engage in arts activities for many young people.

It must be noted, however, that the restraints caused by austerity measures brought about interesting forms of experimental artistic interventions. In some cities the economic downturn made access to low-cost premises for cultural activities easier. For example, in Leeds abandoned shops were turned into arts studio and galleries: arts organisations pay no rent or a very small one, and shop owners avoid paying heavy business taxes (Youngs, 2011). Furthermore, the scarcity of available resources encouraged a more collaborative attitude in the cultural sphere. Many artists

came up with new funding partnerships and strategies; for example, the practice of co-working became increasingly popular (Merkel, 2015). Furthermore, the growth of social media fostered new internet-based forms of participation and expressiveness: the internet offers the possibility to create communities, organize participatory decision-making processes, communicate quickly, share work and collaborate effectively on common projects.

## Urban cultural policies and participation

Historically, funding for urban cultural policies in the post-war period in Western Europe was focused mainly on consumption activities, flagship buildings and city centres. This strategy, rather than encouraging cultural participation, has led to a series of problems that can hinder cultural democracy. First, culture-led urban regeneration projects can bring about gentrification and, consequently, the reduction of affordable housing (Lees, 2008; Newman and Wyly, 2006; Slater, 2006, in Grodach et al., 2016, p. 2) and the displacement of lower income communities (Bridge et al., 2011; Chaskin & Joseph, 2013, in Grodach et al., 2016, p. 2). Secondly, prestigious cultural flagship buildings turned in some cases into “white elephants”. They proved too costly to maintain in the long run and subtracted resources from smaller local projects that have the potential to be more sustainable and participatory (Garcia, 2004, p. 323). The focus of urban cultural policies on city centres tended to ignore peripheral and inner-city areas suffering from “multiple deprivation” - a concept that weighs in factors such as income and employment deprivation, education, skills and training deprivation, health deprivation and disability, crime, barriers to housing and services, and living environment deprivation (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2015, p. 25). From a cultural policy perspective, one of the key issues of these areas is the difficulty in access to cultural activities. As reported by the European Parliament’s publication *Access to culture in the European Union*, there are many barriers hindering cultural access: lack of interest, time and information, but also high costs and limited choice or poor quality of cultural provision in a given area (Pasikowska-Schnass, 2017, p. 13). One of the ways suggested by the report to spark interest in culture, especially for what concerns young people, is to give more relevance to the arts and humanities in the school environment. One strategy to achieve this has been theorised by Claire Detels (1999). She advocates the introduction of a new approach to the school curriculum, which she defines as ‘soft boundaries’, less based on the division between subjects and between theory and practice and more prone to thematic, flexible educational structures.



Educational systems are crucial to understand key issues in policies concerning cultural participation. Indeed, since the 1970s, the relationship between cultural policy and community arts changed significantly. Matarasso (2013) observes that community arts in Britain underwent a process of depoliticization: the aim of community arts, according to the author, does not serve revolutionary purposes anymore, but rather focuses on tackling societal issues, such as health and social inclusion (2013). However, it is possible to argue that rather than being depoliticized, community arts is now serving different political purposes than those of the 1970s. The purpose of community arts responds to the contemporary “rolling back” of the state and laissez-faire attitude towards the market. Community arts projects for social inclusion sometimes aim to provide a panacea for underlying issues of inequality and precariousness. The rationale of cultural policies has shifted towards instrumentalism, up to a point that they have been dubbed “policies of extinction” (Belfiore, 2002, p. 22). Indeed, the expectations placed upon the social impact of arts, in particular for community arts activities, suggests that if this rationale was taken to its extreme “there would be no point in having a cultural policy at all, as art provision could be easily absorbed within existing social policies” (ibid). Furthermore, since the funding rationale for community arts lies in their function as an inexpensive strategy to address social issues, community arts groups in deprived neighbourhoods have to carry a heavy burden. Deprived areas tend to lack voluntary groups and charities (Lindsey and Clifford, 2011) and this often causes community arts groups to be the only form of social support available in the neighbourhood.

Participatory cultural policies, however, are not limited to community arts projects; some initiatives are aimed at involving local communities, with a special attention to those who do not usually engage in cultural activities, in the decision-making process of cultural policies. For instance, “Nouveaux commanditaires” (“new patrons”) is an initiative promoted by the Fondation de France since the 1990s and has since spread in other countries (Nouveaux Commanditaires, 2017). The aim of this project is to increase cultural democracy by giving people the opportunity to talk to artists and commission public artworks. Usually the artists’ works focus on a theme that is particularly relevant to the community, or tackle a problem associated with the use of public space (ibid).

Another example of bottom up decision-making in cultural policy is participatory budgeting. This practice was first adopted in Porto Alegre, Brazil, between 1993 and 1996 and is based on the direct participation of citizens in designing the budget of the local government (Navarro, in Licha, 2004, p. 251).

A further shift in the rationale of participatory arts practices lies in the new attention towards social interaction between different groups and intercultural encounter and exchange. This approach values diversity, which is considered an important advantage (Wood, Landry & Bloomfield, 2006, p. 10), openness and interculturalism as a way to foster growth and mutual exchange between different cultural groups (idem, p. 12). Openness is also one of the most important aims of recent policies adopted by some cultural institutions: in order to foster participation and accessibility, arts spaces are involved in the revitalisation of neighbourhoods, to establish links with the local economy and support local artists (Grodach, 2010). Cultural institutions, therefore, refuse to be “temples” that are only accessible to a lucky few, but are porous organisations that connect with different areas of society.

## Stimulating intercultural participation

In order to stimulate intercultural participation, it is necessary to acknowledge and overcome the geographical division of different communities in the city and to plan the location of cultural infrastructure accordingly. An example of strategic siting is the Apelarte youth arts project in Loures in Portugal, which took place in the Municipal House of Culture. This building is located between the old town and the newer areas inhabited by immigrants, and its location facilitates its appeal to a culturally diverse audience (Bloomfield & Bianchini, 2004, p. 90).

The portrayal of diverse neighbourhoods in the media can be damaging to intercultural dialogue. In order to improve the perception of these areas, campaigns can be used for countering their ethnic stigmatisation. In the case of Hyson Green, in Nottingham, this was achieved through neighbourhood-based place marketing that underlined the uniqueness and the liveliness of the area under the slogan “Life at the heart of the city” (idem, p. 91).

Countering fake news about refugees, immigrants and ethnic minorities is another important aspect of stimulating an intercultural dialogue and preventing prejudice. Verstraete et al. (2017) have identified several strategies to achieve this. They include the creation of online media platforms that do not generate revenue from advertising and invite existing platforms to find new approaches to identifying fake news. Moreover, diversifying the *mediascape* is also crucial to prevent the stigmatization of immigrant communities and to promote intercultural artistic products: Radio Multikulti in Berlin and MATV in Leicester are examples of radio stations broadcasting “hybrid” and “fusion” forms of music and radio programmes that adopt immigrant perspectives (idem, p. 98).

Public space and public events also play a key role in the creation of intercultural dialogue. Festivals provide interesting examples of how the interplay of space and art can foster participation and exchange. In particular, carnivals and similar festivals can not only celebrate the cultural expressions of minorities, but can function as cultural assets that belongs to the whole city, and as vehicles for civic identity (ibid). Examples from city carnivals in Rotterdam, Leicester and Berlin show that these events can showcase the cultural diversity of a city and can be occasions for shared celebration of cultural vibrancy (ibid).

## Conservative and innovative responses to the economic crisis by cultural institutions

In order to discuss cultural participation and the responses to the economic crisis of 2007/2008 by cultural institutions, we will refer to studies by Leila Jancovich (2011, 2014) about cultural participation in the UK.

The UK has traditionally been characterised by a direct correlation between the socio-economic status of people and their participation in cultural activities. The economic crisis, since the late 2000s, increased the significance of economic barriers to cultural participation and put pressure on cultural institutions to involve a wider range of social groups in their activities. Jancovich's research on participatory decision-making processes shows that, in contrast to what might be expected, non-arts audiences may be more open to innovation and risk taking than established arts audiences (Jancovich, 2014). It is also necessary to stress that participation does not end with taking part to cultural activities, but it should also include decision-making. As suggested earlier, participatory budgeting is a method that has been used since the 1990s by various organisations, including the World Bank. However, it has not been applied often to decision making about public expenditure for the arts (Jancovich, 2014, p. 110). Instead, there has been a growing use of budget simulators and consultations that indicate "a move towards a quick Internet straw poll of opinion, rather than a detailed process of deliberation and decision, which is at odds with the core principles of participatory budgeting" (Jancovich, 2011, p. 277). The oversimplification of policy rationales presented by budget simulators can hinder public funding for the arts. Participatory budgeting, instead, is a more inclusive and holistic approach to participatory decision-making that might have beneficial results for the political status of the arts and for levels of arts funding by national and local governments.

## Progressive responses to the crisis

The economic crisis of 2007-2008 provoked responses by grassroots cultural organisations, social movements and activist groups that started taking action in order to design new, low-cost and participatory ways to deal with the lack of public funding and the neoliberal cultural policies coming from the institutions. In the last decade, Europe saw a growth of “festivals of ideas” that have revitalised local public spheres of debate: the humanities gained a new momentum with public events that focused on philosophy, literature, anthropology and history. The work of cultural activists, however, started expanding beyond the local sphere and gave rise to new intercultural activities. These international collaborations caused the emergence of transnational festivals, such as *Transeuropa*, that explore European cultural and artistic alternatives. In particular, since the rise of the #Occupy movement in 2011, the interplay between the occupation of abandoned buildings (especially cultural spaces such as theatres) and artistic works. The work of alternative artistic collectives provoked a pop-up, informal, guerrilla demonstration projects, often in derelict buildings and sites. These works seem to be prefiguring alternative futures and new possible directions in cultural policy, based on the collaboration between institutions and activist groups, such as *L'Asilo* in Naples, a cultural organisation born out the occupation of an abandoned school and orphanage. Indeed, many European cities started using bottom-up, collaborative cultural planning based on the mapping and analysis of local cultural resources. An example of participatory cultural planning is given by the European project Be SpectACTive!: a group of spectators from each city of the network gets to decide the cultural program of a theatre or a festival, choosing out of a range of possible shows. A participatory approach to culture and cultural policy is essential to counteract the simplistic power of populism and to build an effective intercultural dialogue. Participating to cultural activities must be an occasion to stimulate two concepts theorised by Richard Sennett: disorder (1970) and co-operation (2012). By creating occasions for different social groups to meet and interact (creating, thus, a positive “disorder”) and to promote the co-operation of people towards a shared goal it is possible to weaken the hate discourse of populism and to foster cultural democracy.

## Conclusions

The cuts to public funding for the arts and the rise of populism puts the very concept of cultural policy under threat. The focus of public investments on prestigious flagship projects in large city centre damage projects focused on small cities and participation, putting into discussion the concept of cultural democracy. However,



the argument for the benefits of cultural participation is starting to be understood by governments all over Europe. Traditional political parties, challenged by the increasing relevance of extremist and populist parties, have started to consider participation in politics outside the voting dimension as a way to counteract this crisis. Public assemblies and online platforms for direct participation have started to be popular in mainstream politics, but the experience of alternative parties and movements teaches us that actual participation, where all voices are heard, can be hard to achieve. What contemporary politics often puts in practice is “fake participation” (Snider, 2010): political parties give the illusion to their electors to weigh in on the parties’ decisions, but the real decisional power lies in the hand of a small group of people at the top. The importance of bottom-up participatory platforms is thus neutralized by the intimidating and authoritarian practices of party leaders. However, it must be noted that the critique to mainstream politics often comes from extremist sources that use antidemocratic practices, hate campaigns based on fake news and a language that borders cyber-bulling. In this scenario, where mainstream politics does not offer good opportunities for direct participation and the alternatives often rely on populist discourse, it is difficult to talk about participation. The word “participation” has been instrumentalized on different sides: it is necessary to rethink about the value of direct participation and on its impact on society and politics. Given the positive effect of participating in cultural activities, arts and culture might be the starting point for this discussion, initiating and developing forms of participation that promote dialogue and intercultural exchange.



# When does the Artistic become Participatory? Some Sociological Concepts for Understanding Interaction

*Dafne Muntanyola-Saura*

## Introduction & Methods

What is artistic participation? Making transparent the guts of art making is the new hype. The star of the show is the body of the artist. I have been working since 2009 as a sociologist with Wayne McGregor-Random Dance company in the project *Thinking with the Body*, directed by David Kirsh from the Department of Cognitive Science at UC San Diego (UCSD). And it crosses disciplinary boundaries, reaching into academia as well: within the UCLA's School of Architecture & Urban Design, there is the Master of Architecture of Performance by Supraestudio-Mack. Let's think of Sarah Szé's *Triple Point* at the 55th Biennale or the explosion of body performances and happenings in festivals everywhere. The body is the subject matter of art fairs like ARCO, festivals like Biennale or exhibits such as *Dans l'atelier* at the Petit Palais. In all these examples, the body is taken as a tool for thinking as well as a place for creativity. We claim that artistic practice goes beyond the body and involves a certain level of social interaction. Thus, the unit of analysis of artistic practice cannot be the artist/performer/participant bodies. Individual actions cannot be fully understood without taking into account the social context of the studio. Following De Jaegher, Di Paolo & Gallagher (2010), we define social interaction as a given dyadic coordination with a life of its own. We will show examples of artistic practice with different levels of interactivity.

Contemporary cognitive science, in particular authors from embodied cognition (Gibbs, 2006) and cognitive ethnography (Hutchins, 2005; Muntanyola-Saura, 2014b), acknowledges the agent's embeddedness in social situations. In my research, I have developed ethnographies of filmmakers, visual artists, dancers and synchronized swimmers (Muntanyola & Lozares, 2006; Muntanyola-Saura 2015a; Muntanyola-Saura, 2015b). I collected data through observation and filming of rehearsals of these different disciplines in different EU and US cities. The last phase of the project Dance & Cognition took place in 2014 with the piece *ATOMOS* by the world-class neoclassic company Wayne McGregor- Random Dance, resident at Sadlers Wells Theater in London. As part of the team directed by David Kirsh, from the Department of Cognitive Science at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), we filmed the rehearsals with 6 cameras, took pictures and conducted structured interviews with the dancers and the choreographer. We asked agents to explain the material context for their action, in terms of communication, coordination and instructions.

Interviews contributed to understanding the frame of the interaction from the subjective point of view of the rehearsal participants. Triangulation, through the complementary use of visual perception, digital video observation and interviews, allow us to describe and analyze the communicative and interactive patterns of work at a micro level.

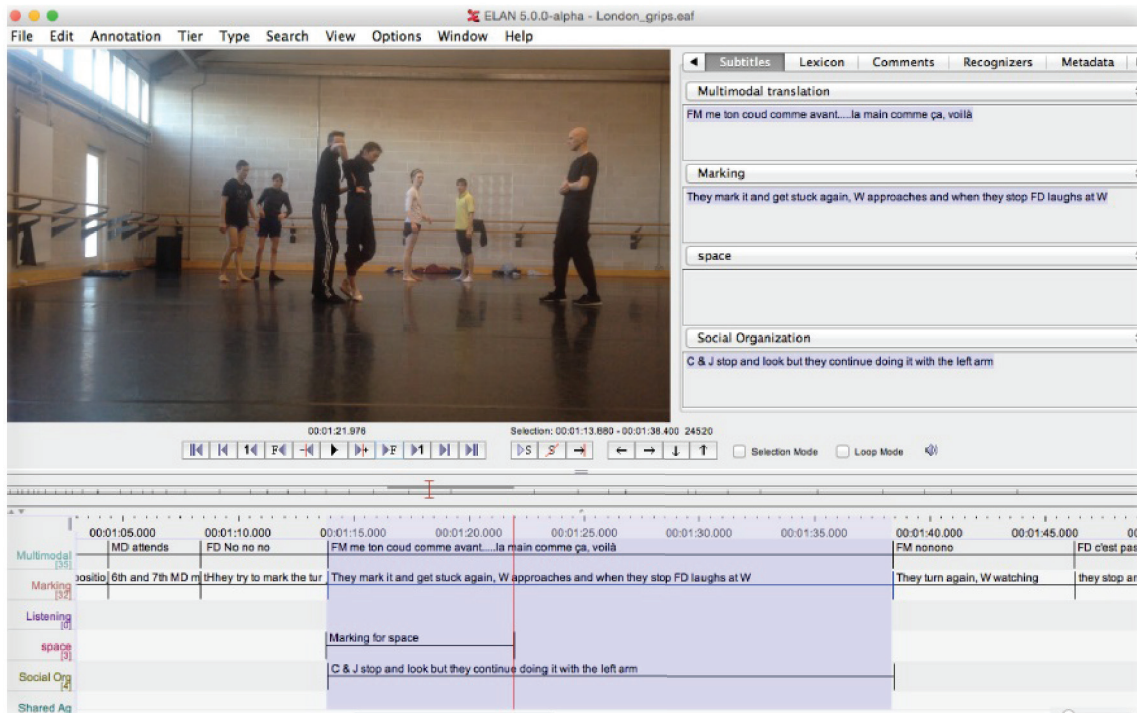


Figure 3. ELAN Screenshot of *ATOMOS* rehearsal, 2014. Image by Dafne Muntanyola-Saura.

We include in this paper several examples based on commented observational visual evidence of artistic events, as well as actual quotes from the dance project. We take a grounded theory approach to iteratively refine coding categories based on additional observations and feedback from the participants (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). We applied ELAN analytical software for small-scale micro interactions (Max Plank Institute for Sociolinguistics) as an analytical tool for multimodality (Figure 5). Successive rounds of inductive coding were applied to pinpoint the most relevant set of cues and criteria used for event classification. We will show in three sections how participation in art has to do with the body but also with materiality, space and interaction. By putting social interaction at the forefront, we define the artist not only a *flâneur*, but first of all a social being. We will look at the social discourse that defines the body of the artist in the paradigm of individualism. Then, we will explore the materiality of artists' choices within the capitalist structure of the art market. Third, we will define the architectural design of the space as having an impact on the artistic practices. Finally, we will provide examples of Artistic Participation that are based on distributed typifications, joint attention and artistic gossip, three key components of interaction.



## The Body of the Artist is the Product of Individualism

The US Pavilion, occupied by the work of Sarah Szé, was one of the most visited exhibits in the Giardini (Figure 4). Fragile installations made of sand; threads and wood filled the halls of the neo-Palladian pavilion. There were structures that seemed to reproduce work environments of artistic practice. The bulk of visible objects, collections and antiquities revolve around two concepts: “Triple Point” and “Triangulation”. The triple point is a combination of pressure and temperature that makes possible the existence of the three phases of the matter (gas, liquid and solid) in perfect balance. Triangulation of objects or people from three points of space makes it possible to target a singular event. By combining both ideas, Szé incorporated materials from Venice such as advertisements, vaporetto tickets, leaves or pictures of architectural items. The installation shows the precarious balance of the processes of creation, always localized architecturally. In the catalog for the exhibit in the Petit Palais, Susana Gallego Cuesta claims that the pictures of workshops evolve around the mysterious moment for artistic inspiration, “giving body to the invisible” (Gallego Cuesta, 2016, p. 277). Still, she also makes the reader aware of the fact that Picasso, the image of the exhibit, was also an emblem of the romantic genius, capable of transforming the banality of the studio into art.

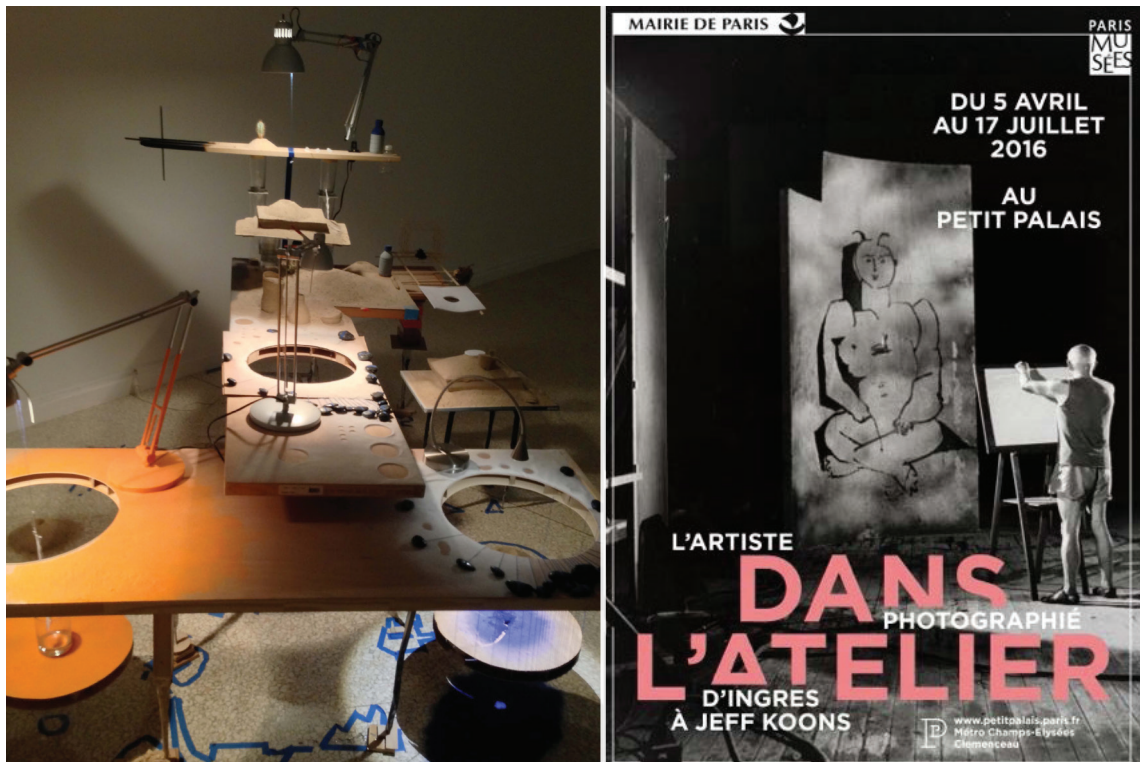


Figure 4. Sarah Szé, Biennale 2013; Dans l'Atelier, Petit Palais, 2016.  
Images by Dafne Muntanyola-Saura.

Not much has changed from the times of Picasso in the art world in terms of imagery. Contemporary art practice is deeply impregnated by individualism. *Sturm und drang*



is still present: the construction of the artist as a genius disconnected from the social context is not new and was born during Romanticism. Old Cartesian dualities appear in artistic discourse: thinking vs. feeling, internal life vs. external action, culture vs. biology. Artists seem to be positioned in the second pole of these axes: their daily practice is taken to follow an irrepressible urge for creativity that comes from their guts, motivated by individual physicality. In his critique of individual creativity as a cultural *topos*, Paul Feyerabend defines the individual creative process as a dangerous myth. He describes the position of mainstream discourse around creativity as follows: "[t]hus understanding or building a work of art contains an element that goes beyond skill, technical knowledge, and talent. A new force takes hold of the soul and directs it, toward theoretical insight in one case, toward artistic achievement in the other" (Feyerabend, 1987, p. 701). Feyerabend relates individualism to the body/mind problem, and to the modern separation during Enlightenment of the free, rational man from his social and natural context of production. In order to counter such atomistic explanation, social scientists and philosophers look into the context of artistic and scientific work and recover specific historical examples. For instance, Renaissance artists "worked in teams, they were paid craftsmen, they accepted the guidance of their lay employers" (Feyerabend, 1987, p. 711). The artists were inscribed in more interactive patterns of labor.

German sociologist Georg Simmel introduced another description of the modern episteme of individualism, that captures the rush of Romanticism. Simmel divides individualism in three moments. The first is 18th century numerical individualism, when rational men are equal to each other following the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This phase corresponds to Feyerabend's exposition of rationalism and positivism as the roots of modern science and art. But Simmel describes a second historical epistemic construction, the individualism of romanticism in the 19th century, where every free man represents a peculiar, different way of being and feeling; and a third, the individualism of distinction. In the 20th century, individualization becomes an open process towards change: the ideal of the free market and the division of labor makes uniqueness the key value for an individual that detaches himself from social constraints (Simmel, 1908).



Figure 5. Venetians by Pawel Altham and Fall'91 by Charles Ray at the Biennale 2013.  
Images by Dafne Muntanyola-Saura.

Bodies are present in the works included in the Biennale. The section curated by Cindy Sherman in 2013 offered numerous examples. In figure 5, we see *Fall'91* by Charles Ray, a giant female figure wearing a Klein blue dress, molded from old Sears' mannequins, an iconic American department store. The simplicity of the proposal (basically an oversized mannequin representing a beautiful air hostess) had an impact on visitors. The scale of the plastic body challenged male visitors who made jokes like "This one is scary. You cannot mess around with this one! Did you see? Impressive, isn't it?". The gigantic proportions seem broken and go against a gendered ratio that is socially constructed. In the social imagery, small is feminine and big and great is masculine (*Make America great* rings a bell? Sigh...). The elegance and the archetypal weight of the figure (this is a dummy, let's not forget) made the proposal stronger: solemn, at times attractive and striking.

Also in the 55th Biennale, the work *Venetians* by Pawel Altham (Figure 5) goes beyond referentiality and includes in its title the object of representation. The artist fills one of the halls of the Arsenal, with its brick walls, with figures made from the plaster mold of the face and the hands of local Venetians. The bodies are made of bandages, wires and cables, resulting in cyborgs with an *air de famille*. The only realistic elements, face and hands, are a sufficient condition to these characters *human*. The artificial bodies mingle with the visitors, as we see in the image in the figure. Body posture, facial expressions and the arms and legs mimic human flesh who walks through the forest of Venetians, a local and, at the same time, universal mass.

The behavior and comments of visitors from the Biennale 2013 are classical examples of the artistic gaze. Another example that pops into my mind is *Art*, the French theater piece by Yasmina Reza. Artistic individualism separates the individual from the social context and looks for uniqueness, as Simmel puts forward. The pure gaze implies a break with the ordinary attitude towards the world, which, given the conditions in which it is performed, is also a social separation (Bourdieu, 1979). So, rationality and singularity give way to distinction, the flavor of (post) modernity. And we get to Bourdieu (1979), whose main opus *La Distinction* puts into question the subjectivity of taste and aesthetic judgment. He contextualizes the Kantian view of aesthetics as an alternative to pure and moral rationalities.

"Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed" (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 6).

## The Artist Materiality is a Strategic Choice

Bourdieu adds another characteristic of this cultural *topos*: that of incorporating individual dispositions as part of the artists' shaped biography. There is a principle of homology between the social position of artists in the field, and the structures of taste and judgment. There is a hierarchy of socially recognized and valued artistic practices and discourses. The social logic of artistic practice, which is that of social legitimacy, goes beyond individual intentionalities. And by expressing and reproducing a specific valued judgment of a work of art, or by choosing a particular style or material, the artist is inscribing him/herself in a symbolic battle for recognition and conservation. The artistic habitus is a product of socialization that is both a state of mind and a bodily state of being. Artistic skills that come with being a competent artist are thus socially acquired in socialization, in the family and at school. The trajectory of the artists in social space shapes a particular way of being and seeing in the world, the habitus that puts together unconscious principles of action, perception and reflexivity. We align ourselves with this definition, bearing in mind that this is a concept that began with Mauss (1936), continued with Panofsky (1967), and was made popular by Bourdieu (1979).

Artists share a cognitive structure and artistic habitus based on typifications. As Schütz (1967) puts forward: "most of the time in everyday life we are little better than dead to each other, so long as we are engaged in the modes of life in which we encounter each other through blindly taken for granted typifications" (p. 185). The participants in the dance rehearsal share visual typifications such as the romantic duet (Muntanyola-Saura, 2009, 2014). Martin Jay (1999) claims that we live in an era of "ocularcentrism". The philosopher defines a cultural *topos*, a shared epistemology that shapes cultural and artistic production.

In Figure 6 (left picture) we see a photographer, a person reflected in the mirror, and a third person in the background. None of the three know each other, but their shared action makes them co-participants of the same reality through the gaze and shared space. The new participatory reality is superimposed with no previous intentionality. It is an unexpected consequence of a sum of individual actions. This emergent artistic product can be understood as artistic participation by freezing the moment here and now, and exploring it as a new social interaction between bodies.

The bodies of visitors, artists and their works occupy the space of the Biennale in 2015. Empty corners become works of art that are not. In the center picture in Figure

6, we see a composition formed by the work of Herman de Vries in the Dutch Pavilion and the security guard. He is sitting at the focal point of the phrase *To be all ways to be*, he is yawning and seems tired. The guard's yawn gets in our frame of interpretation, and when we read the sentence on the wall, we think of his job, his existence, the schedules of the Biennale and the immobility that comes with being a guard. This is an unexpected event, an emergent happening that establishes a relationship, a kind of empathy between the spectator and the guard, and the work of art is the context for it.

Finally, in ARCO 2017 art fair in Madrid (same figure, right picture), fire extinguishers occupied a privileged location next to the sculptures and other art pieces. Because of their placement, it was hard at times to remember that this red iron structures were not meant for contemplation, but had only a utilitarian function. In fact, because they crossed the visitor's gaze so many times, a visitor in act of contemplation, it also became part of the art experience. Unintentionally, fire extinguishers participated in the art process and acquired an extra symbolic value by virtue of perception in action.



Figure 6. Moments from the Biennale 2013, Biennale 2015 and ARCO 2017.  
Images by Dafne Muntanyola-Saura.



*Action in Perception* is a book published by Alva Noë, a philosopher of the body and action that works at UC Berkeley. Noë (2015) goes beyond intersubjective consensus and claims that seeing (and all kinds of perception) is the *organized activity* of achieving access to the world around us. The social organization of artistic practice emerges in the observation of particular interactions. The social organization supervenes our individual intentionality: things that happen in the intersubjective level cannot be reduced to the individual. “Social interactions can be meaningful without being intentional. The fact that you don’t notice that shadows in pictures look and behave differently than real shadows doesn’t imply that we make no distinction between the two” (Noë, 2015, p. 10).

Social interactions are based on shared and taken for granted perceptions and thoughts in action. So artistic practice, as a kind of social interaction, also relies on these frames of interpretation that go beyond the immediate intention of the spectator. As cognitive sociologist Cicourel claims: “[t]he inferences and/ or judgments that we form progressively on interactions are transformed in structural accounts” (Cicourel, 2002, p. 15). Such structural accounts include the established and functional use of language, as well as assumptions about the organizational constrictions and expectancies. We have seen some examples of typifications on gender, time and art in the works from the Biennale 2013, 2015 and Arco 2017 in Figure 6.

Visual artists share common cultural *topoi* inscribed in the individualism of distinction. While artistic discourse might come with terms such as intention, subject matter, materials, composition and inspiration, we must not forget that the creative process is the product of a particular habitus. Thus, it has a unity in space and time that includes social elements such as other participants, schedules, accessibility, funding and clients. More specifically, as Nathalie Heinich (2014) puts forward, artists are inscribed in a restrictive epistemic community that she names the “singularity regimes”. In this production setting, the artists distribute their artwork to private intermediaries, such as art critiques and gallery owners more than public museums. Increasing individualization brings awareness to the need for being strategic. As Howard Becker (2014) claims, artists create their work with an eye on how it will be distributed. The artists’ awareness of the existence of a winner take all markets might be a consequence of the general “ratification” of the service market. The artist, recalling Simmel’s value of uniqueness, needs to present him/herself as a “super artist”, a hero whose work is self-sufficient and over empowering. The pressure for extreme strategic individualism is part of the artists’ professional identity.

The professional network in Figure 7, collected by Social Network Analysis in a recent international study on artistic communities in Europe, pictures the importance of contacts to move forward professionally. In this particular personal network made with Egonet software, we see how the key artistic intermediaries are the old schoolmates from an MA in Visual Arts, the colleagues working in museums in

Barcelona and the Basque Country, and other colleagues from the artistic community she is working in. So artists build their professional careers by accumulating and managing these personal networks that emerge during education, work and daily life.

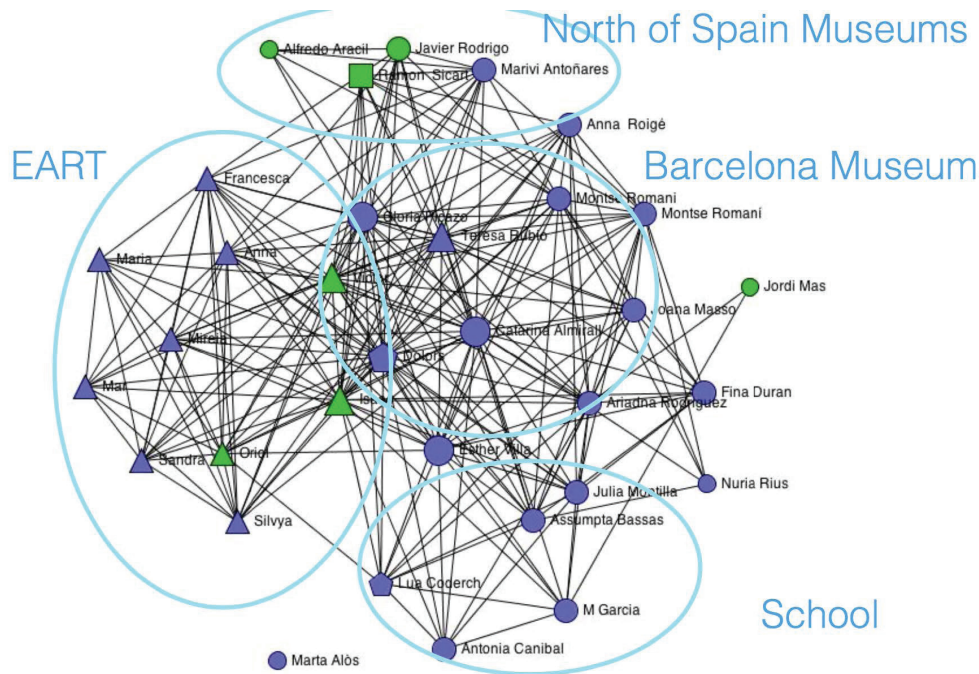


Figure 7. Personal network of an artist working in an artistic community in Barcelona.  
Image by Dafne Muntanyola-Saura.

## The Studio as an Artistic Space

The studio architecture might as well be part of this cultural *topos*. When looking at the role of space within artistic practices, we must understand the choices artists make within this broader framework. The studio is also a cultural setting. Artistic communities such as the ones I studied within the Knoccom project (five communities in Barcelona, Hamburg, St Petersburg, Madrid and London) are based on a studio-based architecture, that is, walls and doors separate the space so that two or three artists share more or less closed rooms. In the case of visual artists who belong to the art studios, we found out that their professional identity is close to a practitioner, with skills that must be apparent and visible in their artistic background practices, so that they can be valued in the art market (Merger, 2002). While the art market seeks singularity, it also discourages segmentation, which means that cooperation, serendipity and interaction are also values that emerge from the professional world. Let's look at the workplace design of leading companies such as Ideo or Google: open workstations, flexible schedules, informal patterns of communication and the pressure for team working and horizontal collaboration. Moreover, the creative process is messy, with blurry personal and professional boundaries, spontaneous

and open to the unexpected. These moments of collaboration and friendship are shaped by the studio architecture. The participation of small interactive groups is a necessary condition to develop patterns of innovation (Collins & Guillen, 2012). All face-to-face interaction requires the “co-presence” of participants; that is, people must sense that others are close enough to them to be able to register whatever it is that they are doing.

The architectural design of the studio is a relevant level of social organization. Nöe (2015) builds on the existence of intersubjective consensus and claims that seeing (and all kinds of perception) is the *organized activity* (p. 10) of achieving access to the world around us. So artistic practices are organized activities, open functional systems. The participation of agents at this level of organization requires looking deeper in the interaction mechanisms that shape us as social beings. Contemporary cognitive science has opened the theoretical door to extended cognition and the embodied mind, but also to distributed cognition (Kirsh et al., 2016). In order to understand artistic practices in context, we need to look into the material and communicative components of studio settings. This distributed model of artistic practice looks for the place of social interaction. If the embodied hypotheses in cognition are true, then architecture and *placeness* should re-occupy, again, its role in the life scenario.

Artists can be collaborative. Joining in living and working spaces, artists debate and cooperate, gain feedback, enjoy support and encouragement from their peers, and maintain friendships. Engaging in shared spaces enables joint production and/or promotion of artworks. The day-to-day interaction of the artists also unfolds in the “buzz” of casual encounters, especially in leisure time. Such encounters are often accidental, spontaneous and highly informal. By interacting in the same locations, artists engage in joint practices, with similar tastes and lifestyles.

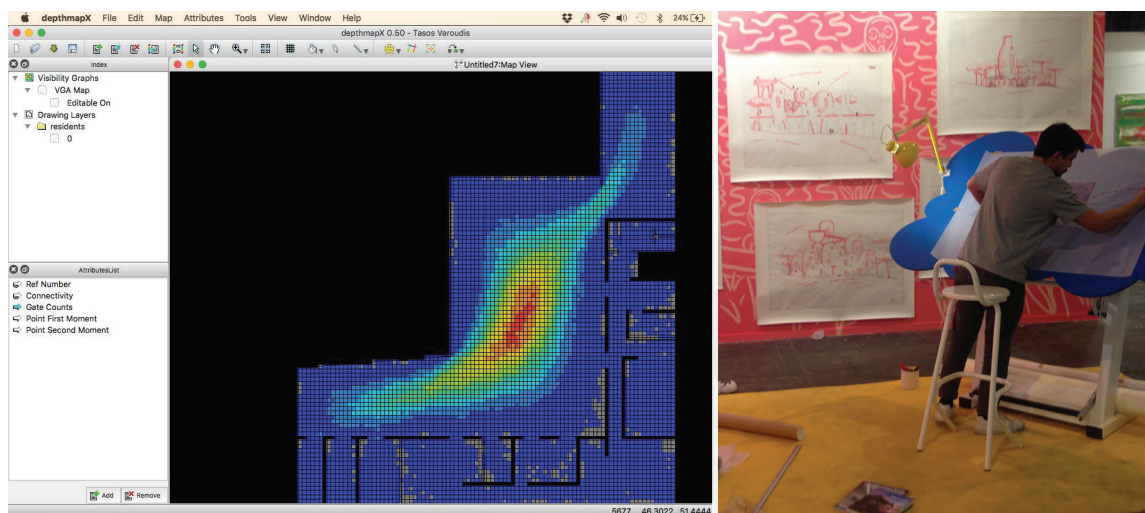


Figure 8. SpaceSyntax Screenshot and Gallery Showcase in ARCO 2017.

Images by Dafne Muntanyola-Saura.

In Figure 8 we see two examples of how the architecture shapes artistic practice. On the left, we see an expected movement pattern drawn with Space Syntax Software of an art studio in Barcelona. Red indicates higher affordability of interaction, and blue higher isolation. Architectural design involves aesthetic, scientific and ethical (political) factors. Every single one has a very different space and time dimension, that is, a different chronotopic dimension (Muntañola, 1997). *Placeness* is always the key.

Following Bill Hillier (1996), founder of the Space Syntax software, architectural theories are non-discursive and space has its own syntax, that is, its own geometry that shapes the behavior of artists and users. In the right image (Figure 8), we see an architect working in his “studio” within an ARCO gallery. Crumpled blueprints are spread everywhere and the architect works feverishly. One is reminded of Norman Rockwell’s drawings of productive cartoonists. Still, the social role of the architect is not the same as that of the cartoonist: the artistic performance seems to put forward the pressure of the construction market against architects that are part of the labor market. The architect has a greater social responsibility as part of the building industry. Also, the specific setting of the studio with pink walls and more blueprints acts like a box and as a showcase, making us aware and at the same time making us question ourselves: are these drawings on the wall ever going to be built? Or are there just immediate products of the architect’s activity in his drafting table?

## Discussion: When Participation becomes Interactive

There are professional ways of seeing (Goodwin, 1994) and moving (Muntañola-Saura, 2016). Speech, tool manipulation and gesture, once mostly analog and currently increasingly digital, constitute background practices for artists. There is a large literature on the role of everyday and specialized objects in creative interaction by authors in distributed, embodied and situated cognition (Gibbs, 2006; Hutchins, 2005; Kirsh et al., 2016; Basov & Khokhlova, in press). The instruments we use in our daily and professional lives shape the type of conceptual operation we perform. So, in the case of artists, space, tools and objects can be physical cues for further action in face-to-face interaction or one-to-object interaction. Physical space might afford collaboration by fostering the exchange of tools, or provisional spaces, or mobility of artists. We will label here moments of multimodal communication or tool manipulation as joint attention. Joint attention implies that the gaze is already a certain level of interaction. A social relationship emerges from the direction of gaze and body position (Simmel, 1908).



	Seconds	Total %	Chreographer %
Speech	193.9	52.3	38.8
Fill Out	148.1	40.1	0
Marking	171.7	46.5	31.8
Distributed Cognition	37.7	10.2	0
Space	26.3	7.1	44.9
Phrase Duration	369.3	100.0	31.3



Figure 9. Multimodal Distribution of instructions & Visual Resources in dance.  
Images by Dafne Muntanyola-Saura.

Social interactions are shared perceptions and thoughts in action, based on multimodal relations among bodies, objects and space. Choreography asks for a continuous multimodal translation, from the visual to other communication modalities. The choreographer is responsible for translating these modalities, so that communication patterns take place in a distributed fashion among the artistic setting. Figure 9 shows the presence of different modalities in rehearsal. The percentages go over 100% since the communicative actions overlap. Speech dominates, followed by marking and full out, that is, dancing together. Marking is a cognitive strategy common to dancers and athletes, and also musicians and other embodied artists, which allows them to communicate moves without doing the full thing, selecting aspects such as weight, speed, direction or dynamics (Kirsh et al., 2009; Muntan-

yola-Saura, 2015a). The data collected shows us how the choreographer is present in modalities, especially in space management, which is the definitory skill of choreography. When spacing is critical, Wayne McGregor embodies the moves of the other dancers and aligns with them, as we see in the right picture in Figure 9. The choreographer gestures, touching his right leg first, and pointing with her right hand later, to visually clarify verbal instructions that refer to the female dancer's legs. The music is loud, the dancers are French and gestures are frequent. The choreographer gives dancers resources that he has at hand. He uses terms such as energy, movement, velocity, the gaze, actions and texture, as collected in our fieldnotes. Most of the information comes through the visual, a possible indicator of "ocularcentrism" in our contemporary society. The triad of dancers and choreographer are an example of joint attention during instruction.

Together with joint attention, another possible indicator of social interaction within the studio is the existence of artistic gossip, a version of the term technical gossip (Knorr-Cetina, 1999). In her ethnography of scientific laboratories, Knorr-Cetina shows how professional and formal coordination corresponds with high levels of informal communication, such as jokes, personal comments or conversation during the working process: "there exists, in the experiments, a considerable account of technical shop talk; much of it reports on technical objects and consultation with 'experts' on the objects" (Knorr-Cetina, p. 129). In Muntanyola & Lozares (2006), a Social Network Analysis of filmmaking shows how coffee and cigarettes are the backbone of professional interaction. Collaboration among scientists and artists at work come with informal patterns of communication and the everyday use of objects such as a coffee machine. There are blurred boundaries between professional conversations among artists and their personal relationships. And, there is a certain correspondence between friendships and collaboration patterns.

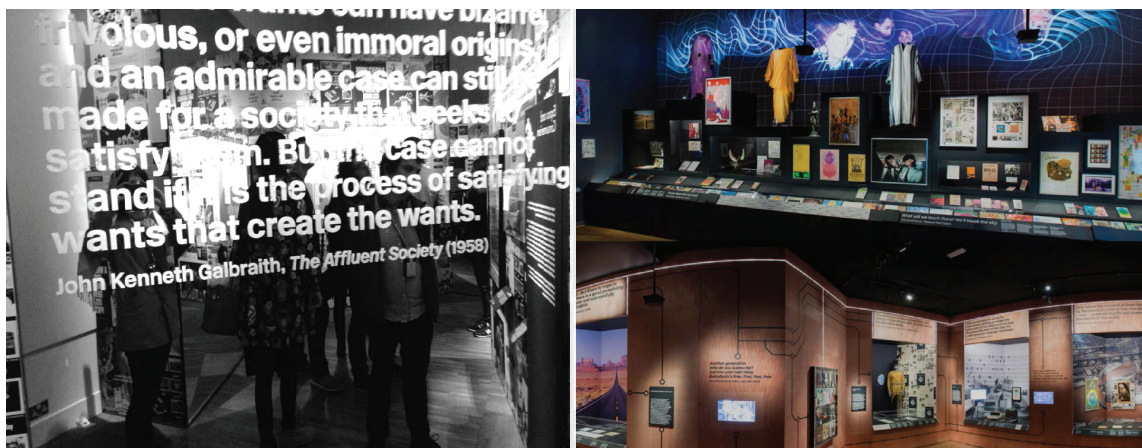


Figure 10. You Say You Want a Revolution? Records and Rebels 1966-1970, V & A London 2016.  
Images by Dafne Muntanyola-Saura.

In Figure 10, there are two images from an exhibit about the Sixties at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. The exhibit was huge (the visit took at least 3 hours) and included individual headphones with an original soundtrack that synchronized automatically with the different environments, so that the songs switched at the pace of the visitor. The sound system shaped the way visitors interacted with the exhibit in a particular way, focusing their attention on the different spaces of the exhibit and marking a certain rhythm that kept the flow of visitors flowing. Attention was not joined but intentionally individualized: the visitor was pushed towards individual interaction with the materiality of the exhibit (the soundtrack for instance, or the mirror from the image on the left, or the multiple texts available for reading). This low level of interactivity discouraged any further interaction with other visitors. The architecture of the exhibit moved away from both joint attention and artistic gossip, more than in the previous examples of the Biennale, where emergent moments of interaction happen, as we have shown in figures 5 and 6.

## Coda: Some Thoughts

Artistic practice becomes participatory if affords social interaction. In participation there is a bundle of social interactions happening unexpectedly. More specifically, in our ethnographies we look for distributed typifications, joint attention and artistic gossip as evidence for interaction. Distributed typifications, joint attention, artistic gossip are all indicators of interaction and, thus, of participation. Figure 11 shows two examples of art exhibits that happen in public space: the image on the left is from Olafur Eliasson's *Ice Watch* displayed in Paris in front of the City Hall; the image from the right is from Bombay Beach Biennale, which will have a second edition in the Salton Sea in 2017. Both include the display of large material structures (icebergs and disheveled structures) in an urban setting: a European city the former, and a desert close to LA in the latter. The contrast pushes the visitors to interaction, as we see in the image: the artistic setup increases our natural curiosity and makes more apparent the exceptionality of the artistic experience. An iceberg in the square and a bunch of artsy people in a desert are not commonplace. Moreover, in both cases of what we consider artistic participation, the artists take part in the exhibit together with the visitors. Such horizontality of bodies breaks with the *topos* of individualism that we described in the first theoretical section.



Figure 11. Olafur Eliasson's Ice Watch and Bombay Beach Biennale 2017.  
Images provided courtesy of Bombay Beach Biennale.

These participatory installations only make sense in distributed typifications such as global warming, travel, capitalism, gentrification and the future of European and US lifestyle as we know it. When the social comes in, the environment captures the body, again. Beyond the atomization of the artist studio, interaction is the key unit of artistic practice. Contemporary cognitive science has opened the theoretical door to participation in terms of social interactivity. Artistic skills are not only extended and embodied practices. They are distributed across performers and audiences that listen to each other. A distributed model of artistic practice looks for the place of social interaction. Without social frameworks of meaning, participation disappears.









Image by Alice Brazziti



# A multidimensional debate



# 1 Artistic quality and audience engagement

*Jaroslava Tomanová*

*Giada Calvano*







# Understanding artistic quality and audience empowerment, what are they and why they can't be without each other?

*Jaroslava Tomanová*

This chapter is based on a presentation I gave within a group discussion at the Be SpectACTive! conference in Barcelona in November 2016. The discussion, chaired by Bonnie Smith from LIFT, focused on artistic quality and audience empowerment, a theme proposed by the conference organisers. Over the last few years, I was affiliated to the Be SpectACTive! project through one of its partner organisations, Tanec Praha, where I gained experience in production management within the field of contemporary dance. I am also a researcher focusing mainly on cultural policy and public funding of the arts. My views in this paper are based, therefore, partially on my work experience in the performing arts as well as on academic research and literature combining inter-disciplinary perspectives of humanities and social science. Here I present a subjective reflexion, in the style of an essay, on the issue mentioned in the chapter title. I address the international debate revolving around the theme of participatory arts engagement and shed some light on cultural policy buzz words such as excellence, empowerment, emancipation and engagement. By participatory arts engagement in this text I am referring to process- and experience-oriented performing arts activities labelled as co-creation<sup>1</sup> and immersive theatre<sup>2</sup>.

I aim to present the reader with thought-provoking statements and questions that will hopefully offer an interesting view of the subject. These insights will perhaps help the reader's critical understanding of the problematics behind immediate claims such as: "quality is good and we need more of it" and "allowing audiences decision-making power in the arts creation process makes the arts more democratic".

1 Although there is lack of consensus in academic literature, co-creation used in the performing arts relates to activities where the audience members "contribute something to an artistic experience curated by a professional artist" (Brown et al., 2011).

2 Immersive theatre is, according to Alston (2013), identified as "theatre that surrounds audiences within an aesthetic space in which they are frequently, but not always, free to move and/or participate" (p. 128). In other words, "immersive theatre may be distinguished by the sensory acts that it demands of audiences, such as touching and being touched, tasting, smelling and moving – this latter often (but not always) being characterized by the freedom to move within an aesthetic space" (ibid, p. 129).



## The Holy Grail of artistic quality and the trouble with assessment

The question of quality is raised frequently in the field of cultural management and arts policy. However, when attempting to agree on what it means, the most frequent consensus among experts is that quality is hard to define because it is a relational concept. Problems arise when the need appears to assess quality in order to justify and allocate public funding. The business management approaches introduced into public services since the 1980s, such as so-called ‘new public management’<sup>3</sup>, require evidence to justify the spending of public resources, with no exceptions for the culture and arts domain. Therefore, in most Western countries, the need for evidence of quality has become a burning issue in the culture and arts field, predominantly because of its fluid and relational nature in this area. Many researchers, including Danish cultural policy researcher Henrik Nielsen (2003), acknowledge the danger of the instrumentalization of quality assessments and of ignoring the multiple conflicting conceptions of quality involved in the public cultural debate regarding this practice. Quality, from the perspective of cultural management, is generally perceived as something desired, good, self-explanatory and therefore may even appear as a “fetished plus-word, claiming an a priori authority and thus the legitimate right to accord status to one thing over another” (Nielsen, 2003, p. 237). Patronising artistic quality produces accusations of elitism in addition to sparking heated debates with theoretical as well as methodological challenges.

In the UK, the term *excellence* is frequently used with regard to high artistic quality. Brian McMaster (2008), an influential cultural leader and the former Head of the Edinburgh International Festival, wrote a report for the Department of Culture, Media and Sport on supporting excellence in the arts. He mentions that training artists to a high degree of technical ability relates to high quality, however, high technical quality doesn’t mean that the work is excellent. Excellence is, according to McMaster, another quality: he believes that excellent culture combines complex meanings and enables us to make sense of our place in the world, helping us to understand the world and ask questions which we wouldn’t have otherwise asked. The more culture does this the more excellent it is (p. 9). He articulated the definition of excellence in the following statement:

3 “New public management” is a term coined to label reforms of public service and government institutions introduced into English-speaking countries by right-wing governments in the 1980s. It aimed to increase efficiency by using private sector management models. Although the approach has been associated with the most industrialised Western countries, since the 1980s the approach has spread to many other countries around the world.

*Excellence in culture occurs when an experience affects and changes an individual. An excellent cultural experience goes to the root of living and is therefore relevant to every single one of us. (...) Culture can only be excellent when it is relevant, and thus nothing can be excellent without reflecting the society which produces and experiences it. (McMaster, 2008, p. 9).*

The essential message from McMaster's understanding of quality for this chapter lies in the acknowledgement that high artistic skills are not a guarantee of excellence. There are other conditions such as relevance and the enlightening powers of culture which will be discussed in the following part of the chapter.

While dealing with the task of evaluating, judging or assessing quality and excellence, we must ask who should judge the excellence, and for what purpose. In the postmodern society, the supreme position of experts and their judgement has long lost its ultimate legitimacy. Instead, as the Arts Council England's (ACE) quality assessment demonstrates, the expert voice has become an element in excellence evaluation with a by no means exclusive standpoint<sup>4</sup>. The expert assessors' report in a predefined template covers a wide range of elements that contribute to excellence in art work. The new ACE system of assessment *Quality Metrics* permits the audience as well as the arts organisation itself to express their judgements, which allows comparisons of different points of view.

Nielsen (2003) and the ACE alike seem to distinguish different metrics, values and perspectives when speaking about quality and excellence. Different lenses for assessing different qualities without applying any hierarchical structure to them seems to be a worthy yet problematic procedure. However, the ACE has attempted to implement such a practice by distinguishing between *participatory* and *programmed work* where both types of arts and cultural activities are assessed according to a different template/set of questions. In participatory work, the quality of facilitation, participant experience and value for participants are essential aspects which may not be the most relevant for judging the quality of a staged show. In programmed work, the originality, technique, concept etc. may be more appropriate things to focus on. Similarly, an expert in a particular art form may be more competent to judge professional skills and innovation within a certain arts discipline, whereas a participant in an immersive theatre show or a co-creation process is perfectly competent to assess how appealing the experience was (or not), how he or she felt and how it changed his or her understanding of reality. Both experts and individuals engaged in the arts are relevant quality assessors and neither's voice should be considered superior to the other.

4 <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/quality-metrics/quality-metrics>



## Is participatory arts engagement democratising the arts?

Postmodern society has introduced questioning of the superiority of experts' voices as well as the high-low culture dichotomy, which was equally a democratic reaction to elitism in modern culture and arts. But still, voices which are raising concerns about the 'taste of the majority' being excluded from policy considerations are nevertheless calling for changes and a re-definition of cultural policy focus which, according to them, continues to reproduce the high culture vs. popular culture dichotomies and places higher value on the former (see for example Juncker & Balling, 2016). Juncker and Balling turn to Lynn Conner's concept of late-modern participatory audiences based on seeking entertainment, experience, feelings, passion as well as the opportunity to express an opinion in a public context and participate *in, through and around* the arts event itself (Conner, 2008, p. 117). They are suggesting a reform of cultural policy which not only acknowledges different tastes and interests but gives them a voice that is labelled by them as "expressive cultural democracy".

Expressive cultural democracy, according to Juncker and Balling (2016), suggests placing the tastes and interests of diverse users of art and culture at the centre of cultural policy, arts advocacy and audience development. This perspective suggests turning culture and arts away from the "educational instrumental perspective governed by professional experts" (ibid, p. 233) and towards individual interests of audience members who are invited to create meaning in cultural activities in relation to their own life inside so-called high culture institutions (ibid). I see so-called co-creation with the audience members as one such example.

Walmsley (2013) argues that co-creation is understood as one of the most intense forms of engagement in the arts, however, he questions to what degree it is authentic and democratizes the creative process. One of his findings states that co-creation attracts a "highly niche audience of 'theatre people' who are active learners and risk takers" (idem, p. 1) while acknowledging that producers and artists have a responsibility to engage authentically with members of the audience and explore their creative skills, the policy makers should not mistake co-creative practice for widening participation and democratizing the arts because it is primarily bringing exciting engaged experiences to a select few rather than to the masses.

In my opinion, there has been another interesting aspect of participatory arts engagement in recent cultural management and policy debates. I believe that, in certain contexts, there may be a tendency to favour participatory arts practices as they seem to appear more democratic than those created by "professional experts". This results in assigning positive values to certain groups of audiences which are then associated with being *active, risk-taking, participating, engaging, expressing an opinion* rather than being *passively receiving or educated by an expert*. Alan Brown, the

author of recent audience engagement typologies has emphasized that it is important to keep in mind that interactivity is not for everyone and we should not make value judgments about how people like to engage and make meaning (Brown and Ratzkin, 2011). Therefore, we should be careful about categorising those who decide not to articulate their creativity and express themselves as in need of involvement or facing a psychological barrier to get actively engaged. I am not suggesting here that we should ignore those who genuinely desire their creative potential be explored and 'helped' in order to be expressed.

## Empowered and emancipated audiences

Empowerment is a concept widely used in education, social work, management theory as well as development studies focusing on so-called third-world countries. In the arts, the term empowerment is used in current buzz talk with regard to co-creation, in the sense of giving the decision-making power in the creative process to the participant, rather than staying with the traditional historical hierarchy where the artist educates the illiterate. However, what does empowerment actually mean? Is empowerment always the case when the spectators are invited to share the stage or make decisions together with an artist or an artistic director during their working process?

There are multiple definitions of power and there is a broad range of understandings of it within social science (e.g. economic power, threat power, soft power etc.). Steven Lukes (2005), for instance, authored a widely recognized analysis of power and power structures claiming that power will always lie in the hands of elites. Hannah Arendt (1970) defines power as the property of a group determined by the existence of the group which is in power. Bachrach and Baratz (1970) speak about power embodied in concrete decisions, and so on. *Empowerment* can be also interpreted differently, depending on which theory of power we are positioning ourselves alongside. I would like to refer to Jo Rowlands (1995) who, focusing on examining the concept of empowerment within the context of development studies, summarised varying views on power as follows:

*Conventionally, power is defined in relation to obedience, or 'power over', since some people are seen to have control or influence over others. A gender analysis shows that 'power over' is wielded predominantly by men over other men, by men over women, and by dominant social, political, economic, or cultural groups over those who are marginalised. It is thus an instrument of domination, whose use can be seen in people's personal lives, their close relationships, their communities, and beyond. (idem, p. 101).*

Empowerment, however, gives “power to resist and challenge power over” (ibid). Rowlands further defines empowerment as focused on making people aware of their own interests and their relations to other members of the society in order to be able to participate in and influence decision-making. To quote Rowlands’s words:

*Empowerment is more than simply opening up access to decision-making; it must also include the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to occupy that decision-making space. (...) These interpretations of empowerment involve giving full scope to the full range of human abilities and potential. (ibid)*

She then acknowledges that the abilities assigned to a particular set of people are by a large extent socially constructed, and empowerment should build the capacity to untangle these pre-defined social constructions and act and gain influence and control. Rowlands, like other researchers analysing empowerment, acknowledged the personal, close-relationship and collective dimension of empowerment.

The Be SpectACTive! project took inspiration from the thoughts of French philosopher Jacques Rancière (2011), who published a philosophical text called *The Emancipated Spectator*. I believe there are diverse opportunities to interpret his work when implementing his ideas in practice. In my opinion, Rancière understands empowerment as the intellectual emancipation of the spectator and encourages artists to challenge the passivity of theatre audiences and push them to become more active members of civil society. I present this intention through a quote from Rancière:

*We no longer live in the days when playwrights wanted to explain to their audience the truth of social relations and ways of struggling against capitalist domination. The loss of illusions leads artists to increase the pressure on spectators: perhaps the latter will know what is to be done, as long as the performance draws them out of their passive attitude and transforms them into active participants in a shared world. (Rancière, 2011, p. 11)*

The essential message of Rancière is to make people actively participate in the shared world. The goal of emancipating the spectator is not to transform spectators into actors and artistic directors, but to understand the distinctiveness of the knowledge and the activity already at work in the spectator’s mind and to acknowledge the egalitarian approach towards intelligence which links individuals. However, I think that in current cultural practice, we are in danger of confusion about the act of emancipation which is frequently implemented by transforming spectators into artists and artistic directors. I am not suggesting that this is the case with every single attempt to bring audiences to participatory engagement in the arts but the trend is

obvious and I think that it may be one of the reasons why “the idea of the audience participating in the artistic decision still provokes scepticism or even hostility from some professionals” (quote from short description of the workshop Artistic Quality and Audience Empowerment).

The key point shared among the definitions of excellence, emancipation and empowerment introduced in this chapter up to this point is the act of providing individuals with opportunities to understand themselves and the world around them as well as to develop a critical consciousness in order to change their situation should they need it. Means of achieving empowerment can vary, but I don't believe they directly correlate with the method or means of their cultural engagement.

I must acknowledge that in the so-called high arts, many artists and artistic directors may exist who refuse to share their ‘profession’ with members of the public. I argue that their work can still be excellent, just like work of doctors, social workers and government officers. On the one hand, I do agree that we should put pressure on the social and economic elites to equalize opportunities for everyone. On the other hand, however, artists and other cultural professionals must be considered as highly qualified professionals just as any other specialist workers in any area of the public domain. The key question is: are they doing relevant work for those whose taxes they are using? I agree with McMaster (2008) who argues that we must trust our cultural organisations and artists to do the best they can – create excellent art.

As acknowledged above, participatory arts engagement can bring great joy to the participants, initiate new social relationships, get people out of their comfort zones, possibly stimulate communities and enhance family bonds. If the work is well done, the voices of less privileged groups of people may be heard through a theatre show. These are all meaningful things and I do acknowledge their immense importance. It can be the case, but it varies from performance to performance and artist to artist and it could end up being far removed from an emancipatory experience. Therefore, again, we should not rely on mere simplifications when labelling the participatory arts experience as by all means empowering and emancipating.

## The freedom and conformity of individual experience

In the last part of this chapter, I would like to focus on the “individual experience” dimension of the idea of co-creation, which is often associated with audience



empowerment as well as with so-called immersive theatre, where audiences are invited to make a wide range of decisions during the show. I would also like to draw attention to experiential, participatory and hedonistic consumption which is, according to Walmsley (2013) among others, becoming a preferred mode of engagement for theatre audiences. Co-creation in the arts is by all means “messy, raw, contingent and context-dependent; at best, it provides a platform for authentic engagement; at worst, it can foster elitism and inter-legitimation” (idem, p. 117). It is slippery to make hard claims about co-creative processes, but even if what Walmsley calls “authentic engagement” is achieved, what does it mean and how does it relate to empowerment and emancipation?

Although I would not want to generalise, I suggest that the idea of experience-oriented audience engagement targets mostly the participants themselves in a consumption-like fashion. Co-creation can take the participant on an exciting journey, create a pleasurable experience and deepen the engagement in art for an individual participant (Walmsley, 2013). Similarly immersive theatre, according to Alston (2013), offers often pleasurable experiences where pleasure is frequently sought as an end in itself, as a site of self-indulgence as well as appealing to narcissistic desires and individualised selfhood, because the experience is all about the individual participant. Alston further explains that, although the experience itself may not always be felt as positive, the fact is that the experience is the main point of a theatre performance. I argue that excellent work in art is more than that. A pleasurable and interesting experience should be a fortunate by-product of the empowering, enlightening and emancipatory influence of an excellent artwork, not an end in itself.

I must acknowledge that the current “liquid” existence in a highly individualised consumer society brings endless opportunities to interpret and evaluate the experience and every attempt to claim or disclaim it as empowering or emancipating will melt under subjectivist reasoning. In the view of Zygmunt Bauman (2000), an author of key concepts in contemporary sociology, the individual is engaged in his or her capacity as a consumer. “Life organised around consumption works without norms, it is guided by seduction, ever rising desires and volatile wishes” (idem, p. 76). Subjective experience is, according to Bauman, difficult to express and compare. It needs to be lived through and subjectively felt and there is no way to know for sure that the sensations of one person are as exciting and enjoyable as those of someone else. When understanding the arts as an individual consumer’s experience, the evaluation of excellence as well as empowerment becomes highly problematic.

Another interesting aspect of individualised cultural experience is the aspect of individual responsibility. The individual participant in a co-creative process or an immersive theatre show is free to choose and decide but also responsible for getting the most out of the experience, for instance by taking risks, daring to speak or express an opinion, exploring the space and interacting with others. Alston (2013) introduces the new term “entrepreneurial participation” which refers to “self-made opportunity” within engagement in such arts activities and presents in detail how such practice convenes with neo-liberal values. I would like to make reference to Bauman (2000) again. He analyses the character of individual freedom as “everything is up to the individual, to find out what she or he is capable of doing, to stretch that capacity to the utmost and to pick the ends to which that capacity could be applied best – that is to the greatest conceivable satisfaction” (idem, p. 62). Bauman further points to the “nasty fly of impotence in the tasty ointment of freedom cooked in the cauldron of individualisation. That impotence is felt to be all the more odious, discomfiting and upsetting in view of the empowerment that freedom was expected to deliver.” (idem, p. 35). The endless opportunities, challenges of never-ending decision-making and the need to establish priorities are, in Bauman’s words, “insomnia-causing”. I would like to draw attention to similarities in participatory arts engagement and Bauman’s concept of powerless freedom in the individualised arts experience. The responsibility of being accountable for one’s own actions during the process or show while having unlimited possibilities to choose from and constantly taking risks of decision-making (or not) does bring the arts experience closer to the fluid reality of everyday life in the contemporary world. Can we, however, say that such practice makes the audience empowered and emancipated?

The last point I would like to make is about the arts organisations and artists’ perspectives and their ultimate search for legitimacy. Slovenian art theoretician Bojana Kunst persuasively argues that the cultural sector and cultural organisations are surviving in extremely precarious conditions and must constantly fight for a stronger social position as well as being pushed to accept ‘safety measures’. One of those safety measures is, according to Kunst (2015), the effort of widening outreach, growing audiences and creating a stronger position in people’s lives. She further argues that the frequent priority of participatory arts activities in public funding on one hand and the willingness to accept the new norm of audience engagement on the other can be demonstrations of frustration from the unstable living and working conditions of artists and art organisations. I do acknowledge that there are artists whose work has always been based on collaboration with their audience and that stems from their genuine interest in such methods of creation. But on the other hand, I support doing our best to prevent situations where artists would be asked to co-create their work with audiences or modify the result to tick the “participatory engagement” boxes simply because they would otherwise be unable to get public funding.

Undoubtedly there are indisputable positive outcomes from participatory arts activities. However, it would be misleading to call them the democratisation of culture and it would be faulty to think that this will help us get rid of elitism in the arts and make the practice more relevant for wide ranges of diverse audiences. Rather, I suggest, let's be active in improving general labour conditions in the arts and fight for more democratic public funding which allows all kinds of work – the one created *with* the audience, the one *for* the audience as I believe they are both equally meaningful and can both possess quality of a different but equally important kind. Let's make sure the artists and arts organisations are free to choose methods to create relevant works of art as well as audiences being free to choose how they want to become engaged in culture without being put into categories and problematized. I would like to end my chapter with one more quote from Brian McMaster's text: "we should not be content to live in a society where artists censor their work for fear of extreme responses. One of the most important parts of an artist's role in society is to question, to provoke, to aggravate and, at times, to anger" (McMaster, 2008, p.11).

I suggest it is important to resist the consumer-oriented social norm and allow the artist to not always please the audience. However naive this may sound, I would still trust the artists and cultural organisations to develop excellent, emancipating and empowering work, which offers a view of the world from a new angle with the author being responsible for its relevance. To answer the question suggested by the title of this text, I believe that excellent art work is always empowering and that conversely, empowering art work is always excellent.

# Artistic quality and audience empowerment. The debate with professionals

*Giada Calvano*

How can we define artistic quality? Who should be judging the quality of artistic work? What are the criteria for assessing artistic value? What is the purpose of accounting for artistic quality? How is it possible to “preserve” this alleged quality whilst implementing audience engagement activities, which put at risk the “untouchability” of artistic decisions? What are the ethical consequences of this process? These are some of the questions that emerged during the two parallel workshops titled *Artistic quality and audience empowerment*, both held in English during the Barcelona Be SpectACTive! Conference on November 22 and 23, 2016. The first workshop was conducted by Jaroslava Tomanová and moderated by Bonnie Smith, while the second one was conducted by Anders Rykkja and moderated by Manel González. Even though the conductors treated the issue from different perspectives, several common elements recurred and resonated in both the workshop sessions, starting from the assumption of the difficulty (or impossibility) to reach a universal agreement on such an ambiguous term as artistic quality. In fact, the purpose of the parallel workshops was not to provide definitive conclusions, but instead to open the debate to provoking reflections on the unstable and shifting idea of artistic quality in audience engagement processes.

## Defining artistic quality - from quality to qualities.

“Quality ... you know what it is, yet you don’t know what it is” (Pirsig, 1974, p. 184). Assessing the quality of artistic work is probably one of the greatest challenges faced by the cultural sector. The problem of accounting for artistic quality raises from a lack of consensus on the same definition of quality, due to its intangible and subjective nature. Thus, before addressing the issue of evaluating artistic quality, it is first necessary to attempt a clarification on the meaning of this term. As evidenced by Matarasso (2013), “[i]n the arts, the word is often used as an equivalent to ‘good’” (p. 3) or excellent, which implies a subjective judgment; whilst quality is a characteristic of things that does not determine or affect their value. In this sense, judgments on artistic quality are based on aesthetic standards, linked to the personal sphere, perception and background of the judger. In philosophy, aesthetic properties refer to the semantic universe of beauty, thus depending on individual feelings of pleasure and affective responses (Hume, 1963; Kant, 1966).



In many occasions throughout the workshops, participants made reference to the subjective and emotional dimensions of artistic quality, especially when involving audiences in the performing and decisional activities. For example, a participant argued that “active spectatorship is not necessarily going to the theatre and choosing or taking an active part in a decision, it is something *inside me*, I am more in the *emotional part*. I understand it is *subjective* and a risky way to define it”. Another one stated: “for me, it is important the word *share*, how to share the quality I *feel*. The audience *feels* quality even if they don’t know where it comes from”.

However, a subjective and emotional response to a work of art does not allow for a shared evaluation of its quality. This is also because of the complex nature of quality, which does not only recall aesthetic and emotional dimensions but relates also to non-aesthetical judgments. In this sense, it is possible to talk about “qualities” of the artistic work, as there are multiple aspects to take into account in the evaluation process. A binary distinction of artistic qualities is given by philosopher Roman Ingarden (in Tymieniecka, 2002): on the one side, masterly skill, thus the manifestation of a perfect performance; on the other side, effectiveness in impressing the audience. His viewpoint perfectly embodies the tension between emotional and intellectual visions of artistic quality, where technical prowess could represent a less subjective criterion of judgment, whilst impact on the audience, and its “readiness-to-receive” the art (Brown & Novak-Leonard, 2007), could make reference to the personal sphere of evaluation.

Even elements generally considered as more objective, and thus more used by critics for reviews, such as the success of a performance, the technique of an actor or the reputation of an artistic director, may vary according to individual tastes and social capital, context and geography. In his presentation of the workshop, Anders Rykkja highlighted five dimensions that can be used to start a debate around different perceptions of artistic quality: geographical, didactical, functional, social and aesthetic. For example, the same performance can be met with indifference or instead be considered of high value in different cities.

It is evident that it is hard to find an agreement on the definition of these qualities; however, cultural organizations need tools or indicators to evaluate their performance. This need is made valid, on the one hand, by the concept of *betterness* (Pirsig, 1974): albeit we may not be able to define excellence, we are still able to differentiate from “good” and “less good”. In support of this thesis, a participant stated that “we have a comparison point, for example, Leonardo da Vinci, we have a background”. On the other hand, cultural organizations are asked to provide elements that prove the quality of their work, in order to justify consumption of public money. And here lays the controversial issue of *what* and *how* to assess quality,

as it is required to make intangible aspects measurable, since humans are guided by “the inescapable necessity of making judgments about unquantifiable things like art” (Matarasso, 2002, p. 1).

## The assessment process: intrinsic and instrumental values

Evaluating arts is thus first a matter of what aspects to consider in the assessment process. Matarasso (2002) offered a classification of the elements to take into account when evaluating artwork: “[t]he obvious elements of arts evaluation include quality of execution, in the sense of how well an activity is done; quality of experience, or how the activity is received; quality of outcome, or the impact that experience produces; and artistic quality, or the intrinsic value of work as an artistic creation” (p. 3). Given that artistic quality is the main focus of the workshop sessions, it is important to go in depth in the problem of defining this intrinsic value, which is completely unique to the arts.

According to Holden (2006), “[i]ntrinsic values are the set of values that relate to the subjective experience of culture intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. It is these values that people refer to when they say things such as ‘I hate this; it makes me feel angry’, or ‘If this was taken away from me I would lose part of my soul’, or ‘This tells me who I am’ (p. 14)”. In his definition, intrinsic values refer to the idea that art has a value for itself – the famous “art for art’s sake”.

However, the individual nature of the experience makes outcomes hardly measurable and therefore these are often ignored in public accounting and funding of culture, even though these represent a crucial aspect of artwork, especially from the point of view of cultural professionals. This is the reason why policymakers prefer to focus on other cultural values to evaluate art, namely instrumental values. These values “relate to the ancillary effects of culture, where culture is used to achieve a social or economic purpose. They are often, but not always, expressed in figures. This kind of value tends to be captured in ‘output’, ‘outcome’ and ‘impact’ studies that document the economic and social significance of investing in the arts” (Holden, 2006, p. 16).

Nevertheless, the quantifiable data obtained are limiting and partial, as there have been considered only some aspects of a multifaceted reality. Furthermore, these figures are often obtained with the use of contested quantitative methodologies (e.g. demand metrics such as ticket sales and attendance figures), which are not effective

due to the oversimplification of processes and the difficulty in isolating variables in complex situations. As one participant posited, “numbers do not mean quality, people have different reasons for attending that have nothing to do with quality, but have more to do, for example, with community gathering”. Last but not least, the primary outcomes of arts experiences are not economic:

*The true impact of performing arts experiences is what happens to individual audience members when the lights go down and the artist takes the stage – and the cumulative benefits to individuals, families and communities of having those experiences available night after night, year after year. If this is true, it would seem that efforts to assess the impact of arts programs would aim to better understand and measure how audience members are transformed – what happens to them in their seats. (Brown & Novak, 2007, p. 5)*

A comprehensive approach to artistic quality assessment should thus acknowledge that arts participation has emotional, intellectual, aesthetic and social dimensions, and should be evaluated accordingly (Brown & Novak-Leonard, 2013).

## Process vs. outcomes

During the workshop sessions, participants highlighted this contradictory tension between intrinsic and instrumental values in the assessment process. As a participant pointed out: “are we interested in artistic quality in itself or in the cultural impact of artistic activity?”. In the specific case of artistic quality in participatory processes with audiences, the question could be reworded in the following way: are we more interested in the process of engaging and empowering audiences or, instead, are we more concerned on the final artistic result of the participatory activity?

This question gave rise to an interesting debate, which resulted in multiple positions on the issue. Many participants called for a balance between process and outcomes, arguing that “by working in a complex way on the process, we can obtain equally excellent results. The attention given to final results and the relationship with the audience can coexist”. Alternative voices highlighted the impossibility to combine freedom of creation of the artists with decisional and artistic responsibility given to spectators. Finally, some stressed the importance of the process over the outcomes, as the former is considered more relevant than the technical quality of the performance when working in an audience engagement framework. “For me, assessing quality is pushing boundaries more than technical perfection”, one participant argued.

## A matter of terminology

The debate around the relevance of either the process or the outcomes in audience engagement activities led to reflections on the same terminology used in this context. Many participants questioned words like “empowerment” and “emancipation”, as these were conceived as arrogant assumptions, given that the speaker who pronounces these words is placing the audience in a subordinated and rather passive position. In this regard, a participant said: “the word *empowerment* is worrying me, because people use it too much and has become the buzz word of the moment. It seems we want to save people from something and it may be risky”. The use of these terms, in fact, implies that audiences “need to be taught” to appreciate a work of art and recognize artistic quality, whilst it is not always the case. As a participant pointed out, “sometimes we say: ‘our audience is not ready for that’, while in reality it is. Sometimes the audience is less conservative than we think”.

The top-down approach is still perceived as prevalent in cultural institutions, even those engaging in participatory processes with their audiences. There is still a sense of supposed superiority and entitlement over artistic decisions among cultural professionals, that should be avoided in order to truly foster a steady dialogue with spectators, based on an equitable relationship between the parts. As a participant suggested: “you put the people and it happens, they don’t need intellectual training”. Some voices argued that sometimes the wealth of knowledge and cultural background of art professionals could be even limiting when it comes to making bold choices and promoting innovation: “artistic directors are influenced, they carry a baggage that audiences do not have. The young people we work with are the real risk takers”.

During the workshop session conducted by Jaroslava Tomanová, participants were also asked to give their definitions of “participatory artwork”, “active spectatorship” and “audience engagement”. As to be expected, participants gave an array of different answers. One participant differentiated the words according to the role of the spectators in the process, scoring their engagement from less to more active behaviours. Another one stated that “active spectatorship is making them part of your creative process”. However, some participants disagreed with the given definitions, mainly because of the use of generic words and the absence of a clear context.



## Audience empowerment: a genuine practice?

As the debate evolved, critical positions generated a shift of focus from the issue of terminology to the question of legitimacy of audience development. As expressed by one of the participants: “is audience development something we believe in and we need or is something we do for getting public funds?”, implying an instrumentalist view of participatory activities, often seen more as a fashionable trend rather than a real mission and necessity. Some voices highlighted that sometimes cultural organizations are including participatory actions in their programme for economic and opportunistic reasons, and not for a real belief in the cause. Many cultural organizations are striving to survive in a competitive market, especially after the global crisis, and thus adopt a participatory approach in the hope of receiving public grants. This phenomenon seems to have particularly increased since the European Union put audience development at the heart of the Creative Europe funding programme.

Allegations of instrumentalization addressed also the issue of *who* is in charge of assessing the quality of a participatory process with audiences: “who says if you are active or not, engaging or not? The people who choose to go to art shows, how do they feel about this?”. Some participants felt that the presence of the artistic director sometimes could influence and thus change the opinions of the spectators involved in participatory activities such as co-programming. As a possible solution, several participants expressed the need to have a person in charge of the mediation process between the audience and the artists and artistic directors, also to avoid unbalanced relationships of power.

Finally, the debate moved to the ethical challenges of co-creating a performance with active spectators. Again, participants had diverging opinions, that can be grouped into two main positions. On the one hand, some stressed that spectators chose autonomously to take part in this type of activity and therefore artists could not be accused of instrumentalization. On the other hand, using the stories and experiences of these people as the plot of a performance was considered unethical, since the implications of this kind of process are not known *ex ante* and can be controversial, citing as an example the case of the German-based company *Rimini Protokoll*.



# 2 Risks and opportunities of active spectatorship from a management perspective

*Giuliana Ciancio*

*Ricardo Álvarez*

*Giuliana CIANCIO*







# Active spectatorship, changes and novelties in the performing arts sector

*Giuliana Ciancio*

## At first sight...

This paper aims to look at some of the events that are contributing to the development of the notion of “participation” and “active spectatorship” in the performing arts sector. First, a brief observation of the current state of the art of the sector is provided, followed by references to specific projects that highlight how the new participatory approach is impacting the life of cultural organisations and the policy perspective. The analysis is inspired by different cases: from the Be SpectACTive! European project, to other EU projects and networks that are experimenting with different forms of creation and management, and specific experiences in the performing arts sector.

The cultural sector is currently facing a series of important challenges from the point of view of aesthetics, management and economy. Since 2008, the world’s post-industrialised countries have witnessed a global increase in political instability, inequalities and unemployment. This process has generated protests all over the world. At the same time, it gave birth to unexpected models of cultural and artistic experimentation. The new practices that have emerged during this period highlight the importance of participation not only in the artistic sector, but also in the political sphere. These have influenced, and are progressively being embraced by, policymakers and public institutions, therefore becoming potential tools for global development.

The idea of participation in the cultural sector dates back to the 1960s. At that time, interesting examples could be found in the context of community art, where local communities are involved as a part of the artistic process, expressing themselves and connecting with others through experiences of free art making. The “site-specific approach” in the performing arts sector is another example of collaboration between artists and communities, where the former nourish their creations with contributions from the local people and their stories. This approach sees the artist carrying out surveys at a local level, exploring narratives, spaces, contexts and characters to create new projects in specific new venues. These practices had an impact on the sector in the 70s and the 80s, transforming the relationship between the art and the audience, the aesthetic results and the managerial models, as well as the stage and



the spectator. Over the last 20 years, these practices and methodologies have been applied in different contexts and embraced as strategies to promote social cohesion, local development and urban renewal. In these cases, the community is involved in processes of regeneration or, sometimes, of internationalisation. Of course, not all the experiences can be considered best practices, but these can be observed as expressions of a need that comes both from the top-down policymaking and the bottom-up art creation.

Starting from 2008, a more complex idea of participation has been developed in both the political and cultural spheres. Audience development, co-creation and participatory practices have a significant role in the identity-building process of cultural organisations or institutions and represent a form of legitimacy to re-take a role in a cultural and political context (Walmsley, 2013). The participatory practices are introducing a new perspective. The active involvement of the audience, in some specific projects, refers to the idea of sharing “responsibility” in the decision-making process. This introduces a sense of belonging in the arts, a form of free exchange of creative energy. The process of participatory decision-making is one of democratic engagement (Negri & Hardt, 2009) that is transforming the notion of cultural consumption (Lash & Lurry, 2007) and cultural policy.

As Bishop (2012) argues, nowadays the artist is conceived as a collaborator and producer of situations, rather than an individual producer of discrete objects: “the work of art as a finite, portable, commodifiable product is reconceived as an on-going or long-term project with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a “viewer” or “beholder”, is now repositioned as a co-producer or participant” (p. 2).

The figure of the “prosumer”, following Bishop’s suggestion, comes to mind. The emergence of this new role comes from the experience of digital cultures, where the explosion of smartphones and the consolidation of the Web 2.0 open up to new possibilities for creating a participatory society. Popular books such as *We think* (Leadbeater, 2009a) and *Here Comes everybody* (Shirky, 2008) popularised the idea of a society moving towards a greater, bottom-up democracy, made possible by digital media.

## Engagement and the policy level

The European Union’s Creative Europe programme has translated part of the novelties that were emerging from the cultural sector into a policy perspective, pushing cultural organisations to find their position within this new cultural and

economic order. Audience development is one of the main priorities that artists, theatres, cultural institutions and art companies had to deal with over the last few years.

On the one hand, the EU programme highlights a qualitative relationship between cultural venues and spectators, fostering processes of co-creation and practices addressing a variety of audiences who represent a new society. As mentioned in the 2016 Creative Europe call, “audience development is about doing something together with audiences, rather than doing something for them” (European Commission, 2015, p. 4). On the other hand, the EU programme should also take into consideration that this process needs time, expertise and a long-term perspective. Thus, the final outcome should not be creating “art products”, but leaving a legacy in the communities involved. In the near future, this aspect needs to be monitored and debated both at the institutional and organizational level. The evaluation of the Creative Europe programme after the first five years of activity will represent an occasion for examining the novelties introduced at the local and European level and assessing their sustainability in the long-term.

Besides EU policy priorities, it is interesting to observe how the topic of audience or citizen engagement has somehow become one of the institutional priorities and, as mentioned above, it is also a process of legitimisation for cultural institutions. Interesting examples are seen at the city level. To mention but one, in Naples the Mayor and cultural activists intend to re-design the use of private spaces as an arena for “civic use” in the light of the Commons. Thanks to an official act made by the Mayor’s office in 2015, local government and activists are designing new ways to collaborate in order to produce immaterial values. This exchange is evidently transforming the relationship between these two agents and the economic relationship between artists and institutions, while it also introduces possible practices for the management of Common Goods at the city level. Certainly, the process is still too recent for being easily evaluated at this stage, but it is presenting an alternative way to approach the topic.

The participatory aspect is also at the centre of Matera’s bid for the European Capital of Culture 2019. Citizens were involved in the creation of proposals throughout the whole bidding process, demonstrating that cities can create civic engagement around the core ideas behind the EU Capitals of Culture project. Similar experiences are presently taking place all over Europe. The cases of Naples, Matera and other Capitals of Culture show that the notion of participation plays a strategic role and creates a breeding ground where perspectives of policy-makers and citizens sometimes can

meet (of course, with different results in terms of recognition and legacy). Indeed, in the case of Naples, this common ground is designed thanks to a participatory use of laws, where institutions and citizens are working together for redefining their roles.

All these practices activated both at the EU and local level are introducing new policy ideas, based on sharing responsibilities between policymakers and citizens, and supporting new ways of designing cultural programmes. What is happening at this level deserves to be observed and monitored, since it has an impact on cultural organisations' practices. One critical question that comes to mind is the following: are these practices a way to build real democratic engagement or, in the long run, can these represent new opportunities for creating political consensus?

Of course, there are no certain answers. However, it is interesting to observe that participatory experiences in the cultural sector are leading new processes of creation, art programming and policy. As Gielen (2009) suggests, the cultural sector - here he is explicitly referring to the art world more than the performing arts - is a strategic site where conducting analysis on social and political transformations, because "the logic of the art world no longer belongs on the margins but has established itself at the heart of a significant part of our society" (p. 14).

## The organisational perspective

Cultural institutions and organisations across Europe have enacted many forms of engagement, from co-creation processes (such as community art, immersive theatre, site-specific approaches) to actual forms of co-programming. In this scenario, the notion of active spectatorship introduces a new perspective. Audiences, who are made of citizens, are not only involved in the artistic process, but act also as decision-makers who express their ideas and needs and can represent new social groups and values. Their decisions can influence and impact the general architecture of institutions and organisations.

Spectators can either be part of the artistic direction or have an impact on artistic decisions or have a dedicated programme (e.g. the Italian Kilowatt Festival with its *Visionari*, the UK Contact Theatre, the EU project Pivot Dance, etc.), where they can manage entire aspects of a season or a festival (as in the case of the Take Over Festival supported by the York Theatre Royal, UK) and can actively take part in the planning of promotions and the dissemination of strategies (as in the case of *La Briqueterie*, France).

In this scenario, Be SpectACTive! provides an interesting case study, due to the variety of organisations that constitute the network and their unique geographical perspective that they bring in their cultural practice. Be SpectACTive! is a large-scale European project, supported by the Creative Europe programme, which focuses on the active engagement of spectators. The spectators play the role of decision-makers in a process of co-programming (of the theatre seasons or festival programmes) in the various venues of the network organisations, as well as the role of “influencers” in the production of theatre performances held among the project partners, across various countries.

The production of new performances in Be SpectACTive! counts with the collaboration of local communities, associations, schools or intellectuals, with the aim to nourish the process of creation starting from the main topic of the art project. This is made possible by a residencies programme in which all the interlocutors are involved: cultural organisations, local communities, active spectators and artists. The creation process creates links and bonds with the communities; whereas the artists and the organisations are the medium that brings about contents and information. Each venue of the Be SpectACTive! network is involved in this process and offers its own network facilities to the artists. However, what are the implications for the single organisations?

In this process, each production is a new adventure for the organisations, with unique contents and practices that need to be explored. For each residency, the theatre employees have to conduct a research, open contacts with other organisations at the local level and explore the contents the artists will work on. This process of residency is an important opportunity to discover new audiences and to create new connections at the local and European level. At the same time, the organisations need to deal with the overlap of the European (or international) aims of the project and their own local needs. They have to uptake a long-term vision, which involves new practices and connections. Sometimes, they need to rethink their way of programming, according to the new audiences reached or potential changes derived from the co-programming process.

Alessandro Bollo, responsible of the Research area of Fondazione Fitzcarraldo in Italy, in a speech presenting the *Study on audience development – How to place audiences at the centre of cultural organisations* commissioned by the European Commission (Bollo et al., 2017), mentioned that younger organisations born during the crisis are “genetically modified”, since they do not easily have access to public funds and show a genuine need to engage the audience for their general strategies. Older organisations find more difficult to open the doors of their institutions to the audience at the governance and management levels.



There is a new challenge for cultural organisations, which requires transparency in the management of their activities and in their aims and strategies. The process of sharing responsibility is an opportunity to inform the audience about the complexity that lies behind cultural production. It is a way to increase a sense of awareness in both the audience and the professionals, at the same time requires attention, time, competencies and long-term strategic vision.

## New approaches to continue the debate ...

On an artistic and organisational level, the impact of engagement practices is visible, for instance, in the emerging of new roles and professional figures. For example, the “community manager” represents an interesting shift in the life of the organisations. This professional figure can be part of large enterprises, taking care of the social media communications, but is also a new profile increasingly required in the social and cultural contexts. Community managers have a strategic role and should be able to have an open dialogue with a variety of actors and, at the same time, having organisation and coordination skills. They are a sort of “creative producers” who should be sensitive to the artists’ language, capable of connecting people and, therefore, creating community. This position involves different tasks: the community manager follows the process of urban renewal, manages the bottom-up process for the definition of activities and the mission in a new place/space and is constantly in contact with a wide range of stakeholders, institutions and local actors, creating a proper community of interests and actions.

In this process of engagement, the spectator (as mentioned above) becomes a *prosumer*. The term is used when the consumer and the producer are the same person: for instance, Facebook or other social media are based on user-generated contents. Prosumers are taking a key role also in the performing arts sector. One example of this trend is provided by the German-based company Rimini Protokoll and their *Home Visit Europe*. In this performance, they “contrast this abstract idea of Europe with the individuality of a private apartment” (Home Visit Europe, n.d.), where the spectators are the performers, bringing their own experiences, visions and interests. There are no actors on stage, the contents are created through the interactions among the spectators, in a dramaturgy that allows them to be authentic and to share their own values, stories and perspectives.

Theatres and cultural organisations, in light of the variety of audience engagement processes, are becoming places where new ideas, citizens and networks can meet, coexist and express their values. With the same logic, artistic programming is symbolically the space in which cultural and social complexities can find their expression.

This is the arena of artistic research, where new strategies and policy experiments can be developed through a dialogue between different interlocutors and localities across Europe and across the globe. It will be important to observe where this process will lead the arts and the policy sector.

As Dragan Klaic (2012) said regarding the creation of a European dimension, the attention should be put on a “regional anchoring”, and perhaps it can be added that, after recent events such as refugee emergencies and new forms of nationalism, we need to foster the relationship between these localities through culture and art practices, to avoid the creation of new localism and barriers.

# Risks and opportunities of active spectatorship from a management perspective. The debate with professionals

*Ricardo Álvarez*

The aim of the session on *Risks and opportunities of active spectatorship from a management perspective* was to discuss the diverse dimensions, experiences, paradoxes and contradictions derived from the proposed topic. The workshop was conducted by Giuliana Ciancio and moderated by Luisella Carnelli.

One of the first questions to arise regarded how organizations are reacting to audience development and whether they are ready or not for an opening. There seems to be a large consensus around the idea that most organizations have a top-down approach, and are unwilling to leave what they are used to doing, simply because it works – for them, at least. This implies a lack of openness or willingness to take risks and change the way these organizations work and conceive of things, both from a managerial and artistic point of view. It seems that the art world is currently miles away from reaching the tipping point, when it comes to involving audiences; attempts are often limited in time and scope, due to different reasons, like the scarcity of institutional support and funding or the lack of continuity when changes in management take place, among others.

2008 was a very important year due to the economic crisis experienced globally, which expanded to include all aspects of life. Arts and culture were not spared from the crisis and neither the European Union as an entity, nor the single countries that conform it, had sufficient resources for artistic or cultural productions. As is usually the case with periods of political transition and upheaval, the situation gave birth to and encouraged alternative models of experimentation such as participatory art (Bishop, 2012). Bottom-up practices – many of which revolved around the idea of democratization and openness – started to impact “traditional” organizations and disrupt top-down processes and structures. This had the obvious effect of gaining the attention of policymakers, and later resulted in an adaption to these booming trends and movements.

Within this context, “active spectatorship” projects started to gain momentum and became much more common and widespread. Cultural organizations, mainly small ones, started to champion them while audiences seemed to be attracted by the

idea. Giving spectators more power and control over what and how they experience became a *modus operandi* for many organizations – as well as opening new channels of communication and interaction to foster a more qualitative dialogue between artists and spectators. The latter were, for once, at the driver's position, with a real possibility to make decisions that had an effect on something they cared about.

Fast-forward eight years, however, the situation does not seem to have advanced that much. The arts world has been undergoing a period of transition in the last ten years, but active spectatorship still remains an ambiguous term that lends itself to diverse practices with very different goals: some people understand it as attracting new audiences and some as audience engagement and deepening audience relationships. In many places, like in Catalonia for instance, there are no specific policies regarding audience development and there are many hurdles when trying to get a participatory project funded – given the conservatism and lack of understanding by both public and private funding bodies – and/or running – due to the lack of confidence and conviction from artistic directors and programmers. People from cultural organizations sometimes jump into such projects because of the money they can get, not because they actually believe in it, or due to the legitimization they confer to “forward-thinking” policymakers. This results in voiding those same projects and concepts they seem to be spearheading and active spectatorship ends up being viewed and scrutinized from a quantitative, rather than qualitative, perspective. It seems it is statistics and numbers that matter when it comes to audience development, rather than making spectators more knowledgeable, sensitive and confident with experimental and innovative artistic proposals – although there is a lot of talk about empowering people, in the end it is ticket sales the real driver.

In this regard, some criticisms have arisen concerning the institutional role of the European Commission and Creative Europe's audience development policies, which are viewed as instrumentalist. And even though these policies have brought together social democrats (who conceive audience development as some sort of “social therapy”) and neoliberals (who applaud it for the sake of market efficiency and see it as an “economic therapy” for the arts), it seems the latter point of view is given more importance. In the same vein, Arts Council England has resorted to semantics to move in the same neoliberal direction, banning the word subsidy and demanding that everything is referred to as an investment which has to have a dividend, not only in economic terms, but also in terms of learning and participation. As Bishop (2012) states: “participation in the West now has more to do with the populist agendas of neoliberal governments” (p.277).

The general impression is that some years ago audience development was truly more bottom-up and authentic, but nowadays the institutions are taking over, even though



they do not like this kind of art nor do they care about the relationship with the audience. In the end, it is a trend which pays back in the form of legitimacy, allowing institutions to prove they are still relevant to society. Many people contend that other options ought to be explored from within “creative” organizations producing and promoting participatory projects and activities, in order to make enriching and stimulating content and long-time audience development a priority.

Some suggest that, maybe, needs of artistic control do not reside in only one organization. Public buildings dedicated to the creation, production and performance of art and culture, for instance, could be controlled by several collectives/organizations to build true community art centers, comprising different art forms and different sizes and types of organizations, all directly linked to the local community. This could also serve the goal of keeping such spaces fresh, up-to-date and open to new ideas that resonate with the local community. For this to work, however, networking is very important, and it is something that comes easily to young people, but for big institutions with senior management profiles, the picture is completely different. The latter tend to have an opportunistic view on partnerships and sometimes do not even see the point in collaborating or working with other groups, which highlights an important generational and mindset gap in the cultural world. Institutions and big organizations, many of which were created centuries ago, are simply not designed for participatory and relational approaches.

In this context, it is no wonder that small organizations and companies are the ones leading the way and trying to live up to the promises and expectations of the participatory paradigm, especially considering that many of them are aware of their need for active participation and support of spectators. This kind of organizations tend to be the avant-garde in terms of content creation and experimentation, but at the same time they are usually fragile and run on very tight budgets, besides having very little know-how due to their young existence.

A point of conflict related to this has to do with money allocation. In the opinion of many, not enough is spent on creation and audiences, while too much money is still spent on building a physical, tangible legacy through grand and monumental objects. The tyranny of building seems to drive politicians mad, but not only them: when it comes to fundraising, patrons want their name on a wall or a seat. Consequently, a battle must be waged for the nonmaterial and performing arts organizations need to get out of their physical spaces in order to engage with their audiences.

Another management problem that seems to be common is the seemingly big disconnect between the education, outreach and creation departments of cultural organizations, which sometimes have completely different goals and priorities.

In the UK, for instance, many large organizations are getting lots of money to do outreach work, like the opera going to schools in deprived areas. But despite many of these initiatives are great, the problem stems from the fact that there is no link between the organization's core activity and the work they do with minorities, kids or elderly people. In the end, it is not really about audience development, but rather about going after the money. And people in organizations have become aware of this fact, they know that if they can adapt and do things with migrants, old people, young people, etc. someone will be willing to support them financially, which leads to active participation being touched on very superficially and to manipulation. Sometimes these organizations just want "ambassadors" with the hopes that they could bring in more people, increasing ticket sales, in exchange for special discounts. In other words, there is no real strategic integration, no shared responsibility, no real change, so audiences who try to engage eventually feel betrayed by "participatory" projects.

A lesson to be learned from this is that cultural organizations ought to refrain from doing anything that betrays people's trust. Both small and especially big organizations need to learn to work with audiences and alternative models, to share responsibility with "active" citizens who decide to join them in this paradigm shift. This implies rethinking how to adapt to changes in decision-making, taking into account the active involvement of the audience and designing and developing multi-layer strategies to engage all the different actors required to put on a good show. At the same time, this represents a great opportunity to inform the audience about the complexities of managing an arts production. Transparency is fundamental in this regard, but it is also a tricky issue, because even though organizations acknowledge its importance, some are not willing or unsure as to how much ought to be visible to "strangers." The inclusion of these "outsiders" in the daily life of cultural organizations has also resulted in the creation of new professional figures who serve as a bridge between the organization and the audience. They are usually in charge of coordinating most of the aspects that have to do with the different communities involved in the project. These roles often include a wide variety of skills like social media management, marketing, PR, and customer support, but they also require people to be sensitive to the context and be knowledgeable about art. Not an easy profile to find and yet the question lingers on regarding how these new professional figures are actually impacting on the sector and whether it is worth investing in them.

Another major challenge for cultural managers and institutions alike is learning how to deal with the prevailing economic discourse which says that everybody ought to be like "art people": passionate workers willing to do whatever it takes to "make it" just for the love of it, and digital savvy, even at the risk of being self-exploited, working around the clock, depressed, and precarious – the "bohemian way of life". However, many voices from within the creative industries warn that this should

not become a model of best practice in the cultural sector, or any other industry for that matter. A case in point would be the precariousness experienced by many professionals that are necessary to produce plays and shows, but are not visible to the audience, like make-up artists, hairdressers and costume designers. Ever since the last crisis, they are usually underpaid or downright not paid at all, which directly affects the quality of the productions, driving audiences away and feeding a vicious circle. Furthermore, as Boltanski and Chiapello (2009) pointed out, the forms of organization that started to take shape several decades ago, based on these desires for freedom, flexibility, autonomy, and greater responsibility, have come at the cost of material and psychological security for the people involved in them, having a huge impact both at creative and managerial levels.

One last but crucial issue has to do with leadership: everyone seems to agree that it is a key factor in order for innovative and alternative projects to really take off, which implies that leaders need to be open to innovative and alternative proposals and should be willing to take risks and see things from different perspectives. It follows then that people leading cultural organizations need to have diverse social, cultural, educational, and political backgrounds to be able to approach thorny and controversial issues with sensibility. However, in most places it is still white, middle-aged males dominating the landscape. Until organizations move beyond this and there will be men and women leading who have grown up with different ways of making arts and engaging in art, there is no real chance for a change. This entails a profound transformation, that does not only affect the cultural world, but society at large and which is not foreseeable in the near future, because the people currently running the show have a vested interest in things staying the same.

Nonetheless, not everything is as gloomy as it seems at first sight. Several big organizations were mentioned as good examples of stakeholders successfully pushing the boundaries when it comes to new and alternative ways of approaching theater making, outreach and active participation, like York Theatre Royal, the National Theatre of Scotland and the National Theatre of Wales.

York Theatre Royal has over 250 years of history and is one of England's leading producing theaters entertaining more than 200,000 people every year. Over the last ten years, it has expanded to include collaborations with the wider community and school groups both on and off stage. This has resulted in one of the largest youth theater groups in the country and largest productions such as the York Mystery Plays 2012, involving over 1,000 members of the community (York Theatre Royal, 2016).

For its part, the National Theatre of Scotland, established in 2006, is a theater without walls nor buildings, which forces the Company to go to the communities and

work with “outside” people, make do with the infrastructures at hand and present a wide variety of work, ranging from large-scale productions to projects tailored to tiny performing spaces. The Company has thus far created over 200 productions which have been performed in conventional theaters, airports, schools, tower blocks, community halls, ferries, and forests (National Theatre of Scotland, 2016).

Along the same lines, the National Theatre of Wales has no permanent facilities of its own and considers “the nation of Wales” as its main stage, which again forces them to engage and work with all sorts of local communities and elements. It has been performing in locations all over Wales, the UK, internationally and online since March 2010 (National Theatre of Wales, 2016a).


On the other side of the spectrum is France’s AMA-Pop (*Association pour le maintien de l’artiste populaire*), a small-scale organization of recent creation which tries to build a direct relationship between creators and audiences, taking after the example of consumers’ cooperatives for farmers. The association was born with a very resolute and open political stance in their effort to remain independent, both artistically and financially, from the powers that be, and especially to avoid art becoming unfree for economic reasons. To achieve this goal, AMA-Pop works with a crowdfunding strategy whereby they ask “common” people for money and create performances for them in public (and usually open) spaces, thus bypassing any and all of the usual channels for funding and performance. Nevertheless, a challenge they face regarding their independence is finding a balance between the money they take from other people and the money they invest themselves, so that the project is not beholden or liable to anybody but its members.

However interesting and subversive, the model presented by AMA-Pop highlights yet another problem brought about by the economic crisis of 2008 and the increasing lack of public funding for the arts, as well as the recession of big private sponsors: the growing pressure on audiences to become donors, partners, co-creators, co-producers, and a long list of etceteras to support arts directly in any way they can.

The circumstances compel the arts community to find a way for this to work, which means that audiences need to be motivated and stimulated, pampered not only through tax incentives but also with content – the single most important factor to draw spectators, be it “active” or “passive”.







# 3 The interactive role of participatory creative residencies: the artist, the venue and the audience perspectives

*Félix Dupin-Meynard*

*Bruno Maccari*

*Rafael Valenzuela*





# Creative residencies: how does participation impact on artists, venues and participants?

*Félix Dupin-Meynard*

This text, based on Be Spectactive! field research, is not a general statement on participatory residencies in performing arts, but a discussion about achievements and limits of the specific experiences observed. This is not a theoretical “academic research” but rather an action-research, involved in the transformation of the studied projects: what do we expect from participatory residencies? Under what conditions could we achieve our goals?

## What is “participation”?

Feedback or debate sessions after open rehearsals, collection of interviews to inspire a creation, co-writing the script based on individual or collective narratives, dance or theatre improvisations during creative workshops, a play interpreted by amateurs, co-direction with participants, etc. Participatory residencies within the Be SpectACTIVE! experience may allow for many types of “participation”. Nowadays, we hear about participation everywhere, so participation seems no longer to mean anything. As some argue, being an audience – watching, feeling, listening – is “participating”, as long as there is an interaction between an artist and a “receptor”: in this sense, “active spectator” is a tautology. However, to specify our object of analysis, in this contribution we will speak only about participation *within* the creative process. In other words, participation as “co-creation”, through any kind of intervention of non-professional artists along the creation process of a performance. In short, “the art of with” (Leadbeater, 2009a): artistic creation intended no longer as production to or for audiences, but with them. This definition seeks neither to induce a hierarchy between different forms of participation, nor to describe “classic audiences” as passive, but to emphasize the question of participants’ influence on creation.

Even reduced to this definition, participation can describe different degrees and forms of participant’s involvement in the creative process, and influence on the show production. Defining a “scale” of participation based on participant’s influence could help us to clarify these types of participation. For instance, we could consider the scale of participation described by Brown et al. (2011), based on participant’s levels of creative control: “curatorial”, “interpretive” and “inventive”. A more precise



attempt at “roles scale” was proposed by the Be SpectACTive! research team, which can be described as follows: 1/ “audience”; 2/ “active audience” (i.e. open rehearsal, feedback, online contribution); 3/ “inspirer” (i.e. interviews, suggestions); 4/ “co-sce-narist” (i.e. co-writing from a participant’s proposal); 5/ “experimenter” (i.e. creating from improvisation); 6/ “actor” (i.e. influence on the act, but not on the rule); 7/ “co-director” (i.e. influence on the process *and* on the product); 8/ “director” (i.e. artists being totally directed by participants... something that we have never seen yet). Of course, the “participation profiles” that we propose depend on the initial frameworks defined by the artist, and on the interaction between artists and participants within this framework (participants’ behaviour may modify it, according to its degree of flexibility). Participants could have distinct or concomitant roles during the same residency. This scale is just an interim proposal, useful for thinking about the different types of participation in terms of power sharing.

Nevertheless, we should not forget that some asymmetry always exists between “artists” and “participants” - at least, within the residencies we observed. Their positions are different: the former are paid, the latter are volunteers; the former are “professionals”, the others “amateurs”; artists are the “masters of the rules”, participants have to follow the rules (even when the rule is to invent a new rule). Legitimacy is not the same, neither power. Claiming that participatory residencies could be a means to give “power to the people” may not be incorrect, but it does not question deeply the usual distribution of power within the creative process. However, thanks to the multiple effects they can produce, participatory residencies represent an opportunity to transform the relations between audiences, venues and artists, as to change the way these actors see their respective roles. And maybe, could these become real means of cultural democracy and co-construction of the artistic creation?

In this text, potential effects of participatory residencies on the actors involved (participants, artists and venues) will be firstly discussed. Secondly, conditions for the realization of these effects will be presented, before questioning the often-contradictory goals of these residencies in the last part, and finally imagining some ways to overcome divisions.

## What effects on participants, artists and venues?

Depending on their goals, strategies and forms, participatory residencies might produce different kinds of effects on the actors involved. These are all “potential effects”, and each one requires specific conditions to occur – that will be specified

in the following section. Here are presented some of the main “positive” effects identified through field research, respectively on artists, participants and venues (positive according to their different points of view).

On the side of participants, many different outcomes could be mentioned. These may include: learning of new tools of expression (dance, theatre, improvisation games, performances, etc... “for me, it was a demonstration that everybody can be an actor, a dancer, a performer”); daring to express themselves (e.g. some participants have never dared to dance in front of an audience before the residency, or have never told part of their story or thoughts in public); meeting new people and enjoying time together (some friendships are born from residencies, some intercultural exchanges too); becoming familiar with artistic vocabulary, which can lead to discover new artistic tastes, as well as feeling the will to create (for instance, some participants created their own artistic project thereafter; others discovered a new passion for contemporary dance, questioning their past prejudices); a better understanding of the creation process and of the “hidden work” of artists “from the inside”; a different perception of artists and venues, and eventually feeling closer to the artistic institutions; or even becoming new audiences of a venue, if they were not before, or “regular” audiences of a venue they already knew (attending performances more often, having interest in the new projects of the venue, becoming “ambassadors”...).

Regarding venues, participatory residencies can allow to reach new audiences, as mentioned above, or to set up new relations with regular audiences, that could exist only if venues are open enough, through participatory programming, for instance. Participatory residencies could also build new links between the venue and specific social groups or institutions (for example, partnerships with neighborhood associations, community groups or social institutions). In some cases, venues could change their perception of programming and, more generally, their role as a cultural institution (for example, their perception of the artistic expertise and the sharing process, the opening of the venue to external initiatives, the cultural diversity and definition of “artistic quality”...), which can lead organizations to democratize their decision-making process and to transform their structure, in a long-term perspective.

From the artists’ viewpoint, outcomes of participatory residencies may include: discovering and experimenting with new creative processes (for instance, it drives some artists to innovate in their methods, or to imagine new skills in their teams) ; mixing different aesthetics and artistic disciplines, transforming the content and the form of their shows (particularly when the project is permeable to participant’s influence) ; challenging the classical definition of “show”, and its borders with the creation process; learning to build new relations with audiences (e.g. feeling closer

and being more responsive to their feedbacks); changing perception of the artist's social role, etc. Is the artist's mission to share his/her tools of expression? Or to give word to those who do not have a say? To instill the desire to create? To bring different aesthetics and cultural beliefs together through confrontation? Does the artist have a monopoly on artistic creation? – Old questions, which are often reformulated when artists try to use participatory tools.

## Under what conditions?

Various conditions may influence the occurrence of these potential impacts, in the short or long term. The most important ones will be presented, taking into account the points of view of the venues and the artistic teams, integrating the participants' viewpoint and their interests to participate in a cross-cutting way.

## Role of the hosting venues

For what concerns the venues, what specific skills and needs are required? First, as projects are often invented and proposed by artists, the hosting venues must answer, as far as possible, to their requests and needs, which have to be clear. These can concern material requirements (appropriate spaces, equipment and technical support, housing, etc.), and contact with future participants (making appointments, translations, etc.), which are prerequisites for the running of the project. In some cases, the artists themselves propose to find the participants, but it can be difficult, especially when the artists are foreigners and take part in the residency for a short period. In this regard, the support of the venue is crucial. When it comes to mobilizing audiences of the venues, the process can be easier (e.g. through an open call in a newsletter), but when it comes to specific groups of people without any links with the venue, the effort may be greater (e.g. research activities and meetings with institutions that could act as intermediaries). Venues that already have local partnerships with social institutions or groups of inhabitants have less difficulties; those that are in contact only with their traditional audiences may lack the know-how.

Taking the risk to support and to program shows which can be modified by the participation of amateurs is also important. This is not obvious for all venues, especially for those that are not used to this approach. Indeed, some venues wish to maintain a high degree of control over the artistic content of the project (its "quality", its "professional" dimension, to use their words) or strongly insist that a "finished show" has to be programmed at the end of the residency. In some cases, this could lead to

“pressure” on artistic teams and make it difficult to achieve their participatory goals. For example, some venues have indirectly encouraged teams to reduce participation, because their work was perceived as too “amateurish”. This raises the question of the “artistic outcome” at the end of a residency: should it be a “finished show” made in two weeks? Does it have to be a “traditional” show? Could venues accept to challenge their usual definition of performing arts on stage, and let be surprised by new artistic forms? Some venues are afraid of not satisfying their regular audience by taking such risks.

Beyond short-term effects, some long-term ones mentioned above are also conditioned by the action and motivation of the hosting venue. If a venue wants to take advantage of the new connections created with institutions or social groups during residencies, it will require efforts to maintain these relationships. What options could be proposed to participants who wish to continue the adventure? Depending on the social background of participants, some places could imagine developing new cultural actions, groups of amateurs, participatory programming activities, sustainable partnerships with institutions in the neighborhood, offering spaces and opportunities for participants to continue creating with the support of the venue, etc. Obviously, it requires motivation, time, money, skills and planning. Some venues are reluctant to engage in this new kind of actions – or philosophies – because of the perception to undermine “artistic reputation” or for financial reasons.

When “participation” occasionally becomes a criterion for accessing public subsidies, financial opportunism can be an undesired effect. The venues where participatory residencies produce the most effect are the ones with the strongest participatory goals. However, some venues that were initially hesitant to take this path, are then transformed by the first participatory experiences, and eventually “convert” to new types of goals.

## Artistic projects and processes

Venues are not the only responsible for successful participation; as artists’ specific qualities and strategies affect the process as well. Within the projects observed, a first condition for success is the participatory content of the artistic project. Some projects seem to use participation as a tool disconnected from the creative process – in order to please funders or stick to a fashion. In this respect, the responsibility of the Be SpectACTive! network is important: what are the criteria for selecting projects, in terms of participation? How do organizations ensure participatory content? Without genuine motivation to develop participatory practice, and without



deep reflection about the role of participation in the creation process, residencies do not bring the desired effects described earlier and continue to be nothing more than “classic” creation processes. And even worse, these can lead sometimes to “perverse effects”, in terms of frustration among participants, that will be further described in the next pages.

The quality and clear explanation of the participatory method undertaken by the artistic team are important preconditions. In terms of artistic criteria, being a “good artist” does not imply any particular ability to involve people in participatory processes: it is know-how. The composition and the experience of artistic teams are thus crucial. The participatory capacities can be reinforced by integrating other skills and profiles into the team. For example, in a participatory residency addressed to migrants, the choreographer was surrounded by social workers and people used to work in cultural projects with migrants, which facilitated the connection with participants and provided a useful methodological basis.

Conversely, artists who have never worked with amateurs or who have never taken part in participatory activities may face difficulties such as: explaining the role of participation within their creation; specifying their requests to the hosting venue; or defining their target participants. The choice of the groups of participants is vital: are they regular audiences of the venue? Do they have specific social characteristics – young people, women, migrants, inhabitants of a neighborhood, etc.? Indeed, the outcomes of the residencies depend on the social background of the participants, and in particular their familiarity with artistic creation: the participation strategy must be adapted to the audience. In this respect, the theme of the projects is also determining: broad topics make it possible to involve diverse populations; while narrow topics can reach only particular categories of people. In general, it is necessary to question people’s willingness to participate according to their social position – and if it is possible, to adapt the method consequently. Do they have time for it? What will interest them the most? How are intercultural or social issues managed within the relationship?

## **The role of the participant: is it about us, with us, or for us?**

Another challenge is the definition of clear goals and “rules of the game” for participants. It is essential to avoid conflicts and frustrations. For instance, in one of the residencies observed, some participants described their role as “laboratory rats”: they complained that they were not feeling to pursue a clear goal, instead they felt to be part of an experiment they did not understand – “it’s OK to participate in an

experiment, but then we want to know what is the purpose of the experiment”, said one of them.

This leads to the definition of power-sharing in the creative process. This reflection is necessary in order to promote participants’ involvement, avoiding instrumentalization. A way to solve possible conflicts is to question the contents of the “exchange” between artists and participants: in exchange for their active participation, what are the benefits for participants? In case of “low participation” modes for participants, such as interviews or collection of testimonials, some participants could have the feeling of “giving” something without receiving anything in return. To what extent are participants’ expectations and perspectives taken into account in the process? In some cases, participants remain largely passive and feel a frustration that affects their motivation and enjoyment. “I felt like I was used for contributing to their project, I felt like I was answering an exercise, not participating”, a participant commented. Artistic projects written before their participatory phase reduce the power of the participants. To stay open to their ideas, projects must keep some degree of uncertainty; otherwise, participants are only “extras”, and the exchange is not really fair. This is what an artist expressed by stating: “we must be *empty* to receive, we must leave room for what will transform us”.

Some participants wonder whether this is made “*about us, with us, or for us?*” - reminding to be vigilant about the famous quote “whatever you do *for me* but *without me*, you do *against me*”. Therefore, if the project is not “made with”, the minimum required to ensure respect for the participants is to clarify at least the mutual definition of the roles of artists and participants. When the “rules of the game” are not explicit, or when they change along the way, participants may feel lax, deceived, betrayed. Conversely, when the rules of the game are clear, participants have the choice to accept a given role, knowingly. Sometimes, however, their claims could evolve towards a request for more involvement or power during the residency: we could call it the “ripple effect” of participation, which must be envisaged by the artists.

From the point of view of the artists, the available time seems to be a major condition of success. “You can’t cook the same food in two minutes or in two hours”, said one of them. When residencies last two weeks, artists are unanimous: it is a too short period to achieve full participatory and artistic goals (as seen by the venues) at once. Artists often complain about having to present a “finished product” at the end of the two-week residency, because the expectation of a “show” from the hosting venue may complicate participation, and may not meet artists’ ambitions. Some artists claim that residencies are “a concept, not a show; a method, not a result”; others simply

assert that they cannot present anything other than a “work in progress”. During one of the residencies observed, some participants clearly felt that the closer the “show” was, the less active they were in the process. Some have had difficulty in moving from a “collaborative” to an “authoritarian” direction, driven by the pressure of time and of the show production: “at the beginning I was feeling freedom, then I felt like I was just performing in a written choreography”. This is one of the reasons why many artists prefer long-term residencies, located in the same place, thus leading to stronger ties with participants. Some consider that the European projects consisting of “jumping from city to city” may be interesting to learn new practices, but will never have as many long-term impacts as local residencies.

## For what goals?

The question of the conditions for success, as for all kind of evaluative questions, should refer to desired goals. Although the debate around the goals of participatory residencies may seem only theoretical, it is also concrete: the target objectives determine the strategies to be implemented, and ultimately the effects produced. Within the Be SpectACTive! network, as elsewhere, there are significant contradictions about participatory residencies’ goals.

The debate is organized around two positions, which could be summarized as follows: “participation as a means/creation as an end”, or conversely, “participation as an end/creation as a means”. In other words, the question is: are we mainly focusing on the “process” or on the “outcome”? On the one hand, some see participatory residencies as a redefinition of artistic creation through participation: in this perception, the main goals are to produce “better” shows, innovative shows, interactive shows, with the help of participation – the finality being the “product”. In this case, as mentioned before, stressing on artistic quality can alter the conditions of participation and reduce the participatory ambition – during the construction of the project or during its implementation. On the other hand, participatory residencies can be seen as a means to reach other goals than merely “creation”, like opening the doors of the artistic process to audiences, spreading artistic resources and transmitting the will to create to amateurs, helping people express themselves, renewing a venue’s audiences, democratizing the cultural institutions... – the finality being the “process” itself. In this case, insisting on participation can alter the conditions of artistic creation, at least as it is classically perceived through the judgment on its “quality” or “value”.

Of course, these different goals are often mixed and co-existing – and this concomitance may involve goals which are too ambitious for a short-term residency. However, several professionals are more inclined to one side than another, which has consequences for the implementation of residencies. Particularly when the goals of the hosting venue, the artists and the participants contradict each other. For instance, when some artists are criticized for producing shows which are not enough “professional” because of the audience influence. This can lead to lower participatory goals and disappoint some participants, generating a lack of support from the producers (which may jeopardize the future of the project). Or when participants ask for more power on the creative process, while producers would like the artists to develop the show they originally planned, artists can find themselves in an inconvenient situation, between two contradictory injunctions.

The coexistence of divergent goals within projects is rarely avoidable: each actor involved has different interests. To imagine a convergence of objectives, more co-construction of the projects would be required and, more precisely, a rebalancing of power-sharing. Indeed, some players have more resources than others in the definition of goals; in particular those who fund. But if one takes the goal of participation seriously, it seems necessary to democratize the conception of projects, that is to say, to take into account the point of view of the artists, and especially the rarely heard viewpoint of participants, in the definition of goals. Similarly, the evaluation of the projects could also be co-executed by all the actors involved. We could imagine, for example, that cultural institutions organize the commissioning of participatory artistic residencies in collaboration with groups of inhabitants and/or spectators? This could favor the connection between artistic projects and local issues, and lead to potential consensus on the desired effects. Research on this subject shows that, most of the time, participation and co-creation only concern an “elite” of established participants; thus, it could also be important to ensure that the social composition of the participants is observed, questioned, and challenged, so as to integrate social groups usually absent from these approaches.

## Overcoming the fear of democracy?

As perceived during conferences and workshops, nowadays, a certain “fear of democracy” is increasingly expressed by cultural institutions, and justifies increasing limitations to such deepening of the democratic ambitions. The reasons given are varied. Sometimes institutions express the fear of “populism” - word rarely defined, often linking “people” with the idea of danger, and creating confusion between dynamics as different as “direct democracy” and the election of Donald Trump; sometimes it is the fear of losing independence over artistic creation, which would be “instrumented” for political benefits. Isn’t artistic creation funded by cultural in-



stitutions instrumentalized in a certain way, because of the particular and socially oriented choices? A way of looking at “democracy” could be the public and contradictory debate of these choices. Other times, it is the loss of the monopoly on the artistic expertise that frightens cultural institutions, especially in times of budgetary restrictions. However, even if artistic institutions are afraid of “losing” something by democratizing their organization, they have in fact a lot to gain: greater legitimacy among citizens, diversification of their audiences, and democratization of their artistic productions, fostering innovation and proximity to the realities of their social environment. In short, the real pursuit of their mission as an open interface between citizens and artistic creation, as an actual tool *by* and for the community.

# The interactive role of participatory creative residences: the artist, the venue and the audience perspective. The debate with professionals

*Bruno Maccari and Rafael Valenzuela*

This chapter aims at providing the sum of the reflections emerged from the workshop sessions on the complexities of participatory creative residencies. The English workshop was conducted by Félix Dupin, moderated by Lenka Flory and reported by Rafael Valenzuela; while the debate in Spanish was conducted by Margarita Troguet, moderated by Oriol Martí and reported by Bruno Maccari.

Under the assumption that – nowadays – creative residencies have become platforms for networking among various agents, the Spanish debate set out to analyse to which extent creative residencies could promote spaces for participation and engagement, not solely designed from the perspectives of creators (artists), but also from the stance and needs of curators (venues, public institutions, cultural managers) and other roles involved in contemporary creative production, going beyond the traditionally exclusive functional responsibility of creators to include diverse agents in order to produce more diverse contents. New relations emerge among audiences, venues and artists; the ways they interact are transformed.

To make these ideas patent, Margarita Troguet sketched out some interesting parallels between the diverse uses of architectural spaces for theatrical production and the processes of participation that arise from these diverse uses (classical theatres, non-conventional venues, theatre company venues, creative laboratories), highlighting the centrality of physical space as constitutive context of artistic creation. This approach allowed her to analyse the transit from architectural uses of space centred on production, presentation or exposition towards uses of space designed to be receptive and focused on the needs of diverse actors involved, allowing interactions and networks that are more open and prone to incorporate participation.

Oriol Martí identified three main agents or key roles involved in residencies (the three C's), which were then used to analyse their respective behaviours and needs: Creator (artist), Curator (venue) and Concurrence (audience). According to him, residencies are strategic working spaces, capable of promoting audience participa-

tion, increasing interaction levels between C's, and generating shared opportunities, offering an increasing permeability of their working processes and creative formats.

In the English debate session, Félix Dupin asked participants to speak freely (not aiming at consensus) to share their experiences in participatory creative residencies. This helped to evaluate whether these had been successful or not, to let participants define success in their own terms, and to describe multiple observed effects of these residencies on various actors involved (venues, artists, audiences). What kinds of residencies exist and what are their effects? Under what circumstances or conditions do residencies work? What is participation? Is it attending a show, giving feedback afterward, inspiring creation through contact with artists during the production phase? Is it co-writing scripts, improvisation workshops, audience members performing, participants' co-direction of presentations, is it participants 'directing' artists?

In line with these questions, it was also asked to which extent could the "conditions of participation" be improved for each of the key agents involved. Is it possible to design processes that will bring benefits not only to creators, but also to venues and audiences? Would these interactions bring about new value systems or priorities? Which effects would participation have on diverse participants? Would the aim for participation bring back the "old dilemma" of either conceiving that creativity itself is the final goal of artistic practice or that there is no final goal in creativity, just processes, creative participatory processes, spaces of mediation, interactions, learning and democratization of benefits for multiple participants?

It was also acknowledged that each agent has different interests towards (and receives different effects from) participation. *Participants (concurrency)* may want to learn new tools of expression, vocabulary, understand creative processes, become familiar with the venues, or perhaps explore the possibilities of becoming an artist themselves. *Venues (curators)* may want to develop new audiences and new relations with regulars, build links with institutions, transform and democratize the organization, or change the public perception of their role in the society. And *artists (creators)* may want to experiment with new creative processes, new relations with audiences, or transforming the format and/or content of their shows. Even though participation in co-creation is still asymmetric between audiences and artists (because the latter are "masters of the rules"), artists involved in residencies can see their roles differently.

While the English workshop discussed creative residencies as a broad subject, the Spanish debate aimed at deepening the understanding of each of the three main agents (creators, curators, and concurrency), analyzing their approaches to cultural

practice in the form of stating their respective ideal missions, visions and values. In this regard, the mission statements ascribe to creators relate to creation, production and contribution; curators deal with providing context, resources and support for experiences; and, lastly, concurrence was associated with notions like reception, learning, enjoyment, active listening and participation. These results seem to mimic classic interpretations of the traditional roles of these three agents. However, one highly interesting finding yielded through this exercise was that aspirational and or political aspects (notions implied in vision and values) included several shared ideas arising from all the three agents, such as interaction, commitment, development of creativity. Based on the acknowledgment of their multiple needs, capacities and contributions, also venue and audience participation (and not only artists' production) are brought into the center of attention, replacing in this way more traditional definitions of their roles.

In a more practical approach, experiences brought forth by participants manifested a less homogeneous panorama. As reported by participants, in many cases in the processes of participatory creative residencies there was no consensus on the goals, among diverse agents. Also noteworthy was the fact that participants always spoke in the third person ("they"), when referring to the other roles, thus always speaking from a role-based perspective (even though this debate group did not explicitly ask to separate roles).

By critically evaluating the traditional role of audiences and focusing on their possibilities of engagement in cultural practice, many questions arose. For example: Given that people in audiences are mostly beginners or do not practice the cultural activity they are witnessing, how much is it possible to demand from audiences in terms of creation or contribution to the creative process? How can venues find people and mobilize them to participate? What are the technical conditions that facilitate this kind of engagement? It seems as if the managerial aspects of a more integrated participation of audiences are yet to surface decidedly, thus, the discussion of various renewed roles of audiences remains, to some extent, on an aspirational level, and associated to each of the three roles.

The future challenge for cultural participation seems to rest on understanding how to promote creative residencies and spaces of creation that manage to articulate interests, needs and contributions of each of the three roles (creators, curators and concurrence), building on the idea of shared responsibility and benefits. The lack of more spaces that foster participation, inclusiveness in decision-making and general openness is symptomatic of a traditional focus of cultural policy on promoting creation (rather than demand or mediation). In this regard, a longer time perspective (regarding the time frame for collaboration) is needed both to create new links



between diverse agents and to stabilize those links over time. And this longer time perspective also has to take into account that this kind of collaboration implies a risk, insofar as programming (or even creation) can be changed or transformed by participation, making the decision for on-going collaboration especially important. In practice, inexperience can play a critical role. For example, failing to focus on socially relevant issues may inhibit participation, or creators may fail to target and approach appropriate groups to foster their participation.

And then, of course, there is the issue of the different effects of participation on diverse agents. Are they the same for all? Do the effects depend on social aspects, personal background or familiarity? Is it possible that some participants may feel used by artists? The problem that lies behind these complexities may be that there is no clear-cut answer to what the goals of creative residencies are.

Not even among professionals of the sector there is a consensus in this regard, each agent has different goals. However, two main types stand out. Some people consider participation as the *means* and creation as the *end*. They see creating better shows or creative produce as the main goal. Others, however, see participation as an *end* in itself, and creation as *means* for promoting participation, for developing new resources and forms of expression, for renewing the socio-demographic composition audiences, among other goals related to participation. For them, the process in itself is the *end*. Most of the times, creative residencies include combinations of both types of people, leading to tensions, when not everyone understands or validates the experience of participation in the same way. For example, artists have been criticized both for not including audiences enough and for producing “less than perfect” shows, because of including audience participation. The expectations of producers do not always come to fruition when it is attempted to put them into practice, sometimes within interaction and participation “things can change” and one has to be prepared for that. One particular project reported having separate time frames planned out in advance, for artistic production and participation; but sometimes policies would encourage the integration of audience participation in the creation itself, making it challenging for artists who, as a result, need to switch roles constantly between “artist” and “creative participation promoter”.

In practice, the diversity of focuses, regarding priorities and goals of residencies, can also be contextualized, taking into account that there is a vastly established asymmetry in access to funds for residencies, meaning that these are given to artists and not to participants. Thus, participation depends –to some extent– on the decisions (and the ability) of the artists (and venues) to foster audience participation. This fact makes the relations between artists, venues and audiences resurface in the centre of the discussion, now from another angle, not the angle of who “has

the power” or responsibility (the funds), but of how this agent (mostly the creator or artist) will establish long-lasting relations with the other agents, by sharing this “power” and responsibility. In this regard, it is also noteworthy that audiences may feel used, if they are invited (or forced) to participate, for example, in a show, just because the project is supposed to end with a show, and no one has given them the option to opt out.

The focus on building relations, as an intermediate goal for fostering participation, also brings about some challenges, like time constraints, derived from the kind of funding the artist gets; not to mention that the limited time is necessary both for achieving high artistic quality in creation, as well as for successful coordination of participation. This makes participation and artistic quality “compete” for the artists’ limited time. So, the way that the “working model” is going to “look like”, in the end, strongly depends on circumstances, people involved and courses of action taken. One participant stated: “I ended up with three different ‘working-models’ after three residencies, and no time to digest the experience”.

One interesting note about audience participation, in regard to decision-making in programming, was the mention of “readers circles or readers groups”, however, there was a relative consensus that these kinds of participative efforts are still of limited capacity, in terms of the audiences they reach and that, once within, sometimes, a person’s participation is bound to strict vertical rules. This has led to identifying a tension between a predominant understanding of residencies as venue-related spaces where artists live and work together and, an alternative understanding, of residencies as spaces that call for the participation of audiences and for audiences to autonomously define their own cultural initiatives. The latter scheme has been less explored, even though it might be more effective when facing the challenges of contemporary audience participation.

Even in the case of an organizational context that would be favourable to audience participation, questions still remain about creators’ ability to engage and work with concurrence, about the optimal moment in the creative process for this participation to occur, and about the best way in which venues and curators could productively integrate audience participation in a sustainable manner. For example: how does a venue choose an artistic experimental company to invite people for participative processes? Which company is allowed to work with audiences in which ways? Some artists may be very good to create quality cultural produce, but less so to work with people and audiences. Some artists may want to work some themes that some venues may want to treat differently, because of the liabilities of including the audience in

processes. The list of derived complications of participation can be long and it needs to be dealt with properly. This has led some artists to consider leaving participation all in all (“there are thousands of artistic residencies that don’t have to do anything with participation”), while in some places “it is mandatory for residencies to have participatory elements”.

Sometimes, as mentioned before, the rules come from above, from venues and policies that provide funding for artists in order for them to work with audiences, at the same time, strictly regulating the processes that base these interactions in a very vertical manner. Artists tend to feel that they should be able to participate in this discussion. Participation has been a demand coming from higher spheres of administration in Europe, but there are many ways of interpreting it, thus, it is important to have this discussion in advance.

The challenge seems to rest on how to promote residencies and creative spaces that manage to articulate or integrate the interests, needs and contributions of creators, curators and concurrence, promoting shared responsibility and shared benefits of the outcomes for the diverse roles implied, and more open, inclusive and participative decision-making spaces for concurrence and audiences. However, these inclusive processes require the engagement of critical key figures and new professional profiles, such as arts managers, educators, animators; the integration of complementary visions like Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology, Education, or Ethnography; and the empowerment of new operators and producers, or at least new relations or working-models, regulating the interactions among diverse agents or communities of shared responsibility.

Without a doubt, organizations face great challenges when trying to integrate participation. Communication is key in defining roles and guidelines for artists and audiences, and also for accessibility of audiences through innovation. Tools for developing audience engagement also need to overcome situation-restricted marketing approaches and commit to integrating participants’ suggestions and participation on a longer time perspective.

The challenges of audience participation raise the issue of cultural policy focusing mostly on production (and less on developing demand). Reverting this focus and including a more open understanding of audiences as groups of active and responsible subjects who are to be involved in curatorial and production dimensions of cultural produce, as highly engaged and empowered protagonists.

# 4 The challenges of artistic programming with active spectators

*Luca Ricci*

*Ricardo Álvarez*

*Janina Juárez Pinzón*







# Artistic programming with active “visionaries”

Luca Ricci

All audience engagement project starts with questioning why many people and entire sections of society do not have access to the benefits of cultural action. According to Toni González (2010),

*it is as important for heads of artistic centres, programmers or institutions, as it is for artists, to consider the presence and growth of the number of spectators as a priority. Unfortunately, this is a task often condemned to failure when methods of developing audience numbers have been centred exclusively on classical marketing methods. Opting for a different type of relationship with the spectator opens new paths for research.*

Creating a “knowledgeable” spectator, who looks at the show with a critical eye, capable of understanding, recognising and evaluating other models or systems, is the great challenge of developing artistic programming with audiences. “Approaching the artistic work from a position of knowledge allows the spectator not only to admire the work but also to advance with the artist along the path of innovation that a piece of art requires” (ibid).

## The active spectatorship

From the Be SpectACTive’s perspective, Active Spectatorship refers to each mechanism through which audiences, namely spectators or citizens, take on the role of *decision-makers* with regard to many of the aspects needed to carry out a festival or theatre or dance programme. People’s participation - and therefore also spectators’ participation - increases if they are accountable, if their ideas are given value, if their perspectives are listened to and considered. If a person feels involved and responsible within a communal process, he/she will feel part of it and will commit to becoming an active agent who is able to encourage others to be involved.

In Europe there are some new experimental projects that aim to give the audience a decision-making role, providing them with individual responsibilities in a common space of creation. These processes offer a new opportunity for spectators to select some shows in the artistic programme of theatres and festivals, thereby activating a

process of awareness-raising around the performing arts. A context that encourages active participation of spectators has the potential to provide artists with useful input in support of their creative work.

Direct involvement and responsibility of the spectator are therefore two aspects that are used to:

- ultimately increase the number of beneficiaries of cultural actions;
- share within processes underlying cultural action, that are often little known in traditional systems;
- perceive cultural production as a full expression of art and society;
- activate medium-term development and social regeneration processes.

Within this perspective, the spectator is not a passive subject to whom contents are directed or someone who only buys a service or consumes products. Neither he or she is considered simply as someone to educate with specific training programs. The spectator is considered, on the contrary, a person who thinks and feels and who is therefore capable of expressing individual opinions regarding what he/she wants to see or not. It is precisely for this reason that the practical aspects facilitating *active spectatorship* build up specific and well-structured projects within which spectator groups are organized, allowing them to be sufficiently autonomous to freely express their opinions, that are subsequently valued. It is important to underline that none of the *active spectatorship* activities are self-generated. Rather they need an artistic director who is able to define both the general artistic objectives and the organisational structure. The audience is never left alone, instead, it is accompanied by those who have conceptualised the project. The ability to look at the artistic work from the public's point of view defines the profile of the professional as one who creates *interactive experiences*, without forgetting his/her responsibility as curator.

## Spectators as creators of meaning

Trying to put this concept of active spectatorship in a “history of ideas”, this perspective is influenced by Barthes's declaration concerning the “death of the author”, which led theorists to begin to consider the reader of a book as a displacement of the author as the primary producer of meaning (Barthes, 1984). Barthes' intuition radically changed our way of considering the interpretation of a work of art (painting, sculpture, books, theatre, etc.), putting the user (reader, spectator, etc.) at the centre of the discourse and allocating an active role to all those who find themselves in front of a creative production.

This standpoint has been deeply investigated and today the new and contemporary perspectives of studies in this sector are all centred on qualitative and critical observations of how individuals respond to show viewings or to book readings, etc. According to Jacucci et al. (2007), “[a]ctive spectatorship is regarded as an alternative approach to the perspective that sees spectators as witnesses merely enduring a sequence of events. Active spectatorship has parallels with the notion of active users, which highlights the view that users cannot be represented as information-processing automata that merely generate responses to stimuli provided by an interface” (p. 1). Spectatorship is intensively social.

## The Visionaries in San Sepolcro

I would like to introduce my personal experience, as artistic director of Kilowatt Festival, the festival that I founded 14 years ago, together with my wife Lucia Franchi, in Sansepolcro, Tuscany, Italy. During the third edition of the festival, in 2005, we sold a few tickets in four days of performances, although many different shows were programmed. One night, while taking off platforms and lights, one of the technicians said it was better to stop, unless we found a way to make the town feel that the festival was “something of its own”. Kilowatt Festival, as it is now, was born from this observation.

We, as creators of the festival, liked the idea very much, but it was not enough: it had to become “something for the local audience, the town and the territory”. We took this goal literally, inviting people from the Sansepolcro area to work with us, putting in their hands the most delicate and precious process of a festival: the choice of some of the shows to be programmed in the annual edition of the festival. The assumption was (and it is) crazy, and so it was (and it is) exposed to failure. But it sparked a new energy around Kilowatt, an energy which already was in the name chosen for the festival, only that it was unexpressed before then. Thus “The Visionaries” (Visionari in Italian) were born, a growing number of spectators who are laypersons: the cashier at the supermarket, the professor, the hairdresser, the pensioner, the student... They spend their winter evenings watching, comparing and discussing videos of the most innovative emerging companies - more or less 300 each year from the annual call organised by Kilowatt - until they choose the best nine shows to be invited to the festival in a specific section called “The Visionaries Selection”.

Since then, Kilowatt has become much more than this: it is a centre of productions and support to production, a residence for creation, a venue opened to experimental music, contemporary literature and visual arts. But “The Visionaries” are and will remain our “identity trademark” forever. And we like it that way! We believe that



live shows are like an open and democratic assembly which concerns the essence of every citizen. Aesthetics is useful to achieve the purpose, but it is not the very aim. A festival, as well as the vision of a single show, are not interludes between a commitment to another of our lives: they are part of our lives. In 2010, the festival was awarded with the most important Italian theatre prize, the Ubu Award, as Best Festival. The motivation was the following:

*Attività di sguardi incrociati tra pubblico, artisti e critici in cui è nascosta la forza eversiva di un punto di vista davvero nuovo. Coinvolto in questa gara popolare un gruppo di spettatori ribattezzati "Visionari", cittadini appassionati ma non esperti, che partecipano alla scelta degli spettacoli e insieme a critici vecchi e nuovissimi si impegnano nella ricerca di un teatro da pensare e costruire<sup>5</sup>. (Bandettini, 2012)*

After 10 years with "The Visionaries", more than 150 persons living in Sansepolcro completed at least one year of the activity. But some of these are working with us in this role since 8 or 9 years. In 10 years, more than 2.500 different artists/companies sent their videos to the *Visionari*, who watched all those videos and wrote their feed-backs and opinions to each artist/company, tying personal contacts that influenced both sides: the artists and the spectators.

Since 2014, the *Visionari* project was enlarged to other 6 Italian cities, where organizations similar to ours asked us to apply this format in their context. At present, there are groups of Visionaries in Como (Lombardia), Novara (Piedmont), Rimini (Emilia-Romagna), Livorno (Tuscany), Teramo (Abruzzo) and Messina (Sicily). The groups of Livorno and Novara, now in their first year, are composed by around 100 persons each, in Como and Rimini they are more than 50 people, the group in Teramo is composed by 30 teenagers aged 16 and 17.

And the same European cooperation project Be SpectACTive! was born from our curiosity to know if in Europe there were similar experiences of active involvement of spectators in decision-making roles. In our research, led in conjunction with Giuliana Ciancio, we did not find many activities exactly like ours; probably the TakeOver Festival in York was the most similar, although completely different in the goals. We discovered another interesting work of active involvement of the local community in the *Zuidplein Teater* in Rotterdam, but they could not participate in our European cooperation project. Anyway, we entered in contact with many theatres and festivals already active in different audience development projects, that accepted to experience this radical challenge: to create an artistic programming cooperating with a local group of active spectators.

<sup>5</sup> Translation of the author: "The activity of crossed glances among the public, artists and critics, in which is hidden the strength of a truly subversive new point of view. A group of spectators renamed The 'Visionaries', supporter citizens but not experts, is involved in this popular race. The 'Visionaries' participate in the choice of the shows and - together with old and new theatre critics - they engage themselves in the creation of a new theater to be thought and built together".

## A laboratory of democratic engagement

Every single person is a mix of wishes, desires, interests and relations. As a response to this, the challenge of artistic programmes shared with spectators focuses on one-to-one relationships and on bonds at the community level to cover all of the audience segments. This is a crowd-culture strategy aimed at creating a sense of belonging among a complex community who shares cultures, languages and experiences.

Active participation in cultural processes can be generally considered as a concrete example of a new idea of citizenship. This vision goes beyond the usual approach towards *audience building* based on “educational” activities (seminars, meetings with artists) or community art actions. It aims at achieving advanced peer education, where everyone actively learns. Dialogue among curators and audience is on an equal footing, giving spectators a functional role within the process of creating performing arts.

The *glocal* approach of this perspective is expressed through the willingness to innovate starting from local roots, creating models and formats which can be replicated internationally and developing trans-local projects. Dragan Klaić (2012), in his book *Resetting the Stage*, wrote: “[w]hat is needed in Europe [...] is a redefinition of interest in culture and the articulation of instruments, criteria, procedures and resources that will implement these interests [...]. This redefinition cannot be just a matter of national policy but needs strong regional anchoring” (p. 171).

In addition to the issue of access to cultural content and democratic participation, the active role of the spectators intends to represent new social groups and new values. The increasing diversity of the new population is often unrepresented in theatres programmes: in this laboratory for democratic engagement, all segments of the population may find the opportunity to express themselves. In 400 BC, the Greek philosopher Aristippus of Cyrene claimed that an active spectator also becomes a better citizen.

## Risks and failures

We are aware that these processes are likely to create a sort of absolute faith in the spectator's evaluation. It is an uninteresting drift and we must avoid it. The spectators are not always and regardless right, especially if they express opinions freely, without any background study and not giving specific attention to artworks. But we are referring to a real community-work process, an experiment of collective intelli-

gence actually based on great attention to the artists and on the capacity of listening to the artworks. We are not talking about equipping the spectators with a button by which they give a score from 1 to 10, without expressing any reasons for their choice, and just for the honor to exercise a power, as jurors. It is exactly the opposite: we mean a process of analysis and query made both on the spectators themselves and on the artworks, a process that is carried out both individually and through a collective effort.

From the organizations' point of view, these processes have a very high activation cost, because they require a significant investment in terms of time, as well as a strong aptitude to listen to the different feedbacks of the audience. Certainly, the selection process carried out directly by an artistic director is faster and less risky. However, the challenge is interesting because we can share all that complex system of analysis, assessments and choices with a group of potential users of those same choices: this takes longer, but it leads to more solid results, and with a real possibility of an exponential multiplication of the sense of participation in the events.

As a negative factor, I would like to underline that these mechanisms tend to approach people already animated by some personal interests in the matter: I do not want to say that it never happened, but rarely we were able to involve in these "active spectatorship" processes persons who had never been into a theatre before. It happened, but quite seldom. More often, people approaching this project have already some curiosity about this field. In many cases, it is about empowering people who have already some cultural interests and accept to include among them, for the first time, also the performing arts. I hope that one day someone will study the "radiating capacity" that these people can pass on to their neighbours, relatives and/or friends. From my experience, the audience in Sansepolcro has quadrupled since we have realized this activity of *active spectatorship* with "The Visionaries". I do not know to what extent this growth is to be ascribed to the overall development of our artistic, organizational and communicational skills, or to the specific activity with the *Visionari*: I can only say that this growth has occurred and that "The Visionaries" project has changed for the better our relationship with the city.

## From the artists' point of view

There is one final point that I would like to stress. I am talking about the effectiveness of these *active spectatorship* processes from the artist's point of view. I believe we need to work further on it, because I have felt the artists' reluctance (not all of them, of course) to consider this aspect. Active involvement of the audience in the selection process could also be an invitation to the artists to renew the way of thinking about

their method of artistic creation. We are trying to make the artists consider their creation not only as the expression of their personal needs, but also as the expression of a social vision, as the result of the community's thoughts and sensibility, of which the artist is the most sensitive medium, and not the one and only generator.

Here we are turning the perspective upside down: the audience interacts with the artists, who have no more a solitary and absolute responsibility for their creations. The artists become part of a dialogic process between stage and audience, a process that needs to be constantly renewed, revived, mediated by the experts. But nobody should forget that the goal is not the "art for art's sake", rather the art as a space for ongoing open verification of the individual and social nature of human beings.



# The challenges of artistic programming with active spectators. The debate with professionals

*Ricardo Álvarez and Janina Suárez Pinzón*

“This project wants to challenge ignorance!” – Luca Ricci.

This is the report of two workshops that took place during the Be SpectACTIVE! Annual Conference held in Barcelona, Spain, on November 22 and 23, 2016. Both workshops covered the same topic: *The challenges of artistic programming with active spectators*, but one was conducted in Spanish by Joan Morros and moderated by Xavier Torrens, while the other was conducted in English by Luca Ricci and moderated by Yvona Kreuzmannova.

In 2013, the European Union launched the new Creative Europe, an ambitious program “to support European cinema and the cultural and creative sectors, enabling them to increase their contribution to jobs and growth” (European Commission, 2016). The program seeks to allow artists, cultural and audiovisual professionals and organizations “to operate across Europe, to reach new audiences and to develop the skills needed in the digital age. By helping European cultural works to reach audiences in other countries, the program will also contribute to safeguarding cultural and linguistic diversity” (Ibid). The EC also acknowledges the challenges related to “audience development”, by stating that “a stronger focus on support for audience building and on the sectors’ capacity to interact with audiences, for example through media literacy initiatives or new interactive online tools, has the potential to open up more non-national works to the public” (Ibid). This idea of audience building has garnered support from two traditionally opposed political groups: on the one hand, (economic) liberals, who consider participation in cultural activities important, making these activities more market-focused and less dependent on public money; on the other hand, social-democrats, who see audience building as a means to increase the capacity of (new and established) audiences to understand culture and actively participate in it, with the objective to empower them.

Broadly speaking, empowering a community can be understood as providing individuals with access to tools and services such as training, education and healthcare. This enables them to prosper, at the same time it gives them the opportunity to influence and be involved in their community, actively participating in the decision-making processes that affect their everyday lives. When it comes to the

arts, one way to empower a community is to offer its members the chance to become part of a team that selects a portion, or the totality, of a venue's or festival's artistic program. This can be assimilated to the concept of active spectatorship as defined by Ricci (2016), who refers to it as "each mechanism through which audiences, namely spectators or citizens, take on the role of decision-makers with regard to many of the aspects needed to carry out a festival or a theatre or dance programme".

In general, artistic directors and programmers seem to agree with the social-democrat view of audience development, engagement and empowerment, decrying that - from an institutional point of view - audience development is more often linked to marketing, big numbers and the bottom line, when it should be about creating processes where spectators have a preeminent position and become more knowledgeable, by helping them understand what artists and cultural organizations do. From this arises one of the biggest challenges of active participation, namely how to make spectators "central" to projects and institutions. For project leaders, one way to address this issue is to think about how art can be useful to people's everyday life and relevant to local communities, helping them to generate, establish, and interpret meaning. If this is successfully achieved, it should result in more active participation, which in turn leads to audiences approaching art and artists with more respect, since these experiences provide them with a deeper knowledge and understanding of the artistic (and technical) processes that need to take place for an event or work of art to occur. Institutions, on the other hand, need to be permeable and porous and proposals flexible or true collaboration to take place and let ideas, knowledge and energies flow from external actors to the institution and from institutions to the outside.

Audiences legitimate art and culture and make them sustainable. Spectators can relate to artistic proposals not only as mere consumers but as active participants of the artistic act itself, becoming part of the "art worlds" (Becker, 2008). In other words, they are willing to accept the risks of the work of the artist, who had to adapt his or her own ideas to what institutions are willing to accept and support, as well as to the implicit limitations resulting from the scarce available resources and their dependency on members of a cooperative network. It makes no sense anymore to think of audiences as a passive group of people. Collaboration is the key concept, intended as "a way of working in harmony with others" (Tharp, 2009, p. 14) that begins with a point of view. As psychologist Susan H. McDaniel (2016) explains, "(c)ollaborative habits are built from activities such as simulation, small pilots, feedback and evaluation. Teamwork is enhanced by the ongoing development of self-awareness through small group experiences, 360-degree evaluations and mindfulness training, as well as exposure to the science of successful teams" (p. 5). As people grow familiar with and become knowledgeable about a specific type of art, their tastes

expand and diversify. In turn, this enables them to enjoy a wider range of artistic expressions. The higher the understanding, the higher the possibility of enjoyment (Kelley & Freisinger, 2000).

Giving spectators decision-making “power” brings with it responsibilities and challenges. For institutions, this means establishing new rules of the game and adapting to a new context where “external” people have a say and are given a chance to actually do things that affect the project. According to Bollo (2014), there are two phases towards consolidating the relationship between an organization and its audience: reach and engagement. The first one requires marketing and communication strategies, including the production of unusual events in unusual settings, to catch the attention, make an impression, arouse the interest and attract both existing and potential audiences. The second phase consists of developing processes, channels and tools that make interactions and experiences meaningful and gratifying for the participants. This obviously involves deciding whether opinions, ideas and proposals brought forth by these “alien” participants are to have the same importance and value as that of the professionals running the show. For active participants, this can entail, for instance, assessing the prospective artistic offerings (reading dossiers, watching videos or even taking part in performances) individually or with other members of the team, as well as analyzing the desires, needs and expectations of the audience.

Some of these experiences are individual initiatives of groups of citizens who decide to lead an artistic project – like in the case of *Toc d’espectacles El Galliner* cultural association (among whose founders is Joan Morros) which has been in charge of the artistic program at the Kursaal Theater in Manresa, Spain, since 2007<sup>6</sup> - while others stem from a proposal of the artistic and/or managing team, as a strategy to empower community members – like the project created by the *Mercat de les Flors* in Barcelona<sup>7</sup>, whereby the audience had the opportunity to participate in the selection of the opening show for the 2013-14 season. In all these cases, key aspects for success are the composition and dynamics of the group, their coaching and commitment, the dialogue and respect between the artistic director and the participants, as well as the progressive renewal of the latter, among others.

A buzzword that often arises in this context is “democratization”, understood as the enabling of hitherto excluded community members to get involved in artistic projects – commonly funded with public money. Some argue that “opening up” to the people can lead to potentially “populist” stances, especially when this inclusion is void of content and only used instrumentally for political purposes on the one hand – since some politicians are eager to hold on to any idea that legitimizes them, and hence jump onto any trend that can achieve this objective – and economic reasons on the other hand – considering that a fair number of cultural companies and organizations

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.kursaal.cat/index.php/galliner>

<sup>7</sup> <http://mercatflors.cat/en/general-en/vote-for-the-opening-1314-season-performance>

from all sizes and sectors often adapt to any demands from funding bodies, like the need to create “participatory” projects, in order to get money and survive, and not because they truly believe in the idea or concept itself, which seems to be frequently the case. Hence, when it comes to communicating participatory projects to the people involved in them, be it professionals or active spectators, it is paramount to know and define as clearly and transparently as possible what their participation in the project brings both to the organization behind the project itself and to the participants who are willing to take part in it, so that their interests and expectations are balanced and none of the parties involved feels neglected, disappointed and/or used. In this regard, projects need to be sustainable and coherent for all parties involved, without forcing them to compromise their values and/or mission.

Linked to this is the common and recurring issue of lack of consensus about what participatory processes are really about and how to define them, as there seems not to be a clear-cut definition about what a participatory process means, which leads to use the term indiscriminately for a variety of purposes. And yet programmers and artistic directors have the constant need to be able to explain this ambiguous concept both internally, to their own team and potential participants, and externally, to their partners, sponsors, government agencies and funding bodies of all sorts.

At the same time, many people from within cultural institutions express some doubts regarding these new ways of working and sometimes do not even see the point of it. Although this mentality is undoubtedly changing, it is doing so at a very slow pace. And when they finally decide to open up, they are unsure about how much “openness” is needed for active participation to work without turning into some sort of “anarchy.” A point frequently stressed by these actors is the need for “experts” to lead the projects, which somehow implies an unwillingness to relinquish responsibility and power to spectators. Yet, rather than being in control and trying to influence the participants or impose one’s own view and having complete control over things, leading a process should be regarded as having the keenness and sensibility to make the right questions at the right moment, to find out why and how things are done, in order to enrich the discussion. If carried out successfully, the collaboration and joint efforts of diverse individuals actively participating in these projects may ultimately lead to collective intelligence and stronger engagement and commitment. Otherwise, if the “leader” tries to control everything from his unique and personal point of view, audiences will not necessarily be engaged; they might participate once, but will be reluctant to be part of the project in the long term. Audiences need to be stimulated and motivated, they need to feel part of what they are doing and not feeling used or being considered simple “extras” or cheap labor for the project. In this sense, artistic programmers and directors ought to be generous towards all participants (both professionals and non-professionals), sensitive and open to the ideas, needs and expectations.



tations of everybody involved in the projects, willing to take risks by admitting and programming shows that have unexpected, imprecise, not-delimited, non-determined results and components. They must be willing to move out of their comfort zone together with their audiences, and have diverse knowledge and experience to be able to cope with the needs and expectations of the stakeholders, from professional artists to (active and passive) spectators, policymakers, and public and private funders.

Another challenge is the way in which participatory processes can reach non-audiences and get them involved. As recent statistics show, a very small percentage of the population really participates in cultural events (Walmsley, 2016a). And when it comes to active participation it is an even smaller percentage, a niche made up by a group of the same people who are already passionate about culture and have previously participated in it. Empirical evidence suggests that active spectators tend to have a very specific profile and do not necessarily represent society at large: they come from mid or high-mid social, cultural and economic strata, and are more demanding in their expectations and assessment than “passive” spectators, even though they usually approach such projects with an amateur and volunteer attitude – they do it for the love of art.

However, there are some voices that argue against trying too hard to engage non-audiences, suggesting that people will participate if they like what they are being offered. Content is the key word here: quality and appealing ideas are crucial to attract people. In the end, it all depends on what organizations and institutions want to do. It is up to them to decide which audience to target, bearing in mind that people should be able to decide whether they want to get involved in programming or production, but not feel obliged to attend a show as part of the audience – active participants should be given freedom of choice to participate in any which way they want to, especially since some people need more time to go through some processes (like teenagers, for instance).

Another aspect to factor in is the response of “traditional” audiences towards community-run and participatory performances and events. Experience shows they tend to reject and question this kind of events on the grounds that they do not have the same value as those created and performed exclusively by professionals. Traditional audiences do not acknowledge the genuine efforts and end up sabotaging these projects and activities by not showing up. Some people contend that it really does not matter if these spectators attend or not community-run or participatory activities, because it is precisely these audiences that currently have the widest array of shows at their disposal, and it is fair and healthy only for other audiences to have access to different artistic and creative proposals. Moreover, the shows traditional

audiences do attend are the ones which receive more funding both from public and private bodies. This stresses even further the conservatism of audiences and funding entities who tend to focus solely on the so-called “high culture” and renown artists and/or companies, neglecting new forms of expression and experimentation, as well as new and unestablished artists. Hence the need for public institutions to support this kind of proposals with long-term strategies, to avoid the ephemeral aspect seen in many participatory projects due to a lack of backing (including funding, promotion, venues, etc.).

It all revolves around “the possibility to construct meaning and social relations between Persons” (Antoine, 2011), where the most important connections are “between participant and professional, between intention and means, between decider and decided, between art and society” (Matarasso, 1997, p. 86). Adding to this is the fact that active participation events have a hard time promoting long-term engagement and creating a legacy – they tend to be just “experiences,” more often than not a one-off initiative for both organizers and participants. There are no real long-term objectives in terms of audience development, but only experimental, short-lived proposals. Sometimes, it seems that audience-building programs are just part of a social responsibility strategy or marketing ploy to meet the short-term goal of bringing “non-audiences” (minorities in risk of exclusion, senior citizens or children, for instance) to a given venue or festival – even just for once – to pretend that audiences are diverse and inclusive, by helping to reduce the culture gap through fostering attendance to cultural events.

This brings up the question of whether the right mechanisms are currently in place to assess participatory projects for future development. Positivist approaches based solely on statistics are clearly not enough. In many cases, such figures are only used to legitimize policies and actions, regardless of the actual outcomes and effects on the long-term development of the projects and programs in question. From the ideas expressed in the workshops, it is clear that artistic programming with active spectators entails many challenges. But probably one of the most important ones has to do with making the artistic community acknowledge that not everybody comes to or engages with the shows and festivals they have painstakingly conceived. Different audiences need different stimuli and it is okay if people prefer doing things other than going to the theater, museum, cinema or music venue. This does not imply that it is not legitimate to try to grow audiences and actively engage them, which is certainly a praiseworthy endeavor, or that these diverse audiences ought to be excluded from cultural activities. On the contrary, anybody - regardless of their social class, age, gender, religion or ethnicity - ought to have the time and resources (both cultural and economic) to be able to participate in such activities any way they want to, if, and only if, they are willing to do so.





# 5 Prosumer experiences in performing arts

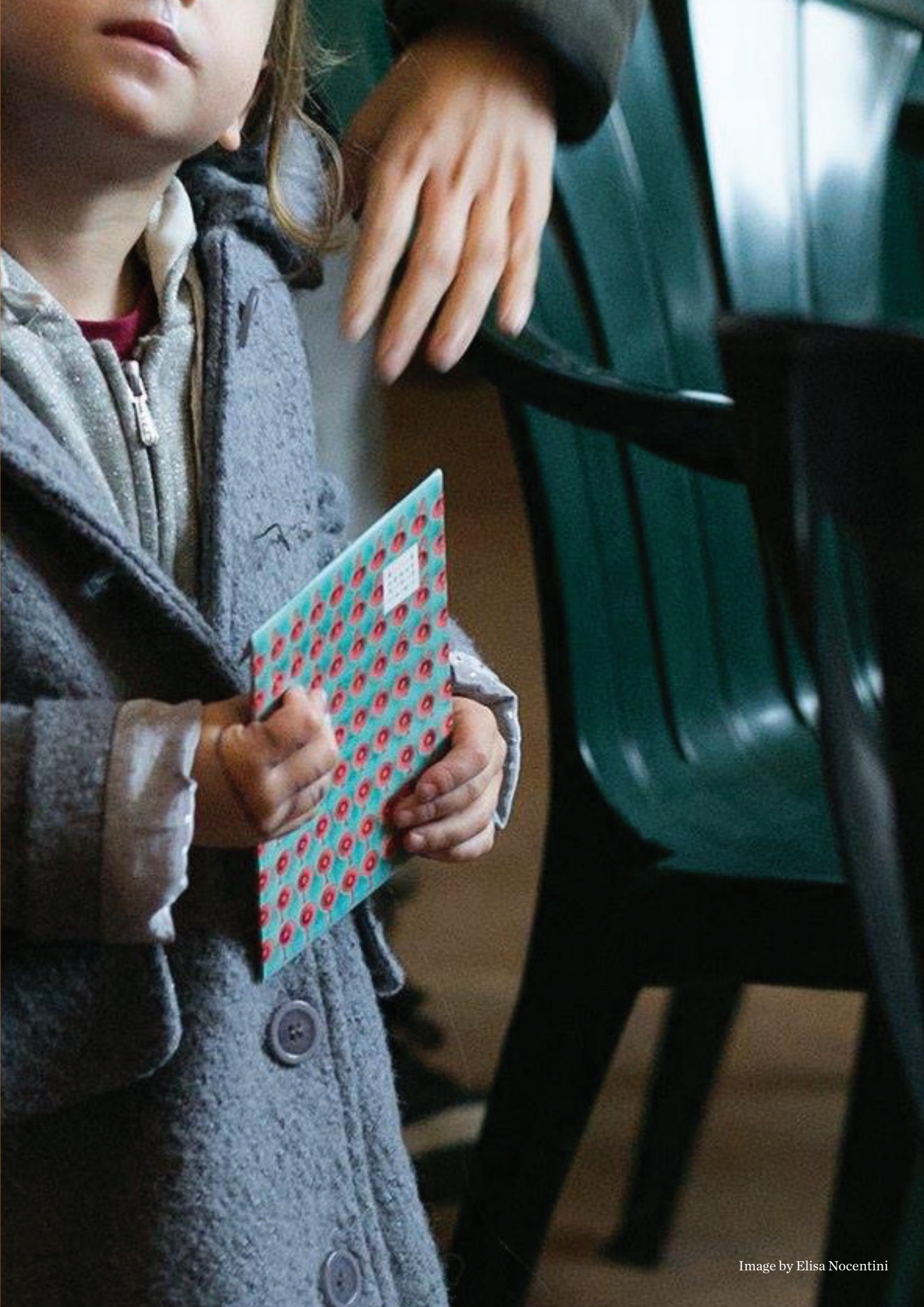
*Luisella Carnelli*

*Jaume Colomer*

*Giada Calvano*

*Janina Juárez Pinzón*





# Prosumer audiences in performing arts creation and production

Luisella Carnelli

## Premise

The term *prosumer* was coined by the futurologist Alvin Toffler - in his book *The Third Wave* - indicating someone who is both producer and consumer: “[p]eople who produce some of goods and services entering their own consumption” (Toffler, 1981, p. 282). *Prosumers* are participants of a “peer-to-peer” *participatory culture*, being actively involved in cultural exchanges; and a participatory culture is “a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement and strong support for creating and sharing creations. In a participatory culture, members also believe their contributions matter and feel some degree of connection to one another” (Jenkins, 2009, p. 11). This means that, in a participatory culture, the focus shifts from individuals to community, collaboration and engagement. The rise of digital media and the advent of web 2.0 triggered a cultural shift which gave people the opportunity to act more as producers than mere consumers. The consumer is no more a simple passive recipient of content, but is now a prosumer: an active actor who adds value to the production.

There is little research in arts on the process of *prosumption* or the possible blurring of boundaries between artists and audiences: by analyzing the emerging artistic practices, Nakajima (2011) picks up Bourriaud’s concept of *Relational art*, which underlines that art is a collective action and a game: art is thus socially constructed. We could say that a prosumer is conceived as a “creative user”, who combines creativity with consumption in the artistic context: the term itself highlights the creation of meaning and inclusive communal logic during production and consumption activities (Chen, 2012). A creative user is “anyone whose participation in an interactive artwork, installation or performance involves a level of interaction that results in them creating any form or content that did not previously exist without their input” (Lander, 2011, p. 177). This broad understanding encompasses all levels of interaction, but it is important to note that there are different types of interaction that leads to different levels of creativity. This collaborative and productive engagement view engenders the concept of creative users as prosumers/producers of art: undeniably, humans’ creativity takes advantage from bottom-up participation in the production and consumption of the artwork. Whenever artists invite (real or virtual) participants to interact with them and with the topic of the artwork, to express their opinion about an issue or to remix the content; audiences



are called to reflect on their individual meanings, tastes and values, raising the question of who belongs in the field and who makes the art.

However, the notions of participatory audience practices concern various levels of involvement, and artistic experimentation with digital technologies leads to a new understanding of the active role of audiences and eventually their impact on the artists' creative process. These notions are aligned to the approach of relational aesthetics that, according to Bourriaud (2002b), considers art as strongly interrelated with the social context in which it is produced and, therefore, represents a shift of focus from the artistic practice to the beehive of inter-human relations. The artwork itself and the performance can be read as a work in progress and not as a static object which is completely unrelated to the audience and the broader social context.

Digital technologies and social networks accelerate this process: social networks allow people to collaborate in innovative ways, which blurs even more the boundary between consumer and producer (Grinnel, 2009): digital is part of our reality and it should be considered an additional means for empowering the creative process in arts. Because of Web 2.0, many mobile internet-ready devices are now on the market. The use of Wi-Fi networks led to a society where online communication has become an everyday occurrence. The level of interaction is strictly related to the kind of content generated, and the kind of interaction involved: therefore, it is directly related to the technology used (and what technology allows to) and the aptitude of users/audiences. This means that not all users are prosumers, in the way that some people would only be classified as simple users, without any kind of "active" interaction.

## A digital gap or a mind-set gap?

Digital engagement in creativity processes depends on the degree of commitment and the technological framework adopted: what can I do? In which way can I interact? How can I add content – and which kind of content? How can I mix and remix my content with contents added by other users? for what aims? etc. The digital environment chosen is paramount, as audiences may feel excluded from being engaged with digital cultural products due to a lack of prior knowledge of simple interface mechanisms or a general low degree of digital literacy: "we must gain a deeper understanding of this aspect of our audiences, meeting them within a comfortable space in order to playfully encourage their deeper engagement and crossing of thresholds into new inclusive territory" (Saldanha et al., 2015, p.13). This implies that active engagement via digital means ought to be artistically led but audience-centric, participatory and socially inclusive, combining a digital engagement activity with marketing and mediation strategies.

All we do via digital must be strictly integrated with what we do in real life: organizations need to integrate digital into their strategies and mission statements, to take ownership of Digital Audience Development and Engagement, and to take care of the process of involving both audiences and artists. In the same way, the performing arts sector needs to familiarise better with existing and shared digital platforms, and methods for disseminating, sharing, remixing, interacting. Performing arts organisations are therefore called to acknowledge and welcome the benefits of using digital for audience development practices: Digital in Audience Development strategies gives not only the possibility to explore new ways in communication and advertising (through social media and the Internet), but also in the area of audience analysis (big data, digital social data, ticketing, profiling, behavioural tracking, etc.) and in the domain of “augmented” virtual and interactive / peer-to-peer experiences. The use and understanding of digital tools amongst Performing Arts Organisations are still not homogeneous. This affects the way audiences perceive organizations themselves and their activities in terms of digital positioning. Digital can be seen as a useful tool to break barriers down and to reach more diverse audiences – overcoming prejudices, myths and preconceptions.

Digital engagement (whether aimed or not at generating mutual interaction that can flow into a co-creative process) must always combine with the non-digital, as engagement is the main objective behind the use of digital technology in culture: digital is not important in itself, as cultural content is the key. And this is the starting point for the Be SpectACTive! project too. The web platform is conceived to be a digital arena for debating and deepening the relationship between artists and creative audiences, but also widening and diversifying potential audiences. The Be SpectACTive! web platform for video-dance is an online space where artists present and discuss their creative research with both real and virtual audiences. The web platform is perceived as a “comfort zone”, where audiences and artists can meet, discuss, interact, find new ways to deepen the topic of the performance set-up. Images, video, pictures, text messages are mixed up in order to find easy and intuitive ideas for developing the relationship and engaging with audiences and users: artists’ stimuli became the starting point to develop co-creative solutions, offering diversified opinions, feedback, suggestions and new ideas for the artists themselves. The web platform is a hybrid model for producing and circulating, where a mix of top-down and bottom-up forces determine how a material is shared across and among users in far more participatory ways. Henry Jenkins (1992) coined the term “participatory culture” to describe the cultural production and social interactions of fan communities, initially seeking for a way to differentiate the activities of fan from other forms of spectatorship. As the concept has evolved, it now refers to “a range of different groups deploying media production and distribution to serve their collective interests” (Jenkins et al., 2013, p. 2). A large offer of online communication tools has arisen to facilitate informal and instantaneous sharing.



*“However, while new tools have proliferated the means by which people can circulate material, word-of-mouth recommendations and the sharing of media content are impulses that have long driven how people interact with each other (...). We must all be careful not to suppose that a more participatory means of circulation can be explained solely (or even primarily) by this rise of technological infrastructure, even as these new technologies play a key role in enabling this shift” (idem, pp. 2-4).*

A digital positioning is not enough to enable sharing, remixing, co-creation of contents, but it rather suggests that the potential of digital media provide a catalyst for re-thinking possible interactions and dialogue aimed at generating new and different contents. Henry Jenkins uses the term “spreadability” to describe “these increasingly pervasive forms of media circulation. ‘Spreadability’ refers to the potential – both technical and cultural – for audiences to share content for their own purposes” (idem, p. 3).

Jenkins’ theory can be seen as an evolution of Gladwell’s, focused on the concept of “stickiness” (Gladwell, 2000). For Gladwell, stickiness consists of those aspects of media texts that engender deep audience engagement results and might motivate users to share what they learned with others. According to this point of view, the audience presence can be directed into a specific online space in order to generate “impressions” (how many people see a piece of media) and spend time on a given website or platform. This means that the focus here is on monitoring quantitative data in an easy and countable way, rather than on the ways audiences want to and do experience online contents. But this “destination viewing” often conflicts with both the dynamic browsing experience of individual Internet users and, more importantly, with the circulation of content through the social connections of audience members.

This was the first approach adopted when Be SpectACTive! set up its web platform, which was conceived as an interactive and dynamic web platform for hosting videos, texts, images, audio, etc. Indeed, when the EU project was developed, blogs were flourishing and the so-called “blogosphere” was one of the most futuristic strategies to make the interaction effective and to find ways to create a common interactive opportunity of mutual exchange, allowing audiences to become creative and to dynamically interact with artists in a mutual way on a specific website.

But two years is a long time in technology. If during the “blogosphere era” users could stand a non-instantaneous feedback loop, and the mode of interaction was similar to e-mails exchanges; nowadays the feedback loop needs immediate responses. Besides, Millennials (also known as Generation Y, Generation Me and Echo Boomers) do not want filters, tend to form communities, are technology addicted, use a mix of social media to communicate their personality (Instagram for creativity; Twitter to find information; Facebook to show their private life; Snapchat to show off), and have a

decreasing attention span: it means that artists (in our case) have a very short lapse of time to gain and maintain their attention. In order to not distort the essence of the content and process, “re-compartmentalizing” and re-designing relationships by taking into consideration new time spans becomes a real challenge (it is what has already happened with YouTubers). This means that a static environment is not always the right context for digital interaction: information, data and images overlap; so, we need to find easy and immediate ways to catch the attention.

The stickiness model, focused on considering isolated audience members, becomes reductive, if considering the value of social connections and interactions among individuals being amplified by the presence of social media platforms. Not only must this approach consider quantitative data (breadth and frequency in which content travels), but also consider the way media contents are used by audiences and the way this interaction may affect the creative process of artists.

When contents are put in a specific virtual space, audiences should be guided for an indefinite time span, offering them limited and controlled ways to “customize” and “manipulate” content within a well-defined structure. A “spreadable” conception should focus on creating media texts that various audiences may want to share for different purposes, thus inviting people to shape the right context for these materials.

Furthermore, audiences 2.0 are more collectively and individually literate about online social networking; they see social networks as part of their real life; they increasingly interact through sharing meaningful bits of media content: social networks are perceived as safe places. This new societal condition, which is highly affected by digital computing and mobile networking technology, is defined as “networked culture”. However, this trend is not generated only by the development of new technologies: what happened in a pre-digital world occurs now with exponentially greater speed and scope, thanks to the potentialities of online social tools, but content is still the key.

*“In this networked culture, we cannot identify a single cause for why people spread material. People make series of socially embedded decisions when they choose to spread any media text: Is the content worth engaging with? Is it worth sharing with others? Might it be of interest to specific people? Does it communicate something about me or my relationship with those people? What is the best platform to spread it through? Should it be circulated with a particular message attached? Even if no additional commentary is appended, however, just receiving a story or video from someone else imbues a range of new potential meanings in the text. As people listen, read, or view shared content, they think not only – often, not even primarily – about what the producers might have meant but about what the person who shared it was trying to communicate”. (Jenkins et al., 2013, p. 13)*

The way of interaction and the means to build spaces and frameworks for common creation are changing. The way interaction is built must be well planned and followed step by step, containing an adequate welcome for all the actors involved, together with interactive tutorials and precise and defined goals, setting the reasons for interacting. What is crucial here is adapting the model to the typology of users. An example of how to incrementally implement a virtual space is the following:

- *first attendees* need welcome messages, clear explanation of the goals, interactive tutorials;
- *new users* need clear rules, easy goals, easy and diversified ways to interact, immediate feedback.
- *users by habit* need always new content, activities, feedback, to feel involved in a dynamic community, rewards (not necessarily material);
- *leaders or evangelists* need exclusive and premium contents or contents that could be available “if you”.

It is a long-term process in virtual as in real life, that needs a high level of commitment and a strong collaboration between either the artistic and the managerial/organizational sides, through the mediation of a creative team. But we cannot expect virtual interaction to produce the same type of contents as those produced during physical interaction. What is important is not the creation of astounding platforms, but the process itself: the way of building up a sense of belonging of a community, that responds to the desire to be the centre of attention, the feeling of empowerment (no matter the way) and personal satisfaction, the idea of being involved in a journey (not only personal, but also collective), the opportunity to have fun.

For these reasons, the tool used is not important in itself, even if it could be more practical to use already existing platforms, where the user feels comfortable because the rules of the game are known, and because each social media can respond in the right way to a specific need. In this digital environment, what is strategic is the way artists build up the relationship with users. First, in order to build up a trusting relationship, artists need to be clear about the objectives and legacy and engage ethically and authentically. The synergy between artists and art organizations is paramount, in terms of facilitating and conveying creativity and as enrichers of cultural and artistic meaning: what artists do in the digital space must mirror the attitude of the real-life artistic approach. We must keep in mind that organizations need to engage all the time and develop long-term artistic exchange relationships via digital media too. Developing a holistic and long-term digital proposition is an opportunity for using digital to promote public understanding and enjoyment of performing arts and to reinforce audience engagement, providing authentic insight to artists: it can

be a strategic win-win approach. But to achieve this, digital will need to become a “dimension of everything” and not just a postiche or imposed activity. If we want to create an open *habitus* and a community of practice, there is the need for artists and producers to create a safe environment both for artists and audiences, trying to carefully mediate the relationship among them and with legacy in mind. Finally, if we want to engage spectators, we need to treat audiences with care, respect and authenticity, building up a playful environment and using tools and platforms in which they feel comfortable.



# Different ways of engaging co-audiences in performing arts projects

*Jaume Colomer*

Several authors consider that one of the most relevant effects of new digital technologies on arts and culture audiences is that a part of them is asking more and more for a direct relationship with creators, producers, promoters and planners through 2.0 communication. Audiences do not only call for a permanent dialogue, they are also willing to get involved and participate in the definition and management of value propositions and to commit.

## Increasing expectations of interaction and interconnection from cultural consumers

In their book titled *How to make sense of Audience Engagement*<sup>8</sup>, Alan Brown and Rebecca Ratzkin (2011) argue that audience engagement in artistic proposals aims at maximizing the impact of the latter. They acknowledge that this is not a new idea, nevertheless, many cultural organizations are currently giving more attention to their audiences as “a response to broad social trends and changes in the preferences and tastes of cultural consumers. Expectations for interactivity and interconnectivity, fueled by social media, are the ‘new normal’. As a growing number of consumers demand more and more intense, multi-sensory, and customizable experiences, arts groups find it more and more difficult to satisfy everyone with one experience” (Brown & Ratzkin, 2011, p. 10). The authors also consider that “(t)he types of kinetic and social experiences idealized by the younger, over-stimulated generation of cultural consumers have diverged substantially from the more conventional experiences idealized by older audiences” (Ibid).

## Engagement: the key factor

The word *engagement* used by the abovementioned authors can be translated into involvement, commitment, participation, etc. Some conceptual considerations should be made on the meaning of the different words used and the sequentiality among these. The verb “to involve” comes from Latin *in-volvere* which means “to envelop” or “to roll into”. The verbal form “to get involved” means to get in or to take

8 Commissioned by The San Francisco Foundation, translated into Spanish and published by Asimétrica with the title *Implica a tu público*.

part in something (an issue, a group, a project). Involvement or engagement can be understood, thus, as sense of belonging when there is a match between values or goals of the group or project and subjective values of the individual.

Involvement or sense of belonging can be the prelude to commitment. Feeling part of a local community, for example, may result in a disposition to commit in its development. It is true that without this feeling or disposition is hard to commit, although this is not a sufficient condition to develop commitment. Commitment implies some sort of formalization of the involvement, whether to oneself or to others, and is nourished and implemented by means of participation, although active participation resulting from commitment and responsive participation as observer or consumer are not the same thing.

To explain the difference between involvement and commitment, Australian tycoon and philanthropist Richard Pratt made this phrase famous: “In a meal of bacon and eggs, the chicken is involved, the pig is committed”. The comparison may sound unfortunate as it can lead to wrongly assume that commitment requires self-sacrifice when, in most cases, is an enriching personal experience.

## Citizens’ willingness to commit

It should be reflected upon whether citizens, especially the youngest ones<sup>9</sup>, are willing to commit in the current context. French psychoanalyst Tony Anatrella (2003) considers that the youth of today are similar to the previous generations. In fact, they are capable of generosity, supportive and committed to causes they care about, even though they have less social references and sense of belonging compared with their predecessors. They are individualistic and want to make their own choice, without taking account of the wealth of values, ideas or common laws.

The author argues that contemporary education produces dependent beings since adults let young people want for anything and have induced them to believe they need to fulfill every wish. Furthermore, longer lifespan leads to assume that individuals have all the time to get prepared for a committed life and currently there are young people who indefinitely postpone their obligations and commitments concerning transition to adult life. Since our society encourages children to act like teenagers when they are not psychologically prepared, the result is a shorter childhood and earlier transition to juvenility.

Other authors consider that today’s youth have a playful approach to life and are

<sup>9</sup> Especially the so-called Millennials, whose members were born between the early 1980s and the early 2000s.

unable to feel a sense of commitment in several fields. They live in contingency more easily and intensely rather than opting for the constancy and continuity of a life built over time. They have a growing interest in commitment to concrete actions, volunteering and social change, yet within modest limits, however this commitment tends to be occasional and limited in time and purpose. American sociologist Kathleen Shaputis (2003) described Millennials as the “Boomerang” or “Peter Pan” generation, since these are perceived as eager to delay some rites of passage into adulthood for longer periods than previous generations. Young people’s reluctance to compromise in the medium term explains the average advanced age of many cultural institutions and the failures of several engagement strategies for cultural audiences. Are young people the only ones who are unwilling to make commitments? Or is it a matter of dominant values in our current society?

## The culture of immediacy

According to a study carried out by British broadband provider *Talk Talk* (“Brits lose temper”, 2009), people last an average of eight minutes and 22 seconds before they lose their temper. Many youths easily lose their temper waiting for the website to load or holding on the phone for a couple of minutes. Several studies confirm that we have become more impatient than our predecessors, mainly because everything turns easier and faster thanks to new digital technologies. Various authors consider that urgency and immediacy are dominant values in today’s society and that we lose our temper mainly because of the underestimation of time, effort, will and commitment, and because of the frustration if immediate result is not achieved. Even eliminating the word ‘no’ in children’s and teen’s education make them unable to bear frustration and, later, turns them into impatient adults.

The culture of immediacy shaped the new Generation Z, i.e. those born in the years 1993-2000, whose distinctive characteristic is being born after the coming of Internet, mobile phones and other digital devices (White, 2015). This generation of citizens is multi-tasking and, therefore, used to visual and auditory stimulation and able to handle a great amount of information; nevertheless, they are unable to keep concentration for a long time, as they need to change activity quickly so as not to get bored. The culture of immediacy results in a lack of interest and ability to make sustained commitments in the medium and long term, despite the willingness to make occasional commitments (as demonstrated by the emergence of crowdfunding). Being part of a community of spectators engaged in the sustained development of a scenic project is perhaps something that concerns only the “dissonant citizens” who sail the seas other than the dominant values<sup>10</sup>.

10 In accordance with the model of “cultural dissonance” proposed by Bernard Lahire (2004).

## Diversity of interests, forms and contexts of engagement

Since both “dissonant” and “consonant” audiences pursue the satisfaction of diverse needs and wants in the artistic experience<sup>11</sup>, the willingness to get involved will take many forms. On the one hand, there are audiences willing to get involved in a scenic project on a sustained basis, while others prefer to do it only occasionally as an immediate response to a trigger (e.g. a crowdfunding campaign). The willingness to get involved will thus have different temporal scopes. On the other hand, the involvement and commitment to participate can be developed in different fields of activity. These can be grouped as follows:

- In the creation process of scenic proposals (co-creation);
- In the production of shows (co-production);
- In the programming of festivals and venues (co-programming);
- In the promotion and influencing activities (co-influencing).

We can further distinguish among different degrees or levels of engagement:

- Low engagement: to take part as observers or listeners in complementary activities such as briefing sessions, debates, open days, awards ceremonies, presentations of the season’s programming, etc.
- Medium engagement: to volunteer on an occasional basis, to participate in a production as an extra, in a workshop or in an after-show, etc.
- High engagement: to participate in a co-creation process, to be part of a programming committee, of a distribution or promotion team, to act as a mediator to assist new spectators, etc.

The combination of levels, fields of activity and temporal scopes will lead to a great variety of modes of involvement, which have to be borne in mind when providing a platform for participation to spectators.

## Turning audiences into co-audiences

The great diversity of forms of participation forces to reconsider the concept of “prosumers” (consumers who collaborate in the production of the scenic experience), since the definition is limiting. Hence, considering audiences as consumers offers a

<sup>11</sup> In this regard, Jacques Nantel (2003) has defined various categories of “benefits sought “ in a chapter of the book *Marketing de las artes y la cultura*.



narrow view, which is market-driven (developed by traditional marketing) and thus does not fit with a public service approach. It is undeniable that the introduction of the word “prosumer” provided a bigger picture, defying the previous idea of spectators as mere consumers or customers. Collaborative marketing considers that spectators bring about value and do not only consume it. This approach turns the value chain into a virtuous cycle, where audiences represent an operational stage increasing the value contributed by creators, producers and promoters. To avoid reductionism, we can speak of “*co-audiences*” to refer to audiences who are willing to get involved and take part in the development of a scenic project in different areas, degrees and temporalities, beyond their basic function of spectators who share the proposals of creators and performers. Therefore, the roles of creator-spectator become dynamic, reversible and interchangeable.

Collaborative marketing also considered that the stakeholders of a performing arts project can turn into a community of interest. Initially, a map of stakeholders is no more than a conglomerate of interested parties. In order to become a community of interest, there should be interaction among the parties, participation and consensus in decision-making should be pursued and the fulfillment of benefits sought should be secured, according to the models of good governance. Promoting audiences’ commitment and participation in the creation, production and programming process of performing arts leads to thinking about various aspects presented here below.

## On the goals of audiences’ engagement and participation

Many considerations can be made around audience engagement:

- a. Increasing audience involvement in the artistic proposals results in a progressive development of the paradigm of cultural democracy, despite the passive role of most of the performing arts players and public institutions. Technological development is the main democratizing factor.
- b. Increasing audience involvement transforms the traditional, sequential value chain into a community of interest, that facilitates multiple interactions among the parties and where the roles of creator-audience are dynamic and reversible.
- c. This reduces the gap and increases the porosity between professionals and non-professionals.

- d. Audience engagement and participation lead to empowerment. The possibility to share the creative or managerial decision-making process with audiences may generate resistance in creators, producers and programmers, since they are required to renounce to their solitary exercise of decision-making. Beyond a real desire to share, it requires a joint learning process.
- e. The process of fostering audiences' engagement, participation and empowerment adds the educational function to the traditional functions of the management team of a performing arts project.

## On the benefits for audiences

A consultation carried out in Catalonia in 2016 (Bonet et al., 2016), involving spectators who are actively engaged in different areas of performing arts activity, demonstrates that the participatory experience brings about multiple benefits in terms of effective use of leisure time, contribution towards the improvement of social reality, learning the scenic languages and heritage, deeper knowledge of the sector, direct knowledge of creators' activity, etc. Spectators highlighted, in particular, intangible benefits. None of the spectators considered the participatory experience unsatisfactory.

## On the reluctance of managers of performing arts venues

Most of the managers of performing arts venues and festivals do not promote actions to foster audience participation and empowerment, or in case they do so, they demand low engagement and activities rarely involve empowerment processes. This observation implies that, maybe, managers do not feel able to pursue this type of activities or are not interested in sharing power. Or, maybe, they do not think about potential benefits.

Few performing arts venues and festivals promote actions to foster audience participation, beyond presentations of the programme, volunteering activities in operational and promotional activities, or training activities like after-show debates. Cultural practitioners who promote real empowerment processes are actually much fewer than those claiming to pursue actions to foster participation. The concept of "participation" is vague and polysemic: it refers either to spectators attending a performance or a complementary activity, or to those who are members of audience associations or a programming committee.

## On fostering engagement processes

Creators, producers and programmers should reflect on the added value deriving from audience engagement and participation and, if deemed necessary, enhance engagement and participation processes in two ways:

- a. On the one hand, offering spectators opportunities to take part in some areas of the performing arts process, actively participating in the decision-making (from giving opinions to co-directing).
- b. On the other hand, fostering learning of participatory values, knowledge and skills among spectators, through practices enhancing their level of involvement.

A reflection is needed on the responsibility of local cultural policymakers in developing audience engagement strategies, as well as the role of the media, especially public-owned ones, in fostering co-influencing activities of performing arts proposals.

In conclusion, the time has come to move on from a performing arts management model based on the paradigm of cultural democratization (which aims at facilitating the access to consumption of excellent practices) to a model founded on the paradigm of cultural democracy (which promotes active participation of citizens in their personal and communitarian development processes). It seems that in the new digital environment, most citizens are willing to shift to the new model, even if their involvement in concrete actions remains occasional. All it takes now are cultural policymakers willing to go this direction.

# Prosumer experiences in performing arts. The debate with professionals

*Giada Calvano and Janina Suárez Pinzón*

## Premise

The digital/technological tsunami of our time along with broader economic and social transformations have brought about seismic change in several aspects of contemporary societies, one of these concerning traditional ways of creation and consumption. The post-industrial binary interpretation of production and consumption as distinct processes recently made way for a new understanding of these phenomena, which are now seen as interrelated and part of a continuum. This shift led to the adoption of a neologism – *prosumption* – that could better reflect and define the occurring change. The new term gained recognition with *The Third Wave* by Alvin Toffler (1981), a popular writer and futurologist who made the first significant contribution to conceptualizing prosumption. The author defined it as “production by consumers” and predicted the coming merging roles of producers and consumers. In the wake of Toffler’s work, numerous scholars started to create a set of similar concepts – like co-creation (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004) or DIY (Watson & Shove, 2008) – albeit prosumption remains the most popular one. A recent interesting definition of the phenomenon is provided by George Ritzer (2014), who understands prosumption as the “interrelated process of production and consumption” (p. 3), thus giving less importance to simultaneity (production and consumption can happen at different times) and rethinking production and consumption as sub-types of prosumption. Whatever the interpretation, the assumption of the term brings about methodological concerns regarding the question of borders between the actions of producing and consuming.

As was to be expected, this emerging vision had vast impact on a wide range of sectors, including performing arts. In the arts, prosumption results in a “possible blurring of boundaries between artists (i.e. producers) and viewers or audiences (i.e. consumers) of artworks” (Nakajima, 2011, p. 550), thus defying the romantic myth of the artists as the sole creators. The rise of information and communication technologies has further accelerated this process, especially since the advent of Web 2.0 and the consequent creation of “participatory web cultures” (Beer & Burrows, 2010), although the practice of art has always been a process of prosumption in a wide sense (Ritzer, 2010). Nevertheless, it is in the digital era, and particularly since



the 1990s, that the focus has centered on prosumption as a key process of artistic practice. However, this move from production, then to consumption, and finally to prosumption generated skepticism in the cultural field, where clear distinctions between artists and audiences are still foregrounded.

This theoretical premise has been considered necessary to introduce the topic and provide a framework for the object of analysis of this work, namely the two workshop sessions titled *Prosumer experiences in performing arts*, held on November 22-23, 2016 in Barcelona, in occasion of the Be SpectACTive! Annual Conference. One workshop (PW7) was conducted in English by Luisella Carnelli and moderated by Dafne Muntanyola-Saura, whilst the other one (PW10) was held in Spanish by Jaume Colomer, with the moderation of Beatriu Daniel. The following pages will cover the main ideas, opinions and reflections emerged from the debates, offering a synthesis of similarities and differences in viewpoints.

## Knowing your audience: who are these “prosumers”?

A first glance at the general set-up of the workshop sessions highlights the different emphasis given by the two conductors to the offline and online dimensions of the phenomenon. Albeit both scholars encompass either the digital and the physical world as environments for prosumption, Luisella Carnelli stresses more the influence of virtual reality on shifting ways of seeing production/consumption, whilst prof. Colomer analyzes more in depth the role of prosumers in actual artistic practice and their position in the value chain. That said, in both cases conductors attempted a definition of prosumer, in order to establish a common ground for discussion with participants.

Professor Colomer opened the debate with some thoughts on the characteristics of prosumers, citing the work of professor Maria José Quero (University of Malaga) on collaborative marketing. In her work (Quero, 2013), the author highlights the shift from relationship to collaborative marketing, the latter providing for the involvement of all the stakeholders in generating and receiving value. This vision implies a new concept of audiences, which are no longer seen as passive consumers, but instead as engaging resources for cultural organizations. As an active part of the value chain, prosumers help, on the one hand, to reduce production costs, whilst cultural organizations, on the other hand, gain in terms of loyalty, commitment and economic and social profitability. According to Colomer, there are still audiences who are mainly interested in consumption, here intended as a passive experience (i.e. mere attendance to artistic performances). Nevertheless, a growing number of

spectators are willing to take active part in the dialogue with cultural institutions, thus activating processes of prosumption. With regard to this type of public, four different levels of audience/prosumers participation in performing arts activities have been identified:

- 1) Co-creation. In this phase, the creative process is opened up to participant engagement, hence allowing audience members to contribute something to an artistic experience curated by a professional artist (Brown et al., 2011). Interactive theatre and dance, often referred to as immersive or relational performance, are a growingly popular example of this. It has been demonstrated that co-creation experiences requiring a person to interact with professional artists and/or strangers provide the individual with a relational challenge and offer the opportunity to learn something about oneself (Novak-Leonard et al., 2014, p. 23).
- 2) Co-production. It relates to involving audiences in some or all different operational activities concerning the production of a performance (from planning rehearsals to staging).
- 3) Co-programming. The selection process of the program of a festival or the season of a theatre can be shared and debated with the local community or specific target audiences.
- 4) Co-influencing or co-promoting. The spectator here takes the role of “ambassador”, promoting the venue/festival activities and thus exercising an influence on other people’s perceptions and habits of consumption.

Starting from this classification, we can define “co-audiences” all participants to one or more of these phases, contributing with personal thoughts, aesthetics, needs and skills to the artistic and technical proposal.

During the workshop conducted by Luisella Carnelli, the debate on prosumers started by acknowledging the vast quantity of information made available by digital technologies. Nowadays, audiences are prepared and more informed than ever before, thanks to the virtually unlimited availability of free contents on the Internet. Nevertheless, participants’ opinions differ on whether “too much information” is making people more superficial, confused and overwhelmed, or instead allows to go deeper and specialize in the fields of interest. The key question seems to turn around what we do with this available information, bearing in mind that “information, after all, is

not knowledge (knowledge is information organized intelligently), and knowledge is not wisdom (wisdom is knowledge put to good use)” (Reed, 2014, p. 164).

Access to information raises other important issues related to the democratization of the arts. What participants questioned is not only the accessibility to tools for obtaining (and generating) information, but also the different degrees of access, as not all citizens have the same resources and background knowledge to find, decipher and create content. It is thus vital for cultural organizations to understand the digital environment, to question the sense of active involvement in our digital society and take into consideration all the issues emerging from the use of new technologies, if these want to engage with the new digital-savvy audiences.

## Every artist was once an amateur

“In our daily lives, the gap that separates production and consumption narrows each day. We can produce a musical work without being able to play a single note of music by making use of existing records” (Bourriaud, 2002a, p. 39). This sentence sums up in a few lines the debate around amateurism and professionalism, which affects every participatory project with non-professional communities and is embedded in the same definition of prosumer.

Amateurism as a fact is older than civilization: prehistoric forms of art, like the cave paintings at Lascaux, were made to satisfy some urge for individual expression rather than with any object of gain. However, amateurism as intended today is a concept rooted in the 19th century. With the advent of new technologies, traditional divides between professionals and amateurs have become less relative and more blurred. The confusion between professionalism and amateurism can be considered as a postmodern trait where ‘work’ and ‘leisure’ are predominantly characterized through de-differentiation (Rojek, 1993). Historical distinctions are losing power in a world where tools for artistic production are at the disposal of (almost) everyone – at least in Western countries. Just think about the disruptive change in the music industry when synthesizer technology was made easily available in the 70s and 80s and people without any previous knowledge of composition started to produce their own music. As a consequence, the amateur dimension of the creative process became the essence of many music genres, like the so-called “New Wave”. More examples of this shift were given during the workshop sessions. The recent phenomenon of Youtubers, for instance, seems to capture and perfectly embody this process, which is accelerated due to new forms and ways of digital interaction. The trend of creating

and sharing creative contents with other users on a Web platform is representative of contemporary societies and raises issues linked to quality and legitimacy of artistic production made by laypersons.

There seems to be a contradiction related to the perception of professional and amateur dimensions. On the one hand, participants acknowledge the importance of guaranteeing the quality of artistic production through a formal recognition of professionalism, usually provided by the educational system. That is, creative workers are legitimated by their background studies, the level of dedication (an artist dedicates every day to creation) and expertise on the ground, which should be recognized by the official artistic community and/or formal education systems. To illustrate this, a participant raised the question of the legitimacy and reliability of news written and spread in the Web by non-professional journalists.

On the other hand, it is commonly accepted that do-it-yourself practice is a distinctive trait of our contemporary societies and can lead anyway to excellent results. There is more: participants questioned the idea of the professional artist, claiming that the path to professionalization always started with personal passion and interest, thus amateur dedication. Indeed, the root of the word *amateur* is in the Latin word *amare* (to love): amateur is a person with an overpowering love of what is doing, and both professionals and laypeople share this visceral feeling. In the case of “co-audiences”, albeit amateurs, the dedication to participatory activities through volunteering borders on the professional and the effort and time devoted to actively engage with cultural venues or festivals give them some sort of legitimacy.

As previously stated, postmodern porosity makes it more difficult to create distinctions between work activity (associated with the professional) and leisure activity (associated with the amateur). This idea “looks past the ‘top-down’ model and calls for a model explaining a more reciprocal relationship, and one sharing a more mutual exchange of differences” (Egleston, 2009, p. 4). If amateurs can become professionals (for example, the current trend of fashion bloggers who turn their writing and/or photography hobbies into a paid job), it is true even the contrary: “[p]rofessionals in the arts, more often than those in science or sport, are forced into some sort of association with amateurs” (Stebbins, 1992, p. 115). In other words, professional artists need oftentimes to supplement their income with a steady paying career. Ironically, this situation forces them to produce work within the same leisure time structure as amateurs. The merging of leisure and work, amateur and professional dimensions is apparent in current practices of audience engagement and cultural mediators working in these processes should be able to deal with the porous nature of this shifting relationship.



## The importance of live experiences in a digital world (and viceversa)

Cultural organisations, especially those embarking on the demanding journey of audience engagement, can no longer ignore the digital dimension of interaction with consumers. The first step in this direction is surely getting an understanding of the panorama of digital users. One of the main challenges currently faced by arts institutions is to reach, dialogue and engage with the younger age groups and, more generally, with the so-called “Generation C”. Generation C - where the letter “C” stands for Content, Connectivity, Community and Creativity (Trendwatching.com, 2004) - is the growing technology-led subset of the total population, whose members are characterised by a constant demand for connectivity. They are usually, but not exclusively, digital natives, exceptionally tech-savvy and share data on the fly. Connected consumers of the new Generation C claims a more active role in the conversation with brands and organizations, which are expected to be transparent and demonstrate greater involvement in social transformation (Morin, 2017). In order to develop a culture of collaboration, organizations should motivate the new digital generations to get involved in the transformation of their structure, challenging the traditional top-down relationship. Motivation, fulfillment and sense of belonging are the keywords to create a connection with young people of the new generation.

Upon acknowledging the importance for organizations to know their online target groups for the aims of creating meaningful relationships, it is now important to understand how to take (potential) audiences off their online dimension and bring them to active participation in the real life. Indeed, albeit we live immersed in the digital experience, the live dimension remains of vital importance for every social interaction. Some encouraging news for arts and culture is that younger generations prefer to purchase experiences over tangible objects. A recent research carried out by Eventbrite (2014) shows that 3 out of 4 Millennials (ages 18-34) would rather spend their money to buy an experience rather than something desirable. Furthermore, even though Millennials rely heavily on technology, they are the strongest believers in face-to-face interaction to promote positive change: 75% feel that participating in or attending a live event is more impactful than taking action online (e.g. signing a petition), compared to just 55% of those aged more than 35. Four in five (79%) Millennials report that attending live events makes them feel more connected to other people, the community, and the world and 74% said that attending a live event has been more successful at expanding their perspective than just reading about something online. Clear exemplification of this is “festivalization” (Bennett et al., 2014), a trend which registers an exponential growth in the number and type of festivals all over the world, as this format seems to fulfill the needs of audiences for immersive live experience.

In the specific case of participatory practice in the performing arts, active and face-to-face participation of audiences should be motivated not only by its social and experiential benefits, but also by the potential impact in terms of personal learning and development. The learning and exchange process activated during this kind of activities is one of the most valuable outcomes, both from the point of view of the artists and of the active participants. In the museum sector, Nina Simon (2010, p. 274) talks about the notion of “radical trust” to obtain authentic audience commitment within a participatory planning based on “scaffolding”, where the relationships between artists, organisations and audiences are more equal and fluid. Moreover, she points out that organizations implementing co-creation projects must have confidence in the participants’ skills and motivations, and should want them to make contributions and take the lead.

To successfully manage engagement both online and offline, cultural organisations should thus understand and gain a real insight of either the digital and live environments; identify their (current and/or potential) audiences, their forms/habits of interaction and motivations to participation; and use the right tools and channels to create the most meaningful connection possible with the desired target groups. And, finally, remember that digital technologies should not be anything more than a (useful and fundamental) tool for stimulating participation in the real world.





A group of people are seated around a long table in a meeting room, engaged in discussion. The scene is overlaid with a large, semi-transparent orange rectangle. The text is written in white serif font over the orange area.

# 6 The organizational challenge of audience development and engagement

*Alessandro Bollo*

*Bruno Maccari*

*Kinga Szemessy*





# Participatory cultural management: perspectives and challenges

*Alessandro Bollo*

Undeniably, the cultural sector performs in times of seismic shifts. Social and economic insecurity has made more obvious the incapacity of old paradigms and models to lead policies, institutions and people into an uncertain scenario. Wide-ranging social transformations and ubiquitous digital ecosystems impact on the way people produce and participate in culture, on their claims for more personalized and authentic experiences, on the need for collaborative spaces and opportunities. At the same time, public funding shrinks and the social legitimacy of culture as an investment is questioned. Many cultural institutions have begun to rethink their role, to find new relevance, to explore new ways for pursuing economic sustainability.

In recent years, cultural policies at the European level, and even at national and local levels, have encouraged the cultural sector to adopt audience-centric approaches, to enlarge and diversify audiences. Notably, the Creative Europe programme (2014-2020) identifies Audience Development as one of the main goals for cultural policies and one of the primary challenges for the different cultural eco-systems. This is the background to take into consideration if we want to understand the reasons that urge cultural organisations to experiment with adapted management models, to redefine roles, competencies and skills, to give people a more active role.

For reflecting on the main institutional and organisational challenges and implications that stem from this evolving scenario, two main concrete references have been taken into account in this contribution: the Be SpectACTive! project and the recent study commissioned by the EU Commission *Study on Audience Development. How to place audiences at the centre of the cultural organisations* (Bollo et al., 2017)<sup>12</sup>. Both the Be SpectACTive! project and the study proved extremely useful in interpreting the nature of changes, opportunities and limits that occur when cultural organisations move towards more audience-centric approaches. It is not irrelevant to remember that these new approaches touch, of course, different dimensions: institutional and organisational relationships with artists, and decidedly with citizens/users directly.

12 *Study on audience development – How to place audiences at the centre of cultural organisations* is a study by Fondazione Fitzcarraldo, together with Culture Action Europe, ECCOM and Intercult, as a consortium, developed in the framework of the Creative Europe programme. For more information: [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/node/228\\_it](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/node/228_it)



One of the first considerations is about the importance of adopting an organisation-wide commitment and a profound change in the mindset for developing successful Audience Development (AD) and Audience Engagement (AE) approaches. AD should not be confined only to one specific department or function. For many cultural institutions, one of the great challenges is to create horizontal and flexible teams that take part and contribute in the early stages of a specific project, approaching the target from different perspectives.

A stronger collaboration and coordination between the different internal functions have to be developed: particularly between the artistic direction, the programming, the marketing and the education departments. In the cases that have been considered in the EU Study, some performing arts organisations have created horizontal and inter-departmental units or a “flexible team” for aligning artistic, organisational, marketing and education competencies during the concept and the implementation of projects that have to dedicate particular attention to audience aspects. Maison des Métallos – an interdisciplinary cultural centre based in Paris – can be considered a paradigmatic example of a progressive reshaping of an organisation, in order to maximise audience development strategies. In 2013, the organisation chart was reinforced with a new function, the Chief of Audiences (*Responsable du Pôle Publics* in French and there are just a couple of theatres in France with the same role), whose role is to develop and coordinate all activities related to audiences, linking all the frontline tasks – from reception and assistance to bar service – with the background ones – outreach staff – and the artistic ones, programming specific activities before and after the events. Although artistic directors select artists and productions in total autonomy, these are always productions with a strong link to audiences, so the Chief of Production and Mediation and the Chief of Audiences work with artists not only to define all production-related issues and practicalities, but also to plan and build with them the mediation related activities: meetings, workshops, and whatever can be done with and by the artists to mediate with different kinds of audiences.

The Point – a cultural organisation based in Eastleigh (UK), that offers a mix of contemporary dance and performance, contemporary theatre, aerial performances, events for families, film and comedy from British and international artists - has experimented with a “creative team” (Creative Producer, Executive Director, Drama Development Manager, Dance Development Manager, Marketing Manager and Theatre Programmer) that develops the professional programme alongside Audience Development initiatives, linked to both the programme and wider creative

learning and outreach practices. Similarly, New Wolsey Theatre – a mid-scale theatre in Ipswich (UK) with a mixed performance programme that combines in-house and touring productions - has undergone recent change in the structure of the team, putting all front-of-house functions into one flexible team: reception, sales, catering, marketing, relationships, designed in “a matrix way”. Mercat de les Flors, a cultural centre devoted to dance and to arts of movement in Barcelona, has developed horizontal relationships between Education, Creation and the so-called “Parallel Activities”. This means, for example, that educational activities or those associated with shows are not born out of a fixed programme, but instead can be planned autonomously, yet always communicating with the artistic creation processes.

To reinforce the importance of pursuing a stronger collaboration between internal functions, many studies demonstrate that audience engagement activities conceived by a single organisational area (education, marketing, outreach) result to be less effective in pursuing audience and institutional goals.

Leadership plays a crucial role in activating, promoting and sustaining Audience Development approaches, particularly in the first stages (“recognising when change is needed”). The EU study confirms the importance for leaders and staff to create clarity, consensus, and internal buy-in around the audience-engagement initiative’s objectives, highlighting the role of the staff in implementing it. Moreover, some studies (among others, the research findings related to the “ADESTE - Audience Developer: Skills and Training in Europe” EU project<sup>13</sup>) argue that in the audience development/engagement area, leadership should be “distributed” in the whole organisation. This means that, despite the depth of AD knowledge, skills and competencies would necessarily vary between roles, every employee should be aware at least of what the AD approach implies, according to the theory of change of A. Jackson (2015). In fact, Jackson argues that an organisational approach is more effective, because it will “ensure and embody distributed leadership, ensure congruence with corporate strategy, avoid tokenism, [...] manage clashes between new and existing audience members, integrate digital and live perspectives, avoid duplication and stop-start processes” (Jackson, 2015, p. 11).

Digital engagement makes things even more complex, insofar as it requires to embed digital competences in the organisation and to align these with the other key functions. Under this perspective, digital means, in Audience Development strategies, the opportunity to explore new possibilities, not only in communication and advertising (through social media and Internet), but also in the area of audience analysis (big data, digital social data, ticketing profiling, behavioural tracking, etc.) and in the capacity to interconnect physical and digital experience and to create new spaces of dialogue and relationship between artists and audiences. Although some

13 ADESTE is a Leonardo Da Vinci project - Development of Innovation, co-financed by the European Commission. Pooling the resources and expertise of 10 partner organisations in 8 countries, ADESTE main objective is to develop and train a new European occupational profile in the fields of arts and culture: the “audience developer”. Research findings can be found at: [http://www.fitzcarraldo.it/ricerca/pdf/adeste\\_research\\_report\\_2014.pdf](http://www.fitzcarraldo.it/ricerca/pdf/adeste_research_report_2014.pdf)



of the organisations analysed in the EU study have a very conscious and sophisticated use of digital technologies to reach and engage the audience, this seems confined to the communication and social media sphere. Probably, there are some reasons explaining this limited use of digital in its full potential. “On the one hand, there is a lack of specific digital skills and on the other hand, consistent financial resources to develop ad hoc solutions are missing: both conditions are hard to find in small and medium organisations, while there are excellent examples of some big cultural organisations in Europe and abroad working extensively on digital development in relation to Audience Development purposes” (Bollo et al., 2017, p. 46). This is the case of big cultural institutions like the Tate, the Rijksmuseum or the British Library Lab, that are making their digital collections available and are encouraging the experimentation and use of their digital contents addressing wide and global audiences.

Another important aspect to consider, also for its possible institutional and organisational implications, is related to the emerging of participatory and co-created approaches. In some specific cultural sector (particularly in community-based art), active engagement and co-creative approaches stem from the very nature of the artistic language and purpose or from the artist’s poetics and needs. Nevertheless, for other institutions like museums, libraries and for classical music organisations, these approaches are quite new and, in many cases, represent a profound re-conceptualisation of the traditional way of doing. In these cases, organisational models from different perspectives are required and the potential effects deriving from the up-taking of these innovative approaches can be read, among other things, in the need to rethink the management of time, risk and quality within the organisation.

Activating the audience is one of the key word of the new approach in cultural production and programming. Many organisations refer to the need to involve the audiences in a more interactive, purposeful and meaningful way. The St. Christopher Chamber Orchestra in Vilnius (LT), for example, offers children’s concerts where no separate definitions and boundaries exist between “the conductor”, “the orchestra” and “the listener”. Everybody is involved in the musical action.

Organisations taking part in the Be SpectACTive! project are experimenting crowd-sourced and co-creative approaches, even though in different forms and degrees of intensity, where the audience is asked to be part of the creative process, to contribute to the implementation of specific projects or tasks and to be fully integrated into the life of the organisation. This is the case, for example, of the York Theatre Royal (UK), where a board of youngsters (from 12 to 26-year-olds) has been established for managing the whole organisation and artistic programming of Takeover, a very successful festival of contemporary performative languages. At the Kilowatt festival

in San Sepolcro (IT), through the *Visionari* project, citizens are directly involved and activated in the decision-making process and in the selection of the shows that will form part of the festival's programme. In the case of MAS in Antwerp (NL), the museum has embedded a board of young people in its own structure (through the *Mas in Young Hands* project), in charge of proposing ideas, fresh perspectives and solutions for the design and development of specific events and activities in the museum.

To be successful, participatory initiatives require a medium to long-term commitment, continuity, risk-taking and coordination of internal competencies. Moreover, participatory projects are often designed for small numbers. These types of projects consume both time and resources. This can create problems for cultural organisations, in urgent need of demonstrating their capacity to generate large-scale impacts and to reach enlarged audiences. It is therefore important to develop and study organisational and economic models that guarantee the co-existence between "experimental projects" (in terms of capacity to develop new engagement models) and a more traditional offer. From this perspective, current audiences need to be harmonized with new and potential audiences.

The capacity to reach new audiences and to target specific segments and communities lies also in the ability to develop networks, partnerships and collaborations with a wide range of potential stakeholders and "enablers": NGOs, community facilitators, education players, artists, private companies and the media. Renlund Museum (Kokkola, FI) – one of the case studies of the aforementioned EU study on AD – has developed a range of active partnerships, aimed at reinforcing its Audience Development strategies, involving local groups/third sector, provincial actors and projects, national museums, other organizations and universities. But it also collaborates at a municipal level with the library, the theatre, schools and kindergartens, as well as the Youth and Sports offices. Organisations such as Cirkus Cirkör in Stockholm (SE), Kindovar in Ljubljana (SI) and Kunstlerhaus in Vienna (AT) work extensively and in a structured way with schools and the larger educational system, hence empowering competences and mutual understanding among the educational and cultural professionals involved.

Therefore, it becomes important to carefully reflect on the competencies and skills that need to be introduced or/and improved when a cultural organization embeds co-creative and participatory approaches. Different studies underline that some competencies are particularly lacking: data analysis, marketing, community management, mediation, digital and social media management, evaluation and monitoring. It is not just a matter of technical and managerial skills, but also

artistic ones: how do organisations choose (and manage the relationship with) the artists that can be functional to the participatory process? Is it possible to train and empower artists with participatory skills? Or should artistic creation remain a matter of personal vision, poetics and attitude? Under this perspective, audience engagement can be seen as a key driver for development and innovation at the organisational level.

Though most institutions in Europe recognize the importance of empowering the staff, only a limited number have undertaken formal and structured training paths for their human resources. This is also due to the fact that university and vocational training in the area of Audience Development are still lacking. From the Adeste study (ADESTE, 2014), it emerged that the European formal education system is not yet ready to enable future cultural professionals to effectively tackle audience development.

Active engagement in culture stimulates also the search for new and alternative measuring systems. The number of spectators/visitors cannot be the only indicator to describe the success of a project where people are actively involved in the meaning-making or in the artistic process. New output and outcome indicators must be defined and tested to demonstrate the real impact of these approaches. It is therefore vital to research and develop new tools for analysing the systemic impact of AD approaches, testing qualitative and quantitative participation indicators.

From a change management perspective, the cases studied in the AD study represent a varied and balanced mix of “reactive” and “pro-active” changes. The reactive approach still dominates in many cultural organisations, as they try to respond to exogenous pressures (funding cuts, specific political requirements, the constant shrinking of current audiences). Nevertheless, some case studies demonstrate proactive organisational behaviours, anticipating and interpreting emerging phenomena (e.g. migration flows, digital ecosystems, civic activism, social innovation), and producing *ad hoc* answers and innovation in terms of proposals, formats and engagement strategies. Leadership normally plays a significant role in introducing alternative approaches and unlocking internal resistance, particularly when change is not yet perceived as necessary by the staff. Very few case studies fit instead with the concept of “emergent change”, defined as a continuous and unpredictable process of aligning and realigning an organisation to its changing environment (Burnes, 2009). This notion of emergent change could be useful in interpreting organisational behaviours in a cultural landscape characterized by a wide-ranging shift towards more audience-centric approaches. In this shift, the creation of an organisational environment enabling change through the involvement of the entire staff and a receptive attitude

to external stimuli is increasingly needed. Rather than directing change, cultural leaders provide the conditions where change can occur. This is the case, for example, of York Theatre Royal, characterized by a strong inter-dependence between key management functions. Open leadership facilitates and triggers a free exchange of creative energy with external ideas, people and projects. This approach led to a completely new offer, *TakeOver Festival*, run by young people. Over the years, the festival has enhanced institutional sensitivity and capacity to deal with young and difficult-to-reach audiences.

To conclude, participatory cultural management requires an understanding of multiple connections between the institution's policy, its profile, artistic aims, financial setup, organisational models and staff composition. Of course, this process entails a substantial change in the mindset of many organisations, but it represents, undoubtedly, one of the most intriguing challenges for the cultural sector.



# The organizational challenge of audience development and engagement. The debate with professionals

*Bruno Maccari and Kinga Szemessy*

This is the report of two parallel workshops addressing the organizational challenge of audience engagement, which took place during the second day of the Be SpectACTive! Annual Conference held in Barcelona, on November 23-24, 2016. PW8 was conducted by Alessandro Bollo and moderated by Vicentiu Rahau in English, while PW12 was conducted by Angel Mestres and moderated by Antoni Tarrida in Spanish. The two sessions aimed at debating and analyzing management strategies and concepts for engaging and deepening the relationship with audiences, from an organizational viewpoint.

## Introduction

Contemporary cultural organizations need to take into account a variety of factors when deciding to face the challenge of developing, diversifying and engaging - new and established – audiences. In fact, the newly embraced participatory approach brings about changes and exchanges in terms of leadership, organizational structure, communication, ethical issues, learning skills and team building requirements, among others. Cultural organizations need thus to take on new responsibilities, adapting to the changing situation.

The current scenario is defined, on the one hand, by an increasing demand for audience diversification at the operational level and, on the other hand, by decisions and strategies aimed at promoting spaces and projects in order to generate higher levels of audience participation and engagement. According to this vision, the first situation can be considered a starting point, a *conditio sine qua non* for cultural enterprises: the need to diversify audiences for widening the support base. A wide range of marketing tools, like segmentation, can be used to achieve this goal, even though these are not sufficient alone to foster audience participation.

Starting from the need to gain a deeper knowledge of audiences, cultural organizations could implement loyalty programs, by inviting target groups not only to attend to performances, but also to take part in meaningful experiences, thus creating bonds of mutual trust, shared interest and worthwhile expectations from

both sides of the relationship. This second scenario is of a more ambitious nature: creating communities who actively engage with the programming and/or creation patterns of our venue, festival or institution from a deep, responsible and committed perspective.

During the workshop, Angel Mestres said that “there is no involvement without strategy, neither strategy without new professional skills”. We will take this sentence to structure this chapter into three parts. Firstly, involvement, or the scope and implications of participation as a common starting point for cultural organizations. Secondly, strategies, namely the course of action – and decisions – that cultural organizations should take in the challenge of opening to their audiences. Finally, new professional skills, or those competencies required from organizations to create, manage and support participatory processes and ensure their commitment to spectators.

## Scope and implications of participation

During the workshops, participants debated around the definition and scope of participation, trying to avoid the naïve interpretation of the term. References were made to “passive” participation, intended as facilitating contexts for cultural consumption (tours, itineraries, programmes, guides), opening calls (contests, grants) or informing about management processes and achievements (reports, budgets, records, etc.). To explain this “ground zero” of cultural participation, reports and statistics on cultural participation have been taken as examples to depict a vision based on the idea of consumption - the number of books read or performances attended - which are valid and necessary indicators, but not interesting for the purpose of the workshops.

The shift from consumption to participation and from passive to active audiences calls for a reflection on the level of involvement: do we strive for audiences to get involved in *our own processes*? Do we work so that creators give a contribution to the community with their projects? Is it possible to develop projects starting from the needs of our audiences? Are we able to promote initiatives that articulate interests and intentions of both parts? One of the biggest challenges of a participatory approach is to get citizens involved and receive their legitimation of the artistic participatory processes, opening these to the local community. Confusion around communitarian participation is longstanding and dates back to the time of calls for companies to open artistic spaces to citizens. Some participants argue that amateur local theatre companies do not lead necessarily to authentic participation, in a similar way as

audiences attending by chance to a performance in a public space. The line marking the limit between participation and occasional attendance depends on the audience involved: organizations should seek to attract audiences who are unfamiliar with artistic activity.

After agreeing on the need to increase the levels of participation and commitment of audiences, the debate focused around the degree of involvement of creators, curators, managers and audiences participating in the process. A first distinction should be made at the organizational level, deciding whether a participatory approach should be applied as a general concept to the organization as a whole or rather be a one-off experiment used only for a single project. This decision depends on the willingness of the organization to eventually change its approach to performing arts and on the target audiences - expanding traditional audiences with more conventional expectations and/or involving new audiences with little to no experience of the arts world.

A model of limited participation could be that of creators/managers who propose/develop their own artistic projects, which provide for different degrees of communitarian contribution or citizen commitment. In this model, participation is predetermined and thus limited, project managers are in charge of monitoring the process, which is open only to specific groups of citizens. The opening procedure here is limited in scope, with controlled results and top-down leadership. However, this model is a first step towards participatory practice, which can be useful for organizations with no previous experience in this field and represents an attempt to instill in the community a new vision on audience engagement in creative processes.

On the opposite side, there could be a model that starts from a wider public base, developing participatory activities where a large group of citizens take part in and have a real influence on the process, in a bottom-up perspective. This vision entails a more ambitious and uncertain communitarian commitment, with less limitations to the process of citizens' engagement, where the community takes decisions on the priorities, activities and projects of a cultural organization.

Nevertheless, this polarization does not correspond necessarily to direct and univocal effects: despite its low level of commitment and impact, the scheme of controlled participation allows for more structured processes, pre-established strategies and achievable results (regardless of the artistic outcomes). Likewise, the open and communitarian model appears more appealing at first and ambitious in terms of participation; however, it may lack certainty over outcomes, impacts and control by the persons in charge.

## Strategies and management for participatory processes

Taking on the organizational responsibility to open spaces for participation requires decision makers to intervene on the management model, not only in terms of target audiences, but also of organizational structure. In other words, beyond the use that organizations make of the levels and spaces of audience participation, it is important to see the preparation and internal alignment when promoting, leading and supporting participatory practice.

At the organizational level, this implies an array of objectives, behaviors and attitudes operating along three axes: artistic, technical and managerial. A first aspect to take into consideration is the familiarity of the organization with participatory practice: traditional institutions differ from organizations that stem from projects where co-creation and co-management are at the heart of the process. Institutions with a more conventional idea of their audiences would have to rethink their original structure and mission. This may require a great investment of time and resources, as the process to define “engagement” can be long and challenging. Similarly, distinctions should be made between young, often private and resilient cultural organizations, born during the economic crisis; and more established institutions, with a long history and generally public funded. The latter are probably less used to collaborate with their audiences and generally more reluctant to change, thus the restructuring process may result harder to implement. Adopting a participatory approach means breaking from previous mindsets, which can be traumatic from an organizational perspective. In fact, audience engagement implies several operational challenges that range from levels of commitment to forms of remuneration: in extreme cases, for example, involving non-professional participants may result in a replacement process along the production chain.

After acknowledging the need of encouraging increased levels of audience engagement and aligning (or re-aligning) the organization under this new perspective, it is important to consider the strategic options of participatory management, especially in the case of institutions or venues facing organizational shifts or re-launch processes, which require greater capacity for regeneration and leadership from their representatives. Organizations should decide, for example, whether to adopt already well-functioning strategies of audience engagement or inventing new ones. In both cases, benchmarking and monitoring external experiences is useful for getting inspired and reflecting on possible applications in terms of participatory practice.

With regards to the forms of leadership, it is vital to have an organization-wide commitment. In order to activate change and enable a real participatory process, a shared model of leadership, in which responsibilities are distributed along the orga-



nizational chart, seems to be the most appropriate. However, organizations should be aware that this approach may conflict with the conventional system of financing, which frowns on experimentation in programming and management. This because funding generally depends on quantitative indicators like the number of shows and attendants, which can be limiting, as these do not consider intangible outcomes (i.e. social impacts on the local community).

Another issue emerging from the debate was the question of legitimacy and legitimization. A first reflection questioned whether all participatory projects with audiences are legitimate or should legitimate all outcome – especially when talking about pioneering and disruptive experiences, which should assume the task to generate outlines and guidelines for recognition around their practice and scope. Secondly, what kind of legitimacy/legitimation is likely to emerge from participatory activities? Is all outcome resulting from participatory processes to be considered legit? What could go wrong during participatory processes? Is it appropriate to develop participatory projects only with the aim of gaining more audience? And, in this extreme case, could organizations design fictitious participatory experiences in order to justify and validate the process because of its successful participation? Could these experiences be considered as valid or ethical? Some participants argued that the lack of experience in this kind of processes could be a justification for misrepresenting and falsifying experiments aimed at incrementing the participation of cultural audiences.

Time perspective was regarded as an additional issue to address when debating around the organizational scope of participation. Participatory practice requires broad timeframes, which can conflict with the need of coping with the requirements and restrictions of the traditional artistic programming and calendar. Moreover, time is a vital factor also for audiences, who often do not find the time for taking part in this kind of processes or understanding the different stimuli. Participatory and creative processes, in fact, require higher amounts of dedication from both parties, as involving non-professional participants implies other forms of research and development times. Far from supposing only a managerial challenge, this time perspective can turn into an opportunity for developing new contributions and resources that could not perform at full potential in shorter timeframes.

## New skills and professional profiles

As already mentioned before, if cultural organizations want to call in audiences in an open and participatory way, these should undertake changes and rethink internal strategies to promote, manage and productively support this process. Otherwise,

a logic based on controlled participation will persist, limiting the potential of innovation to few dimensions and not substantially transforming the organizational foundations for real openness and audience engagement.

A consequence of the organizational strategy of establishing new links consists in the need to alter the daily routine of work, with the aim of being more efficient in engaging and developing collaborative relationships. This implies altering a set of operational aspects (from traditional working hours to institutional communication strategies) to reverse the pre-existing logic assumed as irreversible. Among the resources for fostering innovative connections, it has been highlighted the need to count on new (or different) professional profiles, capable of enhancing this organizational process of openness. For developing these new relationships, exchanges and affinities with more active and committed audiences, it is considered insufficient to rely only on traditional profiles of the working teams of cultural organizations. However, does this mean that competences required before are obsolete and related professions are no longer necessary? What is currently requested to professionals from the sector facing these new interactions? What are the skills and abilities required nowadays in order to face, support and deepen these levels of participation? What are the most effective professionals, skills and/or profiles?

In view of the challenge of participation, an organizational change calls for the involvement of new practitioners: educators, cultural facilitators, sociologists, guides and community workers, among others. While not exactly new, these professions could bring fresh knowledge and strategic perspectives in the cultural sector, in order to reach new niches and/or increase participation among current audiences. Such diversity of professional profiles may contribute, on the one hand, to promoting more direct relationships between creators and spectators; and, on the other hand, to create multiple ties that, to its fullest potential, result in greater interaction with segmented audiences and bonds of co-responsibility with citizens. Additionally, these new relationships with other sectors (social, economic, educational, youth) allow for new spaces of intersection and convergence that, in turn, enhance greater institutional support, commitment and/or coordination. However, during the debate, it emerged that the European formal education system is not yet prepared to train new professionals in this field, as demonstrated by the scarcity (if not absence) of courses dedicated to audience engagement.

In the framework of this convergence, one of the most frequent challenges is represented by “creative clashes” between performing arts companies and participants, namely all those experiences where different reactions and point views of creators and audiences need to be overcome, in order to produce synergies and interaction between both sides. This fuels the demand for new knowledge, mainly

because audiences, unlike creators, can criticize, react and express their opinion. Dealing with audiences is complex, since even if roles are pre-established, the citizen can take an active part and influence on the project, and this has to be carefully managed. During these interactions, the final outcome can be different than the expected, and part of the tacit agreement includes the possibility of deviations and discoveries, which have to be accepted and managed. The key is to understand how to combine the quest for excellence by artists with the additional risk deriving from civic participation. These complexities are inherent to the role of manager; however, creators often seem to prioritize artistic excellence over creative risks not totally under their control. Balancing and finding agreement between artistic goals (usually having a clearer delineation) and civic participation (not necessarily well-defined) leads cultural organizations to an ongoing journey with no predetermined destination, characterized by tensions and possible fractures during the creative and participatory processes.

Throughout the workshops, participants have tried to identify the milestones of this journey, with special emphasis on the convergence of the communicational, organizational and innovative dimensions of participation. Like in the strategies for cultural innovation (where the advantages of open innovation are praised, although practices of close innovation prevail), tensions in participatory processes reveal an organizational reality which generally proposes a model of limited participation, with communitarian projects based more on claims than effective results, more traditional than transformative. If cultural organizations aim at overcoming this mere participatory narrative (and avoid emulating those reports who refer to cultural consumption as participation), they will have to promote new models for strengthening the bonds and opening the process to communitarian involvement. The ultimate goals for organizations should lead to a substantial transformation, by means of strategies promoting genuine equity, commitments of co-responsibility and benefits shared with the audiences.



# 7 Real democratization: involving audiences with different cultural capital

*Arturo Rodríguez Morató*

*Rafael Valenzuela*





# The challenge of real cultural democratization

*Arturo Rodríguez Morató*

The ideal of cultural democratization inspired the first institutionalization of democratic cultural politics in the 1960s. The new cultural policy came to be framed in the development of the Welfare State, in expansion at the time, so that this ideal could express its characteristic redistributive mission in the cultural field (Zimmer & Toepler, 1996). The aim was counteracting the very unequal distribution of culture, understood as a set of elements and experiences laden with cultural value, among citizens. Now, beyond this generic principle, the truth is that the idea of democratization in the field of culture has always entailed multiple ambiguities and contradictions. For this reason, although policies of cultural democratization have always pretended to favour equality, the perspective on how to move towards this goal and on the most important aspects to take into account has varied greatly over time. After a series of transformations, the issue of cultural democratization now involves “the relationship between who gets to ‘consume’ and who gets to ‘make’ and what is at any time considered legitimate culture” (O’Brian & Oakley, 2015, p. 3). Here we will consider changes in cultural democratization policies and related underlying visions of cultural inequality. This will allow us to ascertain specific complexity, dilemmas and paradoxes that this issue implies.

In the first and most influential version of the policy of cultural democratization, which was promoted by the charismatic first French Minister of Culture, André Malraux, since 1959 cultural democratization pointed to a series of objectives: growth in audiences, increasing representation of working classes in audiences and achieving the loyalty of new members. However, these different objectives were difficult to reconcile from the start (Donnat, 2003, p. 11). And, above all, the second of these - that of attracting working classes to cultural institutions - soon proved to be very difficult to achieve. The first sociological studies on audiences, such as the one that Pierre Bourdieu directed in the early 1960s, focusing on museums in various European countries (Bourdieu & Darbel, 1997), showed already at that time the very small representation of these classes among the audience. And this fact, which could be also found in other equivalent artistic fields, has remained almost unaltered since then. Most of this consumption continues to be exclusive today, a prerogative of the upper classes.



This persistent inequality in cultural consumption has produced a terrible paradox: state funding, which aims to compensate the unbalanced distribution of cultural capital among citizens, in fact turns out to reinforce it. A recent British report noted, for example, that:

*The wealthiest, better educated and least ethnically diverse 8% of the population forms the most culturally active segment of all: between 2012 and 2015 they accounted (in the most conservative estimate possible) for at least 28% of live attendance to theatre, thus benefiting directly from an estimated £85 per head of Arts Council England funding to theatre. The same 8% of the population also accounted for 44% of attendances to live music, benefiting from £94 per head of Arts Council music funding. (The Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value, 2015, p. 33)*

According to the first cultural democratization policies, cultural value was exclusively concentrated in the canonical repertoire of high culture works, traditionally restricted to institutions of cultural excellence, while the rest of cultural forms existing outside this privileged space lacked any cultural legitimacy. At the same time, the idea was that those policies had to focus only on overcoming barriers to access. From that perspective, however, only the goal of increasing cultural consumption could be achieved and not the one aiming to redistribute cultural capital. So, cultural consumption consistently grew during the following decades. But this growth was due to significant improvement in access to high culture outside the capitals and in peripheral areas, which led to an important increase in cultural consumption among the middle class, but not to more socially diverse audiences. Indeed, this kind of increase has been the only significant achievement of cultural democratization in developed countries.

The failure in achieving the objective of increasing cultural consumption among the working class fuelled the criticism of the first policies of cultural democratization at the end of the 1960s and led to a rethinking of the underlying idea of culture. This idea presupposed the existence of a unified and hierarchical culture, based on criteria of excellence and cultural autonomy. It was the same perspective that Bourdieu had been building since the beginning of the decade and that culminated in his famous work *La Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984). In this book, the French sociologist outlined a stratified cultural order, in which tastes and cultural practices of different social strata were strictly determined by a logic of competition and exclusion: in that sense, culture was appropriated to and managed as cultural capital<sup>14</sup>. In opposition to the idea of an exclusive legitimate culture, there was also an alternative vision, which became predominant in the 1970s: that of a plural culture, in which the

<sup>14</sup> Bourdieu's vision, however, went beyond coincidence in the hierarchical nature of the cultural order. By showing its intrinsic class-driven orientation, he highlighted the naivety of transforming expectations of the democratizing policy put in place.

diverse expressions of popular culture are equally loaded with value and the cultural repertoire of elites lacks exclusive authority in front of the whole society. It is the vision, for example, of the sociologist Herbert Gans, who published a book in 1974 describing American society in these terms (Gans, 1974). In it, Gans highlighted the autonomy with which different social groups cultivated specific senses, values and cultural repertoires.

Based on the previous idea, the second generation of cultural democratization policies emphasizes plurality and recognition of the diversity of interests and meanings of cultural practices and consumptions. This leads to the diversification of state interventions in the cultural sphere and the differentiation of the public cultural offer. In this new perspective of cultural democratization policies, democratization also crucially depends on the cultural repertoire that is offered. Thus, recognition of cultural plurality involves an inclusive representation of different tastes and interests in that repertoire. In this way, since the 1970s and throughout the following decades, the most diverse forms of popular culture, including the industrially produced entertainment culture (Menger, 2010), have been progressively integrated into the sphere of public action and finally, as well as cultural diversity, linked to immigration (Bennett, 2001).

On the other hand, between the 1960s and the 1990s, in the advanced countries, the cultural order in general and cultural inequality dynamics, in particular, underwent profound transformations and, thus, the perspective on these also changed. Cultural policies lost coherence and their increasingly relativistic nature involuntarily contributed to the de-legitimization of high culture (Urfalino, 1996). Different changes in the organization of artistic institutions and cultural industries, as well as structural transformations in the cultural socialization of the middle classes also operated in the same sense of favoring cultural de-hierarchization (DiMaggio, 1991; Rodríguez Morató, 2012). As a result, the dynamics of cultural distinction described by Bourdieu were seriously altered. Instead of the typical snobbish behavior, tending towards exclusivity, Peterson (1992) argued that the middle classes were becoming “cultural omnivores”, constantly moving across cultural forms, incorporating elements from both high and popular culture. He was able to prove this new pattern of consumption in the United States, but similar signs of eclecticism and omnivorism have been identified later on in many other Western countries, including France (Donnat, 1994). Particularly significant in this respect was the thorough study carried out a few years ago in the UK by Bennett et al. (2009), based on Bourdieusian hypotheses. Despite confirming the persistence of certain dynamics of distinction in the country, the authors found their effectiveness to be very impaired and, in addition, these were paradoxically substantiated by the “omnivorous” attitude. The



study also noted the fragmentation and blurring of boundaries within the cultural system, as well as the importance of factors other than social class in the stratification of tastes and cultural practices, such as gender, age or ethnicity. In short, it confirmed the increased complexity of the current cultural order, a complexity that prevents the application of simple recipes to advance towards cultural democratization.

The persistent difficulties encountered by supply policies in achieving the objective of cultural democratization have led to the idea of applying demand policies to this problem, both in academic and political circles. In this sense, influencing education seems certainly the most logical option, since all studies on cultural consumption, both those of Bourdieu and of later authors, emphasize the key role played by the educational level in cultural demand. Indeed, cultural consumption fundamentally depends on educational capital. So, it seems obvious that, to a large extent, the problem of uneven distribution of cultural capital should be addressed through education, essentially by increasing educational levels of the population and improving cultural and artistic contents in the general education curriculum. This is, for example, what Antonio Ariño (2010) advocates, as a conclusion, in his work on cultural consumption in Spain. From a political perspective, however, this approach is not easy to implement, both because educational inequalities by themselves are difficult to overcome and because cultural policy has little chance of influencing this field. Undoubtedly, the possibility of incidence is almost null with respect to the general problem of educational inequality. But it is also limited in terms of artistic and cultural contents of the general curriculum, given the usual disconnection between the administrative areas of education and culture. The case of France is illustrative of that difficulty, since cultural administration arose in direct opposition to the educational mission of the state. It was not until the beginning of the new millennium, forty years later, that the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Culture finally developed some ambitious joint action plans for the first time. (Donnat, 2003, pp. 16-17).

However, it is not certain that the results of these demand policies, which have not been made visible so far, will become important after all, given the wide margin in which individuals manage to articulate different tastes and interests in a particular way (Lahire, 2004). In this sense, higher educational level or greater cultural education may not determine the integration of legitimate tastes in the case of individuals who are distant from them because of their origin. This would seem to be what happens, at least in the UK, in the case of ethnically diverse individuals, whose highest levels of education are not associated with higher frequency of participation at museums, but contrarily with less attendance (O'Brian & Oakley, 2015, p. 8). This

evidence helps to downplay the influence that education can have on the determination of consumption of high culture, not because it puts the impact of education in question, but because it makes one think of other related variables that might affect consumption. At the same time, it seems to point to the crucial importance of a particular factor, already considered above, and which is raised again here: that of the representativeness of the repertoire. Indeed, the absence of an effective cultural alignment between the existing museum offer and ethnically diverse individuals determines the withdrawal of the latter.

Beyond general policies of supply and demand, in recent years the concern for the democratization of cultural consumption has moved to the micro level. At this level, of crucial importance nowadays, cultural organizations have been forced to assume the general challenge of democratization and have come to specify more limited but more precise objectives and strategies in this respect. Objectives that are classically considered as aspects of democratization, such as the increase in the frequency of attendance to a cultural facility, the expansion of the audience and its loyalty, are addressed in a differentiated manner and are thus easier to control by cultural organizations. On the other hand, in this case, these objectives are defined in particular local contexts, so that they are specified more precisely, in terms of accessible audiences and the ecosystem of the concurrent cultural offering.

Regarding strategies, cultural organizations focus on improving the relationship between cultural offer and cultural demand in a new environment characterized by the impact of the digital revolution and associated changes in lifestyles. How do they do? To what extent can the different strategies that they adopt help democratization? What are the risks involved in them? Today cultural institutions are urged to enlarge their audiences. The most common answer to this request is to make plans for audience development and to use marketing devices for reaching new groups and for enhancing their loyalty through different mechanisms. These kinds of actions use to contribute to the strengthening and even to a certain expansion of existing relationships with the audience. But the predominant market perspective guiding them limits the scope of this expansion to the predetermined horizon of the most accessible audience, which in the case of high culture institutions is restricted, as we have seen, to the middle and upper-middle classes. Going beyond this horizon would require the adoption of a “positive discrimination” (Donnat, 2003, p. 20), allocating much more resources and energy to attracting the unlikely audience, something that is inappropriate from this perspective.

Other strategies developed by cultural organizations to enhance their relationships with the audience concern the use of digital technologies. First, they are used for reaching new and remote audiences. In that sense, the development of appli-

cations and programs is still incipient, since it is slowed by the difficulty of establishing business models and adequate regulatory arrangements. Their potential is undoubtedly very great, although probably limited in terms of including new culturally distant audiences. Most promising in this regard could be the use of digital technologies for improving the cultural experience of users. Indeed, when applied for curating additional information and providing an increased understanding of the content, they could make experiences more shareable. This is particularly important for specific audiences like kids, parents or non-frequent participants (LaPlaca Cohen, 2017).

In the fruitful perspective of reflecting on the experience of cultural consumers as the key to attracting non-engaged audiences, a fundamental observation is that today the determining factor is relevance (Ibidem). Relevance, of course, has to do with contents, with the fact that they connect with the vital reality of consumers (which is why the issue of representation is crucial) and are also stimulating (which can mean interesting or fun). A significant means of favoring the sense of relevance is also to develop participation in all its forms, whether that of co-creation, co-production or co-programming (Simon, 2010). These participation patterns seek the engagement of the audience, trying to provoke in them a connection of maximum intensity with the activity. This intensification of the relationship seems especially important for the integration of theoretically distant audiences, such as young people, blue-collar workers or immigrant groups. For those audiences, participation serves or may serve to break the estrangement towards the cultural repertoires of the institution, making the activity vitally important to them. Proof of the democratizing potential of this strategy is found in the incredibly successful experiences in engaging young people from deprived areas in classical music practice. The case of *El Sistema* program of youth orchestras founded by J. A. Abreu in Venezuela in 1975, aimed to foster social inclusion of children and adolescents seen as vulnerable or socially and educationally at risk, is paradigmatic in this respect (Tunstall, 2012). There is a lot to learn from it.

Now, the challenge of cultural democratization is very complex and difficult. Government policies developed in this area have never been able to overcome it. On many occasions, they have even produced contradictory or paradoxical results. The actions undertaken by cultural institutions and organizations in this direction also have limitations and risks. We will end this overview of cultural democratization policies by warning about some of them.

First of all, it is convenient to draw attention to the risk posed by the slogan of engagement promotion. Despite the positive effects that can be produced, as has been previously said, its expeditious adoption can also lead to a more marked restriction

of the usual audience. Inasmuch as participatory initiatives can attract the most knowledgeable groups of these audiences over any other, they can “shield” the institutional spaces from those audiences who are far-removed. The result can be the establishment of an invisible club, thus returning to the most antidemocratic nineteenth-century formulas, those of the philharmonic societies or the private opera theatres, which also had the most engaged and active audiences. To address this risk, therefore, it is crucial to develop this policy always with a concern for inclusiveness, that is, promoting diversity at the same time.

Finally, another risk related to the development of policies for cultural democratization on the part of individual cultural institutions and organizations is that of the solipsistic attitude: to believe that initiatives and responsibilities in this area can be thought of in isolation. This leads to inefficiency or escapism. In fact, it is essential that responsibility is understood and also shared collectively. For some time now, the need of the cultural sector for increasing systemic awareness has been pointed out as a fundamental requirement for its effective development in all respects (Cherbo & Wyszomirsky, 2000). The challenge of democratization must also be approached in this way, as a collective challenge. As the British report previously cited says, “the challenge we face is how to effectively ensure that all have the opportunity to develop their particular cultural preferences and experience genuine access to the means to produce and consume the creative forms they choose to engage with, having mastered the skills necessary for access to a diverse range of cultural choices” (The Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value, 2015, p. 37). This is definitely a challenge that requires a coordinated involvement of both the entire cultural sector and the state with its educational and cultural policies.



# Real democratization: involving audiences with different cultural capital. The debate with professionals

*Rafael Valenzuela*

The workshop on *Real democratization: involving audiences with different cultural capital* was moderated by Ricardo Álvarez, reported by Rafael Valenzuela and conducted by Arturo Rodríguez Morató, who introduced the discussion by highlighting that the idea of “democratization of culture” may imply a *Bourdieu-esque* notion of hierarchy of cultural value, as a result, making this “democratization” a question of accessibility to culture. However, strategies focusing on facilitating access to canonical culture have not been effective enough and patterns of cultural consumption continue to be very contrasted between upper and lower classes. Arturo added that the notions of cultural capital and field could be criticized, contested and extended in various ways and that these ideas (at least in their present conceptual state) may have shortcomings in providing causal explanations for cultural consumption and participation patterns. For example, hierarchies of cultural value may vary in different cultural contexts and cultural consumption may not be field-specific, as noted in the phenomenon of cultural “omnivores”.

From here on, participants were asked a first question: can cultural institutions engage new audiences through marketing? Answers to this question covered a vast range of topics. Participants coincided in observing that cultural consumption is strongly related to a person’s education, suggesting that the only real democratization of culture may come about through education. Another prevalent opinion was that people working in cultural institutions (cultural mediators and educators) have a great responsibility in organizing cultural contents, products, services and experiences, taking into account that adaptation to already existing demand can be only a partial (and frequently unsatisfactory) solution. There was a consensus that “if you want to ‘market’ something and to ‘target’ a specific ‘new audience’, you need to ‘know’ this audience well”. Consequently, market research can be an advisable first step when approaching a new audience. However, “talking about communication and building relations could be better than talking about marketing”. Extending this idea, it was mentioned that participation starts where communication and interaction begin and this makes research (on people to be engaged in cultural consumption) a good start. Also, practical approaches to working with a “community” (town or small venue) coincided in ascribing importance to “knowing the audience, working with

them and building communication and relations”, considered as key aspects to successfully engaging new people in cultural consumption and practice.

At the same time, participants questioned to which extent marketing could be effective in transforming people’s relations towards culture. “Is marketing only an extension of an ‘accessibility’ paradigm? Is democratization of culture being pursued mainly through the provision of access, but not through fostering interest in culture?”. Alternative voices were more optimistic about marketing strategies and their effectiveness: “it depends on how you use them and how well you know your target. It is possible to design processes in order to engage an audience, even including professionals from other fields (e.g. psychologists, educators) asking them: how can you help us to interact with this audience with your know-how?”. These contrasting positions opened up a new space of discussion, leading to the distinction between (at least) two different kinds of marketing strategies: one traditional, focused on accessibility, venue-based, top-down and product driven; and another one innovative, focused on creatively building relations through interaction. Thus, by engaging in a dialogue with the potential audience and by researching the market segment through ongoing communication and relations, marketing was regarded as potentially interactive (even before starting to “market” anything).

Some bold voices went one step further, arguing in favour of putting marketing tools in the hands of people (audiences) through participation processes, in line with the notion of “shared responsibility”. These voices wanted to provide laypeople with the experience of being part of the complexities that lie behind producing cultural processes. Maybe, this way of proceeding would not be strictly aimed at cultural education nor “centrally” connected to a “cultural” practice itself, but it may yield cultural empowerment, by providing agency to audiences, in search of “a bigger consensus”.

This new marketing strategy could serve as a tool for cultural access, helping laypersons in entering the cultural realm, through the opportunities provided, for example, by interacting and participating in cultural programming. These new marketing concepts and strategies would provide multiple opportunities for developing various relationships between audiences, venues and cultural programmers, thus, enhancing cultural institutions’ chances of generating interest among “new audiences”; whereas, a traditional “accessibility-driven” marketing approach would be weaker in creating these relations and, therefore, also in democratizing (even only access to) culture. Nevertheless, whatever strategies may be currently in place to reach new audiences, it seems, from the perspectives of participants, that a general norm is confirmed in different cultural contexts: higher levels of cultural consumption are most frequently associated with higher levels of education (even when there may be changing trends regarding the participation of specific populations, of different ages or ethnic or socio-demographic background).

An important aspect that was explored in the discussion was to which extent the practice of adapting cultural presentations to expectations and languages of new audiences (“widespread practice stemming from the belief that the role of marketing is to reach non-interested people using their own language”) could be whether useful and necessary or negative. Most voices regarded the role of cultural mediators as critical in the selection of interesting art for new audiences to engage with. This “subsidiary” practice was conceived of as “creating a secondary art to complement the first”, in order to target new audiences, for example, through digital platforms. In this particular sense, marketing was not seen just as a tool, but as becoming more of an art form in itself, capable of “creating ‘truly new’ interest” and “making people think-feel-decide” that “this particular performance is interesting, worthwhile, high-quality” (while still receiving the message in their own language). It was said that, in the quest for reaching new audiences, some parts of the artistic production process, traditionally regarded as “not so important”, like digital marketing, might become crucial.

Some participants thought that by “removing barriers” (sociological, financial, psychological) “natural” cultural demand should surface. However, other participants raised concerns about when a “non-audience” wants to “remain a non-audience”, challenging, for example, festival programmers to include “attractions” based on several common languages shared by various “people not interested in the main cultural theme” of their festival. One participant argued that “she would never become a football fan”, but that she had noticed that in some places “they make an artistic (e.g. dance) show within the sports setting”, so that “there’s ‘something in it’ for everyone”.

Participants were of the opinion that marketing can be used to increase existing demand and potentially develop new demand. But there was also consensus around the fact that marketing strategists need to address their efforts in building relations with audiences based on (positive) experiences, “because a negative experience can trigger desertion faster than a positive one can establish participation”. Detailed learning about new audience’s preferences, styles, languages, skills, know-how and other various aspects was also considered critical to developing ongoing relations with new audiences.

Regarding cultural consumption among the youth, it was signalled, as an example, that new audiences may feel that they “take risks” by attending a kind of experience that they have never participated in before, “not knowing for sure how to act” and “feeling alien to the rules and languages, for example, of an opera hall”. Thus, the social dimension of youth cultural consumption should not be overlooked nor underestimated. Cultural mediators could aim at using the social dimension of youth cultural consumption for reducing the perceived risk of “going somewhere new”, by promoting and facilitating group or social enjoyment of cultural experiences.

“In this way, it’s not ‘risky’ to go there, because I’m going with her/him, who knows ‘the rules’ of the place”. Also, there could be ways of empowering young people “who take friends with them to see culture”. “Getting into the minds of new audiences and programming experiences for them is not only about the product and the sociological aspects of the audiences, but it is about a more complex approach that can be very challenging for the venues and cultural programmers”. A first risk for cultural programmers was touted as a “classic risk of marketing”, namely, the risk of programming something new at an old venue, or inversely, something old at a new venue. According to some participants, a specific challenge was that “it is easy to make an experience interesting once, but it has to be meaningful to people, in order for them to want to repeat it consistently”.

According to participants, another challenge for cultural democratization is that a vertical venue-based paradigm, highly influenced by the ruling cultural institutions, predominates in cultural consumption. Sometimes even cultural organizations work in a top-down manner, regarding their own staff, not integrating different voices nor generating consensus. Some participants even thought that, for ultimate democratization of culture, a new kind of leadership was needed in cultural organizations. Democratization demands de-centralizing both cultural consumption and production. “It is important to have multi-disciplinary festivals, where big productions come to smaller venues and ‘catch up’ with new cultural forms”.

Everything suggests a moment of transition in which organizations and audiences are changing dimensions. “Cultural programming –nowadays- means to connect different kinds of people with different kinds of attention processes”, “programming is a key feature of cultural mediation, including issues of marketing and experience, but also issues of accessibility, that offers many interesting opportunities, not solely one authoritative high culture product, but a broad range of cultural consumption alternatives”. Nevertheless, there were also voices assuring that “you can program everything for everyone”, but the important part is building a relationship. For example, “if you program in a small village, you talk directly to people, after that some go to the cultural institution themselves, you can facilitate it, for example, program ten nights in a village and then take a group to the city to see something different with a cultural institution and then talk about it”.

By this point in the session, starting from marketing, the topics of building relations, communication and interaction had surfaced repeatedly. Even the label “engagement” had been mentioned. In this sense, one participant posited that cultural mediators “propose spaces” for people to “appropriate of”, to “create a collective sense of being there”, and, in this way, cultural mediators in their role of “programmers of experience” do not know “how it will end”, “there will be drama and surprise”, but finally there will be the feeling of belongingness and participation.



“You have to work together for engagement, long-term conversation always provokes a next step”. Engagement was regarded as a possible key to the problem of democratization, calling upon examples of successful connections made through intensive engagement, where cultural activity became central for people participating in it.

As a result of the previous debate, the discussion was moderated towards the questions of how to create engagement and how to avoid the risks a) of enlarging only the audience of previously-interested people, and b) of “creating a club” of very engaged but very homogeneous people. In this respect, a concrete case of a theatre school in Mataró was shared. Years ago, a public high school received many students whose parents were immigrants. One teacher started to do theatre with the youth, in order to address issues related to the school’s high social density. She asked for help from the public theatre school. Their model was replicated and the possibility to do theatre in primary school spread. This program did not only reach its goals in terms of resolving the issues they set out to resolve, but they accomplished that the non-audience got familiar with theatre and got to understand the rules and languages of it. Even the families understood more than before. There were several mentions of projects relating cultural activities to various social issues (or “using” cultural education to indirectly address key social problems). These examples were regarded as successful in their own terms, but the broader discussion of democratization of culture does not finish here. Nevertheless, their sole existence proved that new cultural audiences might emerge through participation processes, in which culture is sometimes the vehicle of something socially relevant to the group, which is being (directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally) “targeted” as a new audience.

In order to target cultural democratization, cultural policies should be integrated with urban strategies (e.g. transportation). For example, “even with engagement programs, some residents of the suburbs do not attend cultural venues regularly, because they cannot reach them. Also, a cultural agenda should remain lively year round, to foster high sustained engagement, “not to leave the audience alone during the year”. One example suggested that a creative strategy was to program in big venues, but feature artists with whom new audiences were already familiar at a neighborhood level, “bringing the neighborhood language into the bigger stage” and -with it- “bringing its followers to the venue”. Similarly synergistic was the idea of developing festivals, including both international and local artists, facilitating relations, engagement and collaboration.

Furthermore, “biodiversity of a cultural ecosystem” is key to an ongoing lively cultural ambience that democratizes cultural consumption by providing various quality alternatives. In this regard, venue-program collaborations (and not exclusive competition for audiences) would be the advisable approach. Thus, considering that

“if you run a venue in a medium-sized city, there are not too many institutions to collaborate with”, one should take special care of developing a working model which does not isolate the venue. For example: “How can a venue ‘contribute something for everyone’ if its reputation inhibits audiences from attending?”. Sometimes a venue has to overcome this by refreshing its programming and yielding comments from new audiences, like: “I don’t usually go there, but ‘that piece’ interests me”. This bio-diversity should engage different people in cultural consumption and participation and, in a best-case scenario, develop new interactions and connections, potentially having a positive impact on the venue’s reputation, through quality work and positive audience experience.

And still, to address the main question: does participation impact audience diversification or at least enlargement? “Are we achieving something? Or are we stuck ‘in the same club’?”. For one side, the “opening of the club (developing truly new audiences)” is more possible than ever. *Omnivores*, for example, seemingly have more open identification processes to engage in diverse cultural consumptions. “Sometimes, regardless of prior experience, *omnivores* feel interested or identified with specific experiences. But do they feel truly entitled? Or is it like an excursion?” Following the idea of identification processes: “One difficulty for audience management in big institutions like ‘theatre’, ‘music’ or even ‘football’ rests in the fact that ‘audiences have their own agendas’, be it identity affirmation, religion or else... Somehow, it is clear where you belong or don’t belong”. However, as discussed above, sometimes belongingness needs not to be pre-eminently founded on participating in the original cultural practice, but sometimes in marketing strategies or designed spaces to which audiences already belong. “A project led by arts professionals takes contemporary dance to villages, creating events in public spaces routinely used and appropriated by locals”, consequently, “utilizing the common space as a common language” and as an element of cultural presentation, discourse and consumption. High artistic level, however, is always mandatory for quality experience. This partly explains why programs are mostly designed by venue-related arts professionals and by cultural institutions (in the ways portrayed in the above discussion), “taking high culture to smaller venues”.

The discussion included a vast array of topics, points of view, backgrounds and even opinions. There was no clear-cut answer to the question of democratization, but ongoing engagement and identification were highlighted as critical aspects. Also, this engagement needs to be fostered in a context of integrated urban strategies. Education stood out as an apparent benchmark for access to cultural practice, however cultural consumption seemingly opens up a bit more to new audiences, through phenomena like *cultural omnivores*.

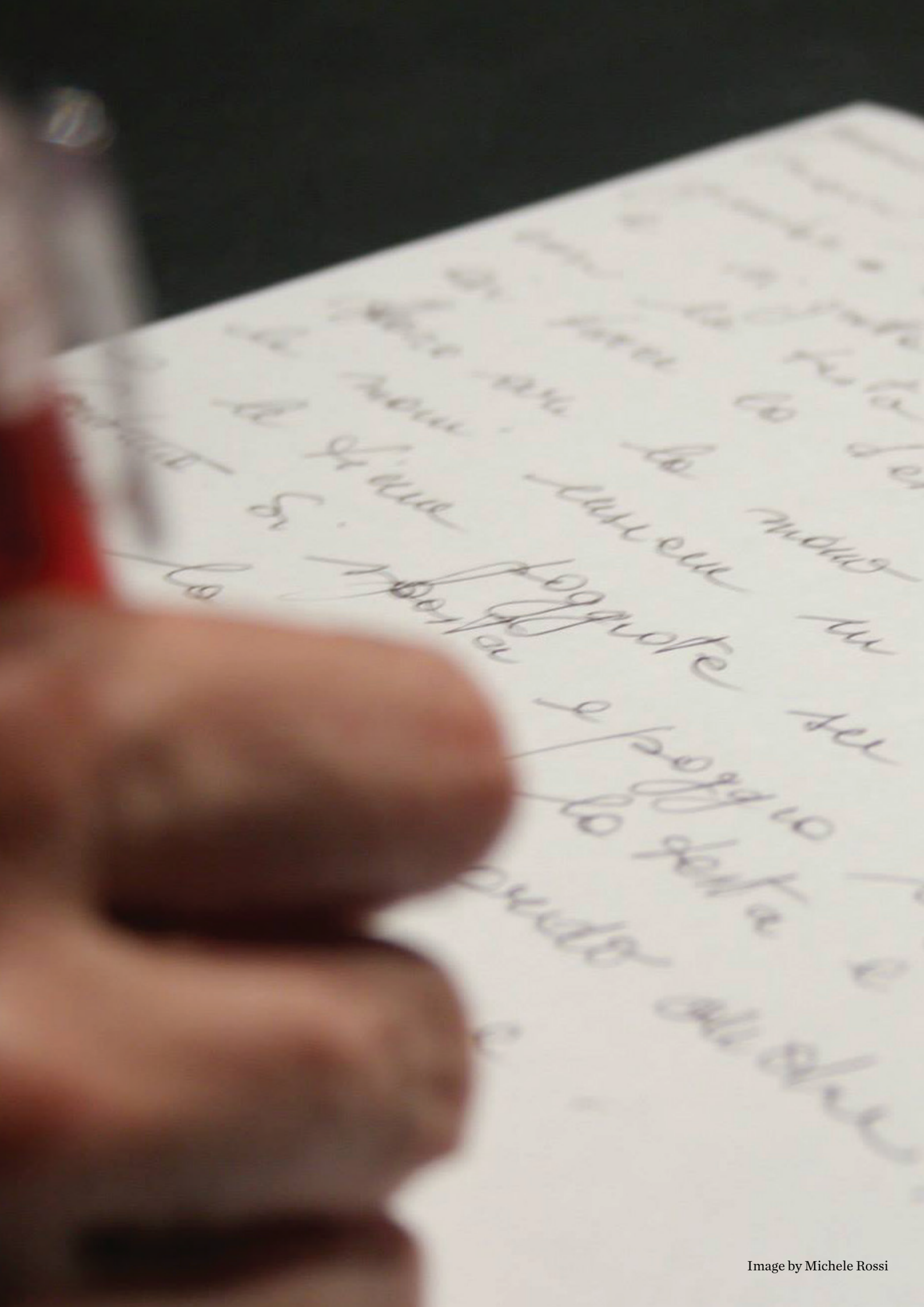






Image by Luca Del Pia



# Conclusions

*Ben Walmsley*



# A plea for audiences: from active spectatorship to enactive audience

*Ben Walmsley*

## Introduction

The Be SpectACTive! conference at the University of Barcelona in November 2016 focussed primarily on questions and notions of active spectatorship. Speakers and delegates exchanged ideas about what it means for audiences to participate actively in the arts, to co-produce artistic outputs and experiences, to get involved in aspects of programming and management, and to be politically and organisationally empowered. The driving force behind the Be SpectACTive! project is the European Union's *Creative Europe* programme. Accordingly, in the opening session of the conference, Cristina Loglio<sup>15</sup> outlined the origins of the programme, including the underlying (and highly questionable) rationale of using the arts to develop "better citizens".

From the outset of the conference, delegates were confronted with the definitional challenges provided by the key term of "audience development", the EU's preferred term for activities related to deepening and broadening arts audiences by recruiting new audiences and/or enhancing and diversifying the audience experience itself. These definitional issues became a recurrent trope throughout the conference and at times it became apparent that we were sometimes talking at cross purposes; whilst at other times we were constrained by the semantic limitations and implications of the terms themselves. As Jean-Paul Sartre illustrated powerfully in *Les mots*, words can indeed be treacherous.

In my closing keynote, I was asked by the conference organisers to provide a reflective critical summary of the key ideas raised during the two days of the conference. This was a fantastic challenge, which required me to listen attentively and empathetically to as much of the conference as I could physically attend (bearing in mind the parallel workshops sessions) and linguistically comprehend (considering my appalling Spanish and non-existent Catalan!). So this reflective essay is intended to provide a summary overview of some of the core ideas raised over the two days by the invited speakers and delegates. It is also my intention to run with some of these ideas and provide some critical provocations, as well as some tentative conclusions and a couple of calls to action.

<sup>15</sup> President of Creative Europe Desk Italy, Ministry of Culture

## How did we get here?

Public perceptions and policy perspectives of culture and creativity are changing at a rapid pace. As Raymond Williams (1958) reminded us back in the 1950s, culture does not just pertain to the so-called “high arts”: it is to be found in the everyday activities of ordinary people as much as in the grand theatres and opera houses of our “civilised” nations. Culture is evolving, Williams argues, from a process of individual feeling to one of general communication. This is not a singular view in either sense of the word: there is growing consensus amongst cultural theorists and sociologists that culture and creativity are increasingly collective entities, which are now more often to be found in communal experiences and endeavours than in individual creative geniuses (or artistic directors). Accordingly, some scholars have characterized creativity as a “boundary phenomenon” (Ibbotson & Darsø, 2008) that thrives “at the edge of things” and “between the gaps” (Wilson, 2010, p. 368). I like this shadowy articulation, because it suggests that creativity can reside in processes and groups as well as in individual artists.

Psychologists too have responded to this more participatory approach to creativity: as Csikszentmihaly argues, “creativity is a phenomenon that is constructed through an interaction between producers and audience. Creativity is not the product of single individuals, but of social systems” (Csikszentmihaly cited in Pope, 2005, p. 67). This naturally raises significant questions about ownership and empowerment that clearly have potent implications for artistic practice – questions that impinge on the aesthetic, legal, economic, social and political. The growing creative commons and phenomena such as the gift economy (see Bollier, 2010) are testament to the public demand to claim back ownership of creative activity and content, and to often do away with the creative intermediary altogether. This is perhaps because, as Ken Robinson notes, “creativity is possible in all areas of human activity, including the arts, sciences, at work, at play, and in all other areas of daily life. All people have creative abilities and we all have them differently” (National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, 1999, p. 6).

At the turn of the millennium, Matarasso and Landry (1999) argued that the main challenge in the coming decades was to identify and develop a “third way” for cultural policy, between government control and the free market. Governments are rapidly becoming influencers rather than directors of policy, and if this is true of governments, it must be particularly apposite for supra-governments like the EU, which lie at arm’s length from both national parliaments and people; and if this holds for policy-making in general, then it must surely resonate especially within the frameworks of cultural policy, which is often devolved to regions and quangos and

which attempts to govern the ordinary and everyday as characterized by Raymond Williams (1958), as well as the best that has been thought and said, as so beautifully articulated by Matthew Arnold (1869). Perhaps a more important “third way” for the arts, then, might be one that lies between the arts sector and its various publics: between arts organisations, artists, producers, curators and cultural leaders on the one hand and audiences on the other; between arts venues and their communities; between politicians or cultural policymakers and the general public. However, this shift will certainly not be easy, since we know that “the development and management of cultural policy is [...] one of the most complex areas of modern government, a kind of balancing act [...] between competing visions of the role of culture in society” (Matarasso and Landry, 1999, p. 7).

In order to explore what this third way might look like in practice, I’m now going to critically explore some of the emerging theories and practices regarding how artists and arts organisations engage with their audiences.

## Rethinking the role of the audience

There is a pernicious perception in much of the literature and rhetoric about arts audiences which suggests that the act of audiency is passive.<sup>16</sup> This misplaced perception of passivity is communicated in terms such as “active spectatorship”, which is, of course, one of the key foci of the Be SpectACTive! project. Related concepts, such as “audience development”, suggest that there is something wrong with audiences – something missing or lacking that needs to be improved. Even worse, audience development or recruitment initiatives which seek to entice new audiences to the arts are often constructed on tacit or even unconscious assumptions that there is a latent arts participant within everyone and that the arts are inherently good for us all. This is sometimes referred to as the ‘cultural deficit model’ – a model which acknowledges the arts as “merit goods” (Zuidervaat, 2011, p. 34) which enable consumers to self-actualise and accrue cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). We are not a long way here from the policy perspective of the arts as a civilising force in society – a perspective which held sway from the Renaissance through to the English Clerisy movement and beyond to inform the current British arts council model of funding (Upchurch, 2016).

In order to move the debate forwards, one of the core objectives of this chapter is to argue for a decoupling of audience recruitment and diversification from practices of audience enrichment. As Alan Brown has demonstrated, the terminology surrounding arts participation is in a state of flux (Brown et al., 2011, p. 4), so perhaps

16 I use the neologism “audiency” deliberately, because “spectatorship” etymologically reduces the complex act of artistic engagement to a distanced, visual endeavour. The neologism is influenced by Reason and Lindelof’s (2016) concept of “audiencing”, which they define as “acts of attention, of affect, of meaning-making, of memory, of community” (p. 17).



now is the time to be clearer and less ambiguous in our definitions. Another core aim of this chapter is to shift the terms of the debate from the now outmoded marketing paradigm, which tends to cultivate transactional relationships with consumers, towards an engagement paradigm, which takes a more relational perspective on notions of cultural value and artistic exchange.

So let's begin by exploring the nature of the act of being an audience member, or "audience" as I have called it here. The first point I want to make here is that audiences are not generally passive. Just because they are often to be found sitting in darkened auditoria in narrow rows (not through their own design, of course), this does not necessarily make them passive. Indeed, we know from existing research that the audience project is actually far from passive. As Matthew Reason has argued:

*The possibility that the theatre audience is engaged in a kind of doing is an interesting one. It might be considered a kind of imaginative doing, as audiences suspend disbelief; or an emotional doing, as spectators invest sympathy with the characters or performance. The audience experience might also be considered an intersubjective doing, through kinaesthetic empathy with the movement and presence of people in space (Reason, 2010, p. 19).*

What is revealing about this argument is that it establishes the act of audience as a complex, multidimensional pursuit. But what has happened over the past 150 years or so, since audiences have been cast into darkness on the other side of the fourth wall, is that the act of audience has been reduced to a simple act of seeing or hearing: a passive presence that merely enables the performance to take place. The unhelpful etymology of related terms such as *theatre*, *audience* and *spectator* serves to justify and perhaps even perpetuate this reduction. However, as Helen Freshwater (2009) acknowledges, the relationship with the audience is indispensable because it provides the performing arts with their very *raison d'être* (p. 2). This is an important point, because it places audiences at the heart of the arts in a role of creative centrality. After all, we might well ask who and what the arts and arts organisations are actually *for* if they are not ultimately for audiences.

Rancière (2011) famously argued that audiences must be emancipated and that spectatorship should not be equated with intellectual passivity. He also acknowledged the paradoxical approach that artists have taken towards the relative 'presence' of the audience in his discussion of what he calls the "poles of distanced investigation and vital participation" (p. 2). This paradox reflects the generally ambivalent attitude that artists, philosophers and managers have tended to adopt towards audiences. However, focussing on the latter of these poles of engagement, Claire Bishop describes the long tradition of "viewer participation and activated spectatorship" in the arts

(2004, p. 78). We have certainly known since Aristotelian times that audiences invest their emotions into the performing arts in the hope of finding some kind of catharsis. We know also that they need to engage their imaginations to complete the inevitable gaps left by the staging and presentational process. The fact that arts organisations engage scenographers, sound designers, lighting designers, film-makers, pyrotechnicians, etc. demonstrates the increasingly multisensory nature of the audience experience, and the rising trend of immersive art, complete with its gaming experts and experience designers, highlights this development vividly.

This all suggests to me that we need to develop a new paradigm to reflect the complexity of the audience experience. I discussed earlier how the arts marketing paradigm is now outmoded; but marketing is not the only culprit in dehumanising the audience experience. Artists and producers have often ignored or forgotten the fundamental role that audiences play in the creative process, whether by participating actively in production phases or by decoding and interpreting, giving meaning to the work of art itself. A possible response to this call for a paradigm shift is provided by Bleeker and Germano (2014), who call for an “enactive approach to spectatorship” that could “contribute to understanding how theatre works [...] as a process that is both profoundly embodied and deeply cultural” (p. 383). So let’s maybe start to talk about what an enactive conception of audiency might look like and entail.

Enaction implies audience immersion; it situates audiences at the heart of an artistic experience and acknowledges that they are engaged in performance in a deeply phenomenological way. As Bruce McConachie has argued, an enactive approach to audiency is holistic in that it embraces the cognitive, the embodied and the social: “[f]rom an Enaction perspective, perception, like the rest of cognition, is not only embodied and embedded, it is also ecologically extended. Spectators use their material and social surroundings as well as their bodies and brains to take action and make meaning during a performance” (McConachie, 2013, p. 186).

Another important consideration here is that fact that arts audiences are heterogeneous. Although it does appear to be tempting to many artists, scholars, marketers and commentators to talk and write about “the audience”, we know of course that audiences come in many shapes and sizes. This simple truism has even been acknowledged by transactional marketers, who now segment their audiences geographically, demographically, behaviourally and even psychographically. However, audiences are not just characterized by their age, gender, income, drive time, profession or ethnicity. Nor are they distinguished purely by their recent ticket purchases, their artform preference or their propensity for risk. There also exists a ‘spectrum of engagement’ to consider when designing activities for audiences (see Figure 12). According to Brown et al. (2011), audiences’ involvement in creative practice can

be designated at five points across a spectrum ranging from spectating at what they call the “receptive” end of the spectrum to what they term “audience-as-artist” at the participatory end. In the middle of the spectrum lie three hybrid pursuits: “enhanced engagement” (which is not designated as participatory – note the vertical line), “crowdsourcing” and “co-creation”.

The aim of this spectrum is to qualify different types of engagement according to audiences’ level of creative control, which the authors assess according to considerations of curation, interpretation and invention. This is a helpful framework, which succeeds in placing the focus on engagement rather than transaction. However, the model fails to acknowledge the (en)active, multi-sensory aspects of audience noted earlier and is premised on an implicit semiotic hierarchy where the warm colours represent high creative control. This seems to suggest that the “warmer”, participatory end of the spectrum is in some sense superior to “colder”, more receptive modes of engagement. This is problematic in a sector where organisational missions are generally related to the production of high-quality art, which in turn (rightly or wrongly) tends to privilege artistically-led organisations.

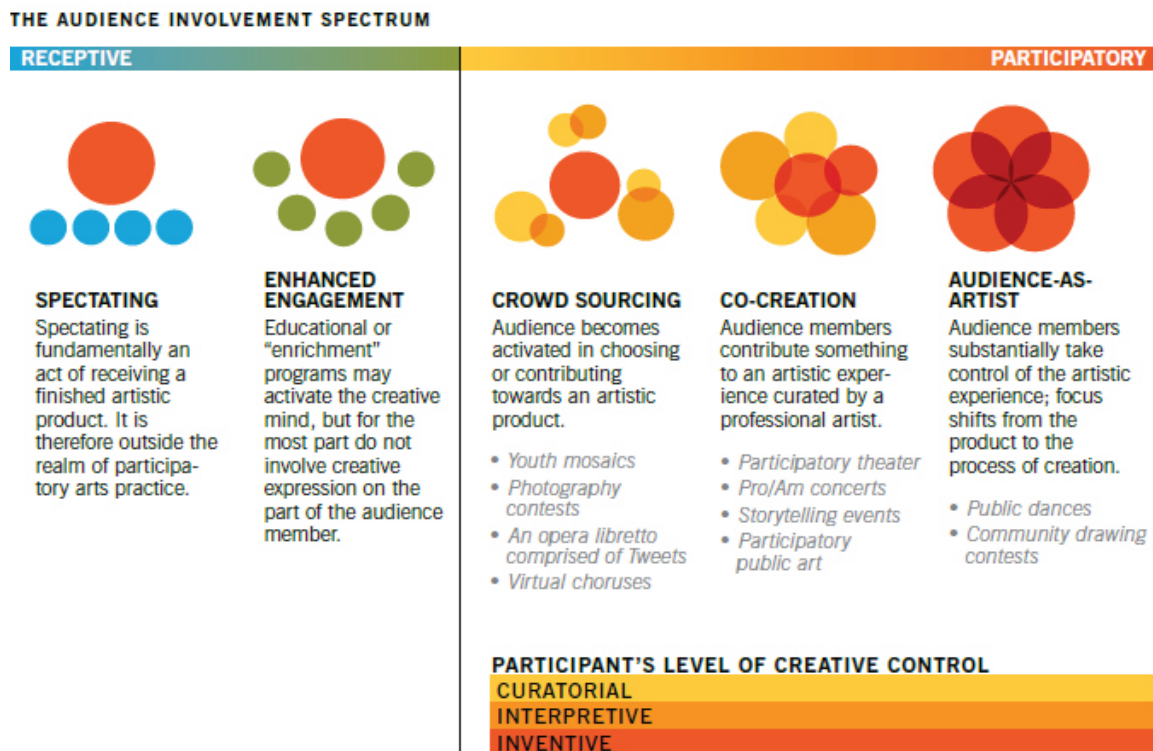


Figure 12. The audience involvement spectrum.  
Source: Brown et al., 2011, p. 15.

## Co-creation

Charles Leadbeater (2009a) claims that cultural activity has undergone a seismic shift from production *to* or *for* audiences to creation *with* them. Personally, I think that there has recently been far too much focus on the involvement of audiences in the creation of artistic work. This is perhaps a controversial admission in the context of the Be SpectACTive! project, which has to date engaged with a number of projects that do indeed strive to involve audiences in artistic creation (and often do it very well). However impactful these kinds of initiatives can be for a relatively small number of audiences, it seems to me that this particular focus can often come at the expense of other modes of audience engagement and other types of co-creation. I, therefore, agree with scholars such as Miranda Boorsma (2006) and Marylouise Caldwell (2001), who emphasise the sense-making qualities of co-creation rather than the production-based elements. Indeed I would argue that the most positive consequence of recent forays into co-creation is that the vital role of audiences as meaning-makers has finally come to the fore. As Colbert and St-James (2014) maintain in their musing on the future of arts marketing: “[c]o-creation practices are an integral part of artistic experiences, as consumers engage in cognitive, emotional, and imaginal practices to appropriate and make sense of a cultural product” (p. 570).

This description of co-creation is reminiscent of the enactive, multi-sensory and multi-dimensional descriptions of audiency discussed earlier in the chapter. It therefore appears reductionist to seek to separate processes of audiency from processes of co-creation. My suspicion is that this propensity to focus on the productive elements of co-creation emanates from a contemporary obsession with participation combined with a fetishisation of the novel. For example, Louise Govier (2009) describes co-creation as a collaborative journey that producers embark on with audiences to create something *new* together (my emphasis). Why does co-creation need to culminate in something new? And does it need to necessarily create something tangible?

Other practitioners and scholars interpret co-creation in a much broader sense, which helps to contextualise the phenomenon within an organisational setting and within society more broadly. One of my preferred definitions of co-creation is provided by Hannah Rudman, who articulates it as a “free exchange of creative energy” that can engender a new form of “organizational porosity between an arts organization and its public” (Brown et al., 2011, p. 17). This more open characterisation of the role of co-creation clarifies why arts organisations should invest some of their dwindling resources in acts of co-creation – namely, because it can democratize



the relationship between an organisation and its audience; break down the aphoristic fourth wall; and act as a catalyst for creative exchange.

It is tempting to consider co-creation as a uniquely creative or aesthetic phenomenon; and indeed the etymology of the term might well encourage us to do this. However, as Arvidsson (2008) has demonstrated, the progressive inclusion of consumers in the creation of value is actually one of the most significant trends in contemporary society. This trend has also been referred to as “the participatory turn” (Crawford et al., 2014) and it manifests not only in the public and private sectors (e.g. through crowdsourcing and crowdfunding) but also in society at large (e.g. in the increasing localized nature of festivals). So it could be argued that co-creation is actually a reality rather than a choice, which suggests to me that arts organisations which choose not to engage with and invest in co-creation will gradually become irrelevant.

There is, then, a strong business case to be made for investing in co-creation, and this is not predicated solely on the “do or die” strategy outlined above: co-creation has actually been credited with maximizing the lifetime value of desirable customer groups (Payne & Frow, 2005), which underscores its inherent value to any marketing approach which aims “to create value for customers and to capture value from customers in return” (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010, p. 26). Boorsma (2006) argues that co-creative activities can fulfil an organisation’s artistic mission by developing what she calls “artistic exchange relationships” (p. 77). These are the kinds of relationships that I want to propose as *optimal* in this chapter. But it must be noted that the development of these relational, creative relationships will require a culture shift in many arts organisations – a shift away from the traditionally transactional approach to marketing towards a relational philosophy based on tried-and-tested notions of hospitality.

## Hospitality and hosting

Practitioners and scholars are increasingly drawing on theories and practices of hospitality to illuminate how artists and arts organisations might engage with their audiences more meaningfully. Personally, I find the notion of arts organisations as hosts a compelling one. I recall as a young general manager of a small touring theatre company hearing Jude Kelly (now Artistic Director of London’s Southbank) deliver a speech about audience development, where she derided arts workers for inviting new audience members into their venues and then ignoring them. She called upon the sector to treat new audiences as guests at a party – to welcome them in, introduce

them to new friends, show them around and make them feel at home. How many arts organisations can honestly claim to do this? I fear that Jude’s derision is as apposite today as it was back in the early 2000s.

Henri Nouwen (1986) articulates the hospitality concept as follows: “[h]ospitality means primarily the creation of free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place” (p. 71). I like this quote because it highlights the significance of *space* to perceptions of belonging (another nod towards enactive engagement) and because it suggests that hospitality (like the arts) can be *transformative*. The concept of “threshold anxiety” is well established in audience development research, and therefore anything that arts organisations can do to make their venues less intimidating and more welcoming can only be a positive development. The focus on free, friendly space is therefore warranted; and the notion of transformation peppers so many mission statements that hospitality appears to me to be a highly strategic ethos to adopt.

Although some scholars continue to focus on the hospitality economy (Kitsios, 2006; Conner, 2004), Lashley et al. (2007) succeed in moving the analysis of hospitality beyond its traditional scholarly home of services marketing to explore its implications for fields as diverse as art, architecture, anthropology, and sociology. They also relate hospitality to practices of commodification and consumption. We can see here how a renewed focus on principles of hospitality might therefore inform processes of audience engagement, allied as it is with artistic and social consumption.

One issue that sparked some heated debate in the course of the conference was the question of what level of duty of care artists should assume towards their participants and audiences. One artist’s response to this was that his participant-audiences were adults and that he therefore had no ethical responsibility towards them whatsoever. This contrasts starkly with my own empirical work on processes of co-creation (Walmsley, 2013), where directors stressed the need for artists and producers to create a safe environment for audiences and broker the relationship carefully. Moreover, artists highlighted the need to treat audiences with care, respect and authenticity and create a playful environment – another important prerequisite for enactive audiency. These considerations weren’t necessarily ethically motivated: they were the underlying conditions for effective co-creative practice, and they once again emphasise the significance and positive impact of careful hosting.

## A culture of change

It goes without saying that engaging audiences in a more relational way and adopting a culture of hospitality requires a strong, distributed approach to leadership and a significant amount of change; and we have learnt from Alessandro Bollo's research throughout the course of this project that participation is all about innovation and change. Much has been written about both leadership and change management in the business and management literature; but despite the fact that both concepts are particularly vital in the arts (for reasons too numerous to explicate here), relatively little research has been conducted in this area in the arts and cultural sector. This is clearly a significant gap in knowledge and I suspect that arts and cultural leaders are often nervous about managing change initiatives for valid reasons related to inexperience or ignorance. Because failures in this area are often hidden or hushed up, leaders often perpetuate poor practice, as knowledge and experience remain poorly disseminated across the sector.

So what do we know about managing change in the arts, and how is this related to audiences? What might change look like in practice? Do we perhaps need different business models and structures? One seminal article on managing change in museums highlights the fact that "signs and talk of change are everywhere" and claims that "the metaphors and models that we use to describe organisations condition how we think about change within them" (Peacock, 2008, p. 334). Having evaluated a major change initiative in a performing arts organisation, I concur fully with Peacock's theory: participants in my research referred to their organisation variably as a "juggernaut", a "donut", a "treadmill" and a "buoy". Another common metaphor bandied about during periods of change (and indeed well beyond them) is that of the "departmental silo". It is easy to appreciate how these pernicious metaphors might impact on a change initiative and influence the management of it. But there are also positive metaphors and stories that can help an organisation to progress more healthily and sustainably through a process of change.

Like audiences, change initiatives come in many shapes and sizes and it is helpful, I think, to be mindful of the different typologies of change. In my experience, arts organisations tend to engage with change reactively and then proactively. A typical scenario might be a funding cut, followed by a top-down approach to reduce programming activity, which in turn incites resistance from staff. The ideal model is, of course, an emergent approach, where leaders empower staff to engage continuously in change and facilitate innovation both within and beyond the organisation. As Chris Bilton (2007) puts it: "[r]ather than directing change, managers provide a climate within which change can occur" (p. 134). The goal, then, is to establish change-ready organisations, peopled by change agents where change becomes the norm.

In order to enable change, hierarchies should be flat and leadership must be distributed; and in order for change to occur beyond the walls of an organisation, audiences and other stakeholders must be engaged in an active and participatory way. The key implication of this is that leaders of change-ready organisations need to be relational and participatory; good hosts who are happy to serve their communities and share their leadership and power.

A natural example for me of this kind of leader is John McGrath (see Figure 13). It is perhaps no coincidence that John holds a PhD in culture and performative space and began his theatre career in New York as an associate director for Mabou Mines. He became the artistic director of Contact in Manchester in 1999 and in the ten years he was there developed it into a world-leading participatory arts venue that places young people at the heart of everything it does. On the back of this achievement, John was appointed as the founding Artistic Director at National Theatre Wales (NTW) in 2009. During his seven-year tenure at NTW, John developed a truly ground-breaking organisation, which staged often digitally innovative work on trains, military training grounds, beaches and mountains, in warehouses, nightclubs, tents, village halls, schools, aircraft hangars and libraries, whilst developing an interactive online community of over 5,000 members (National Theatre of Wales, 2016b).



Figure 13: John McGrath at National Theatre Wales.  
Image by Warren Orchard, courtesy of National Theatre Wales.

NTW replicated the successful model of National Theatre of Scotland (NTS), which was established in 2006 without a theatre of its own to collaborate with the existing theatre community and infrastructure (Walmsley, 2010). The company's founding



business plan contained the following statement of intent: “Scottish theatre has always been vibrant, demotic and pioneering. With the arrival of the NTS, we now have an opportunity to transform the meaning of national theatre on a global scale by creating a truly innovative structure, free of bricks and mortar institutionalism, which will be alert, flexible and radical” (National Theatre of Scotland, 2005).



Figure 14: National Theatre of Scotland truck outside King's Theatre Glasgow.  
Image provided courtesy of National Theatre Scotland.

What these non-building based models facilitate is assuredly diverse sites and modes of audience engagement and participation. The quick and global success of these two fledgling national theatre companies raises an important question of whether buildings (i.e. arts venues) might actually hinder participation and change, preventing the “innovative, alert, flexible and radical” approach characteristic of both these companies and the enactive approach to audience engagement articulated in the course of this essay. If so, then we must fight for a radical rethink of arts management and funding in order to prioritise arts and audiences over the obsessive creation of new arts venues.

## Conclusions, implications and pleas

I have argued in this essay that the terminology surrounding audience engagement is unhelpful, ambiguous and constraining. So this is a call to broaden out our definitions, to widen our perceptions and admit that audience engagement is complex, messy, process-based, contingent and context-dependent. It should also be holistic (i.e. embedded across every arts organisation) and permanent (not curtailed within a one-off festival or project). This presents significant challenges for artists, leaders, managers, marketers, scholars, policymakers and audiences.

Processes of participation and co-creation have been shown to deepen audience engagement and provide authentic insights to artists. Enactive audiency is, therefore, a strategic win-win. But we heard in the course of the conference how many current approaches to co-creation, which focus predominantly on modes of production, actually fail to democratize the arts: as Luca Ricci discovered through his inspired approach to participatory programming at Sansepolpro's Kilowatt Festival, they often appeal to or ultimately culminate in a new elite of established visionaries and risk-takers.

These conclusions clearly have implications for scholarship, research, policy and practice. First of all, I would argue that as one of the most dynamic and fastest growing sectors in the world, the arts sector must urgently reconceive of its audiences as partners and guests, and stop treating them as customers or consumers. This, in turn, implies a wholesale re-conceptualization of arts marketing and cultural policy – a shift that will require significant further research into manifestations of co-creative practice and enactive audiency.

Secondly, artists and organisations that choose to engage in co-creative activity need to clearly define their objectives; plan for a sustainable legacy; and engage with their participants both ethically and authentically. Hosting is a vital component of audience engagement and it encompasses a duty of care. Participatory artists require a particular skill set, and they should conceive of themselves as facilitators and conduits of creativity; as enrichers of artistic engagement; as enablers of cultural and artistic meaning.

Thirdly, politicians and policymakers should not rely on co-creation to democratize the arts and widen participation. Several studies and projects (e.g. Walmsley, 2013) have demonstrated that co-creation and other more participatory modes of audience engagement often predominantly attract already highly engaged audience members or fellow artists, so audience diversification requires an entirely different approach. We have seen in this chapter how important it is to separate the enrichment of core audiences from the development of new audiences. I would argue that the ongoing

conflation of these two activities actually limits the effectiveness of both, and that both activities are often engaged in tokenistically and disingenuously.

Enactive audiences require listening, learning, porous and hosting organisations. But audiences are not generally artists, producers or experienced programmers and there should always come a time therefore when organisations make a bold artistic call and stop listening to them. Organisations need to transform their historically transactional relationships with their audiences into artistic exchange relationships. This will ultimately require a paradigm shift from the tactical processes of marketing towards the more participatory modes of engagement: marketing sells, whereas engagement enriches.

Ultimately, what became resoundingly clear in the course of this conference was that we are living through a period of transition in the arts: transition from creation towards co-creation; from marketing towards engagement; from hierarchical power towards distributed leadership; and from outmoded perceptions of spectatorship towards an enactive conceptualisation of audiency. This suggests to me that future-proof organisations will be artistically led but audience-centric and create an open habitus or community of practice. This is perhaps the ideal third way dreamt of by Matarasso and Landry; its realisation will require a new generation of change-makers who embody the relational, distributed and participatory forms of artistic leadership that enable them to develop enactive relationships with their audiences and co-create meaningful artistic experiences.





Image by Andrea Settanni



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*This book, edited by Kunnskapsverket, is the result of the reflections emerged during “The Proactive Role of Live Performance Audiences” Conference of the BeSpectACTive! project, organized by the University of Barcelona on November 22-23, 2016, in Barcelona. BeSpectACTive! is a cooperation project co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union.*







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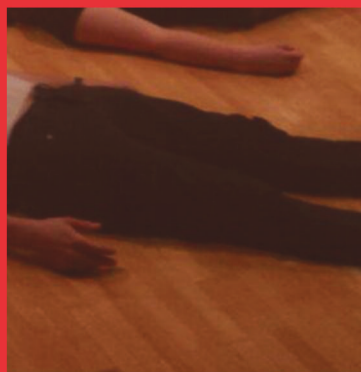


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Co-funded by the  
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