

# The participatory turn in cultural policy: Paradigms, models, contexts

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## **Title: The Participatory Turn in Cultural Policy: Paradigms, Contexts, Models**

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### *Abstract*

There is a participative turn in the field of cultural policy. Nevertheless, far from being coherent and generalized, this new focus is bound up with one of the peculiarities of cultural policies: namely, the coexistence of several paradigms that induce distinct versions of participation. Secondly, it faces three major changes that affect the relationship between culture and society. Technological, societal and political trends explain the growing role of participation as a protagonist in today's Western societies, with significant consequences on how cultural behaviour and cultural institutional strategies are reconfigured. In order to clarify the plural dimensions of participation and its results and consequences on cultural life, we propose a model showing the distinct proactive roles of current citizens. This will then allow us to critically examine the arguments and organizational implications for the achievement of political goals as well as their relationship with stakeholders' positions and human behaviour. This discussion will be inspired by the assessment of *BeSpectACTive!*, a European action research project whose objective is to analyze active citizen participation in the field of performing arts.

*Keywords* : Active Participation, Cultural Democracy, Empowerment, Policy Paradigms, Artistic Co-programming

### *Highlights* :

Each cultural policy paradigm induces its own definition of audience engagement.

Three streams (social, technological, political) open onto participation.

Participation in arts shows distinct interactions between audience, artist, and venue.

Four interpretations (from economics to politics) exist and affect its sense.

One empirical example questions the social and political conditions of success.

## 1. Introduction

The theme of social participation in the arts and heritage sector is obviously not new. The cut-off between creation and audience is a boundary (illustrated by the “fourth wall” in the performing arts) that has been questioned for a long time and across all artistic areas, from live performance or the visual arts to the audio-visual or the music sectors (Heinich, 2001; Bell, 2008; Rancière, 2008), as well as, for heritage, in new conceptions of audience and care (Szmelter, 2012). Meanwhile, in the commercial sector, the role of the consumer as king has not been completely realized, in particular as the borders between production and consumption are becoming more porous (Bruns, 2008).

The reflection on people participation, and its implications for governmental cultural policies is becoming particularly relevant in contemporary debate (Pawley, 2008; Jancovic & Bianchini, 2013). Two reasons might explain this. Firstly, there is the evolution of models of governance, with stronger demands for participation by more active citizens (Elkin & Soltan, 1999). This tendency dialogues with the evolution of cultural politics paradigms, which range from the preservation of excellence and cultural democratization (which started in the 1950s and 1960s with the development of cultural policies in many Western democratic countries) to the emergence and evolution of later notions of cultural democracy, cultural development and cultural diversity (Bonet & Négrier, 2011a). More recently, there is the growing importance of the synergic relationship between culture and the economy, the development of creative economy policies more oriented to the supply side (Garnham 2005), and the emergence of a politics of the commons that disputes the traditional role of government in defending and leading the public interest (Etzioni, 2004; Bertacchini, Bravo, Marrelli & Santagata, 2012).

The second main reason reinforcing the originality of this debate on cultural participation is that it stands at the crossroads of three main currents: technological, economical and sociological in nature (Rifkin, 2000). Indeed, participation has emerged as a new contemporary issue, but the notion of participation may correspond to different features, to providing information (reciprocally), to being heard (consultation), to having decision power, or to the phenomenon of co-production (co-creation), among others (Rowe & Fewer, 2000).

In the field of culture, participation simultaneously touches upon different fields of analysis. Firstly, it has a bearing on the instruments that connect artistic production and heritage interpretation, as well as expressions of tastes and experiences among the different members of a society. These processes had been largely analysed (Bishop, 2006; Brown, Novak-Leonard & Gilbride, 2011; Rancière, 2008). In the last decade, many of these practices have undergone significant changes with the development of digital technologies and social networks (Donnat, 2009; Walmsley, 2016).

Secondly, the economic model that governs the relationship between production and consumption is questioned. Conventionally, in the field of arts and culture, this model was dominated by the supply side, and demand depended on taste formation and cultural capital (Einarsson, 2016). Beyond their contrasting interests, both private producers and civil servants shared this common understanding. The emergence of the theme of participation in the arts is a potential failure of this model, since it suggests

that the demand (those involved) should play a more active role in this relationship, through the recognition of collective cultural rights (Jakubowski, 2016).

Thirdly, there is the sociological dimension of this relationship. Culture, in its interaction with society, is moving from a focused and hierarchical model to a diffuse and shared one (Bauman, 2011). The issue of participation involves the testing of a dual hypothesis. The first is that of a radical transformation of the hierarchical model implying a lack of power on the part of the audience to decide on the content of whatever event it attended. The second hypothesis speculates on the extent to which it is now possible to consider a new model of participation which overcomes such hierarchies. However, some forms of participation, such as voluntary work, may have conflicting implications. The dark side of the creative and night-time economy, with poor working conditions or even unpaid work, usually generates self-exploitation of voluntary work and internships (O'Brien 2014). This fact generates a better social acceptance of the role of volunteering in wealthy societies, such as Scandinavia, with respect to others, as has been shown in the case of European music festivals (Négrier, Bonet & Guerin, 2013).

In the first part of this paper, we will analyse how the main paradigms of cultural policy interact with audience behaviour and participation. We will expose the contradictions, hybridizations and intersections among paradigms in the use of audience participation. In the second part, the paper will propose a model showing the different types of interaction participation can represent, according to the major changes that affect the relationship between culture and society both on the technological, societal and political sides. The distinct proactive roles of citizens are influenced by these changes, as we'll illustrate from an empirical example: *BeSpectACTive!*,<sup>1</sup> a European action research project on active citizen participation in the field of performing arts.

## **2. Paradigms, Critical Assessment and the Question of Audience**

To measure the importance of the participatory turn, it must be related to the initial evolution of cultural policy paradigms. The question of a paradigm shift was illustrated by Peter Hall as a way to better define what a public policy is: not just a program, in the narrow sense, but also a worldview derived from general principles, as well as norms that ensure their translation into a concrete reality and instruments to implement them. Some changes may seem significant even though they only affect instruments. A paradigm shift, however, is one that affects all three dimensions and transforms both our world, the standards we use, and the instruments employed (Hall, 1993).

The apprehension of 'audience' as a category by artistic and heritage institutions and professionals - as well as by governmental officials - is bound up in the evolution of cultural policy paradigms. One of the specificities of the field of cultural policy is that these paradigms, rather than substituting one another, tend to be cumulative. Indeed, the emergence of a new paradigm does not eliminate the previous ones. Rather, they live together, with greater or lesser predominance in each of the plural landscapes of cultural projects and venues. In most places, the natural tensions between them tend to

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<sup>1</sup> Project co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union, [www.bespectactive.eu](http://www.bespectactive.eu)

be tempered through their adaptability to changes in social values and the stakeholders' strategies (Bonet & Négrier, 2011b).

In contemporary cultural policies, distinct overlapping paradigms thus coexist: cultural excellence, cultural democratization, cultural democracy and creative economy. Each one emerged within a distinct time period as a means to lend global coherence to the content of cultural policy, from its discourse to its institutional instruments and management tools. In most Western democratic societies, the cultural welfare state came into being during the 1950s and 1960s, and its paradigms were the result of the evolution of social values over the course of these last six decades. During this period, the very concept of culture (as a field of public policy) changed, just as industrial society transformed itself into a postmodern society and into a service economy (Castells, 1996; Rifkin, 2000). Each one of the four paradigms holds a specific vision of audience policy.

The paradigm of *excellence* was the first to appear since it resolved two important challenges in cultural policies following World War II (Lewis & Miller, 2003; Poirrier, 2011). Firstly, it allowed the exercise of an independent criterion, autonomous from direct political pressure, that respected freedom of expression (held in check by totalitarian systems) and incorporated the support of avant-garde creation as a goal of governmental intervention (pre-existing cultural policies did not include avant-garde arts given their lack of academic legitimacy). Moreover, the demand for excellence fits in well with support for non-commercial artistic expressions, which due to the difficulties they experience to survive in the free market, require philanthropic patronage or governmental support (Throsby, 2001). Those responsible for guaranteeing the excellence of proposals that compete for governmental support would be, in countries under the arm's length model (Hillman-Chartrand & McCaughey, 1989; Heikkinen, 2005), experts selected by arts councils for their criteria and independence, whereas in other countries, like Germany (Burns & Van der Will, 2003) or France (Dubois, 2015), they would be high-level officials responsible for prioritising subsidies, with more or less occasional intrusions by the policy elite. In both cases, the major role is played by the expert, through his/her ability to identify and support a creation of quality, sometimes with complex codes of access.

Under this paradigm, the role of audiences is ultimately subordinate to quality, a controversial criterion due to aesthetic, social and political subjectivity. Programmers and decision-makers of public policies belong, together with the critics and most seeking governmental support, to the same endogamous group of professionals (Urfalino, 2004; Alexander & Rueschemeyer, 2005) that excludes those who do not share the dominant hierarchy of values. Nevertheless, the system of excellence, facing criticism for self-referentiality or subjectivity, did not die. On the contrary, beyond this criticism, the permanence of this paradigm over the following decades, and of its corresponding institutional instruments, is explained by: a) the difficulty of finding alternative criteria for maintaining the autonomy of art and heritage against other prevailing systems (economic, social or political); and b) the expansion of cultural expression able to claim public support and the consequent adaptation of the criteria for quality and excellence used in such cases (and promoted by more eclectic or post-modern views).

The second paradigm implemented was *cultural democratization*, the main justification behind most arts and heritage venues and projects. Its main purpose is to facilitate access to the broadest number of people to high-quality cultural goods and services that, without government support, would not be supplied by the market. Under this paradigm, most cultural policies have increased in budget and territorial presence, from the Sixties until the beginning of the current economic and public budgetary crisis (Psychogiopoulou, 2015). It should be noted that, since the beginning of the crisis, not all countries have cut their cultural budgets in the same way (Bonet & Donato, 2011) and some, even, have increased it (Getzner, 2015). The correlation between the socio-economic level, accumulated cultural capital and cultural consumption practices is responsible for the failure of many cultural democratization policies and for the scant social equity of a large number of the cultural programs funded with public resources.

From the point of view of audience participation, its main criticism targets the separation between the producer's proposal (assisted by governmental decision makers) and consumer demand. Audiences consume and passively participate in whatever artistic directors, editors or curators propose, without any other alternative besides exiting the event. The role of marketing and communication strategies is to extend the social base of audiences in relation to the venue or distribution capacity, without falling below a minimum standard of quality. The intermediary mission is to transmit, in the most effective way, content that remains intangible across the social space. Nevertheless, in many Western countries, the attendance figures for cultural production have remained quite stable over time (Donnat, 2011; Zorba, 2009). They have even exhibited a tendency towards reduction, as the population of many countries becomes more diverse and with more heterogeneous interests.

The next paradigm to emerge chronologically was *cultural democracy*. It emerged in the 1970s as a criticism led by socio-cultural operators and some independent curators in terms of what they perceived as the failure of the two preceding paradigms. Cultural democracy postulates the possibility of each social group obtaining recognition of its own cultural practices (considered illegitimate under models of cultural excellence and cultural democratization and/or unprofitable by the economic system) and gaining support for them (Pyykkonen, Simanainen & Sokka, 2009). It assumes that there is no coherent and hierarchically superior cultural product or expression that is necessary to be transmitted widely among an undifferentiated set of citizens. It was in this context that participatory discourse was mainly developed, especially in the case of art forms for which recognition remained at this time controversial among conventional citizens and cultural policy officials. Under this paradigm, the divorce between supply and demand would theoretically become meaningless.

In the late 1980s, in the context of discussions on the preservation of cultural diversity and cultural rights protection, the cultural democracy goal was redeveloped and spread worldwide as a model linked to the concept of cultural development. It was able to overcome not only the critique of hierarchical and homogenizing models of cultural democratization, but also the cultural globalization of the economy (Meyer-Bisch 2012). It offers an alternative to democratization on the one hand, and to economic globalization of culture on the other. It creates an opening in relation to public indifference, since it identifies social groups that can set trajectories, expectations and partially original cultural policy. The UNESCO World Decade for Cultural Development (1988-1997) and the discussion around the *Convention on the Protection*

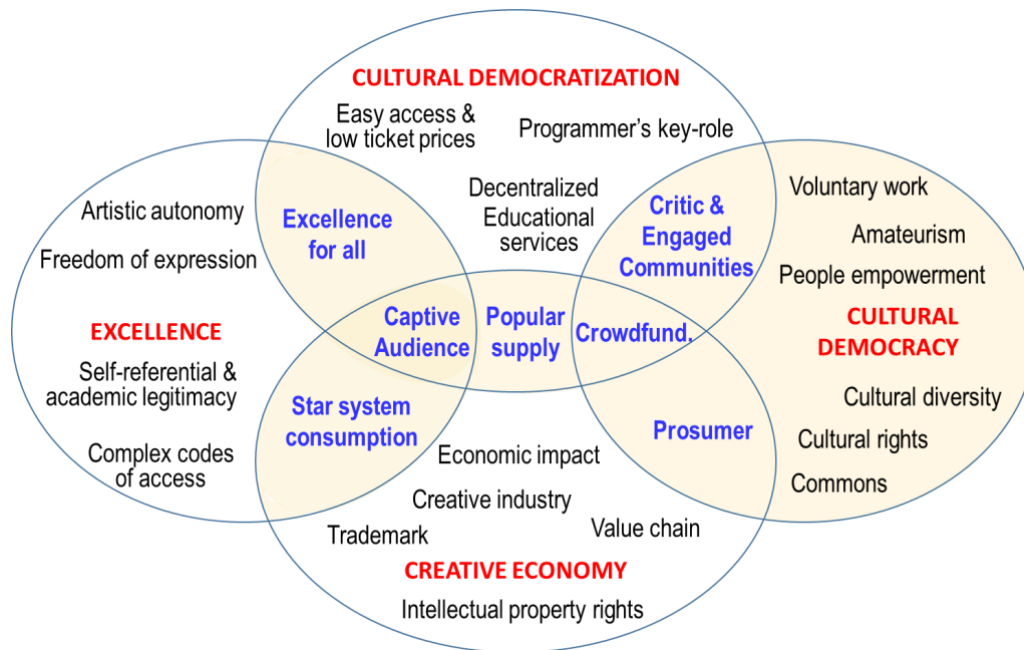
*and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* indicate the incorporation of these paradigms into the rhetoric of international cultural policies (Unesco, 1995; Unesco 2005) and the difficulty of their being implemented (Vlassis 2011; Unesco, 2015b).

In recent years, cultural democracy has welcomed a new interpretation with the rise of the cultural commons approach (Bertacchini, Bravo, Marrelli & Santagata, 2012; Barbieri, Fina & Subirats, 2012). Its original purpose was to emphasize the empowerment of citizens as active subjects and stakeholders in public policies (Polityczna, 2015) by giving value to assembly decisions taken by active collectives and citizens.

Criticism of cultural democracy can be separated into distinct arguments. The first one targets the limitations of its rhetorical discourse, due to the huge difficulty encountered in concretely changing the mission and practices of most institutions oriented toward excellence and democratization. The second one develops in more depth the idea that cultural democracy – or cultural rights – devolves into cultural relativism, where the anti-hierarchical access to creativity means the lack of respect for art as a “necessarily” historical, vertical and selective process.

The *cultural economy* paradigm emerged in the 1970s as an academic field, but slowly gained visibility during the 1980s, with the legitimization of the previously stigmatized (notably by the Frankfurt School) term of cultural industries (Girard, 1978). It focuses on the direct economic impact and externalities of the cultural sector, traditionally considered more as a domain of expenditure. This cultural economy paradigm is also an attempt to justify governmental support for cultural practices with low attendance. But it was at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st Century, when it was strongly reinforced with the rise of the creative economy (Volkering, 2001; Hughson & Inglis, 2001) and the worldwide development of the Creative Cities strategy (Byrne, 2012; Landry & Bianchini, 1995). The *creative economy* is a new formulation of the cultural economy paradigm. Many countries, led by the UK, diverted the approach from the support for core arts and heritage activities to those outcomes of human talent that generate intellectual property rights. In doing so, the sector has expanded to a large set of creative industries that were not necessarily considered as legitimate objects from the previous standpoint of cultural democratization and cultural development (Garnham, 2005; O’Brien, 2014). The role of audiences in this cultural and creative economy paradigm is linked to their role as consumers or users who make the business financially viable, whether directly or indirectly.

Figure 1. *Participation in cultural policy paradigms*



The simultaneous coexistence, in one way or another, of all these paradigms results in cultural policies that are complex from an interpretative standpoint. Each paradigm considers citizen participation from a different perspective. At the same time, it is in its practical application that the contradictions (and the convergences among paradigms) shine, as can be seen in the overlapping sections on the diagram. In any case, cultural democracy plays a central role in active citizen participation, even if – in the overlapping sections – we can see how contrasted the pallet of participative orientations is (from standard consumption to *prosuming*; from captive audiences to crowdfunding engagement).

The paradigm of excellence is rarely interested in participation, except when the artistic proposal needs it as part of the artistic experiment. Cultural democratization, with its mission of delivering excellence for all, tries to attract not only larger audiences but a growing diversity of them, mainly via education and marketing campaigns (long- and short-term strategies). It looks for passive consumers of predefined cultural offers, but due to the difficulty of attracting new audiences, the result is captive and endogamous audiences. These are preferred by projects of excellence, since professionals and audiences share the same interpretative codes. At the same time, these captive audiences guarantee the economic viability of many of the business models driven by the paradigm of the creative economy. Yet, faced with the difficulty of attracting different audiences, many facilities built to respond to the objectives of cultural democratization end up offering popular programming, not far removed from the most economic model. Nevertheless, the creative economy paradigm does not just look for these passive consumers but for interactive *prosumers* of the latest technological tools, as participation is crucial for competing in immaterial markets, as well as for giving new space to co-creation and co-production practices.

Another space of convergence between these diverse paradigms is the revitalization provided by crowdfunding. From the perspective of cultural democracy, it gives voice to a plurality of expressions, feeding their basic communities. As for cultural economics, it is possible to expand financial sustainability, mainly in small-sized projects given the predominance of rewards-based crowdfunding over equity- or pure



donation-based crowdfunding (Bonet & Sastre, 2016). It is also possible to test its market potential and transform local initiatives into much larger virtual communities. Finally, in terms of the strategy of cultural democratization, it allows for wider audiences.

On the other hand, in terms of the promotion of *prosumer* behaviour, the paradigms of cultural democracy and of the creative economy coincide. The possibility of transforming a creative yearning into a tangible reality gives individuals and communities independence while expanding the range of cultural expressions. This is possible thanks to technological applications resulting from the creative economy where interaction and participation are at the centre of the new value chains.

So, even though participation is crucial to achieving cultural democracy goals, the different meanings of participation (from support given by critical audiences or *prosumer* behaviour, to more passive and captive consumers) and its use by each of the cultural policy paradigms show the hybridization of contemporary strategies. The tension between ideological approaches, without any one model in a clear position of dominance, explains the contradictions in the battle to set the political agenda.

### 3. Modelling

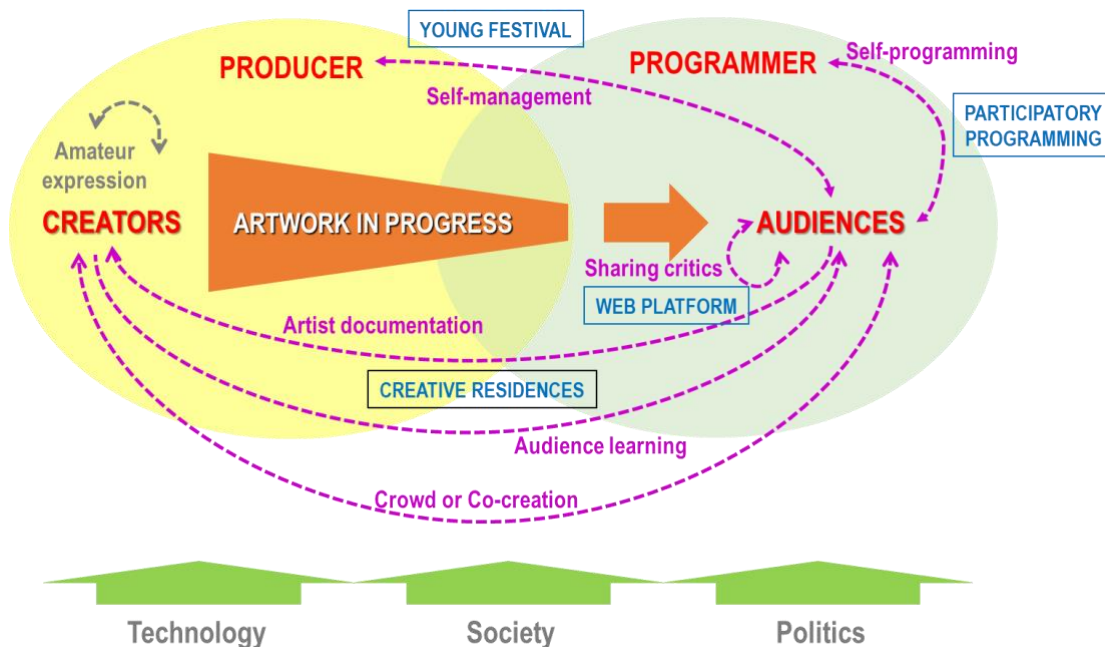
In figure 1, we showed that participation could be articulated very differently, depending on the paradigm in which it is expressed. The model that we present below tries to explain how different mechanisms of proactive participation between programmers, creators and audiences are organized based on four intervention strategies. These strategies interact, with varying levels of tension and complementarity, with the four previously described cultural policy paradigms. In this sense, figure 2 aims to show the principal interactions that stimulate proactive participation in the arts. The model is inspired by the implementation of *BeSpectACTive!*, a European project whose main objective is to experiment with active audience participation in the field of performing arts. This project allows to look the distinct features that characterize the main stakeholders engaged, feeding the relationship between creation and audience. Four different intervention strategies or platforms are used in order to develop proactive participation: creative residencies to produce performing arts co-productions, participatory programming among different groups of spectators, the organization of a theatre festival by young people for young people, and a web platform for specific interactive performances. This experiment is being developed in a range of European cities with very different political cultures (from the UK to Romania, Italy or Croatia). The project involves an action research approach using several analytical tools: participant observation, interviews, workshop discussion with partners, and analysis of digital exchanges. The results of this analysis are used to empirically demonstrate the complexities of implementing active citizen participation in cultural activities.

Figure 2 describes seven different forms of active participation, even though the *BeSpectACTive!* project only experiments in the six latest ones:

- a) Amateur expression. The ability of collectives of laypeople to create, interpret and jointly enjoy a community work. The empowerment of these individuals is total, because they decide on what, how and when they participate, and the

- border between the process of creation / interpretation and of consumption / participation is almost non-existent.
- b) Crowd or co-creation. Individuals or audience groups participate in the process of creation and interpretation of a performing art piece proposed and lead by an artist, through a more or less intensive interaction process.
  - c) Self-programming. Groups of voluntary people participate in a process of selecting some, or the totality, of the next artistic season or festival programme. This means having to review a large number of artistic proposals, to agree on the selection criteria, and to evaluate their suitability to be presented to target audiences.
  - d) Sharing critics. Individuals write their opinions and reactions to video performances specifically created for a web platform; and complementarily, groups of local audiences from different cities connect simultaneously and share their opinions through the web platform during the European Spectators Day.
  - e) Self-management. Groups of voluntary people lead the organization of an artistic programme, a festival or a theatre.
  - f) Audience learning. The participation in activities organized during creative residencies allows spectators to better understand the creative process and to react and to learn from it.
  - g) Artist documentation. During different stages of creative residencies, the artist team learns from audience reactions and discussions enriching the production and the artistic proposal.

Figure 2. Interaction between proactive roles of cultural audiences and BeSpectACTive! project platforms



The three arrows at the bottom of Figure 2 make it possible to understand the contemporary dynamics of participation, but also how they are differently implemented according to the contexts. Each level (technological, political, social) contains a participatory potential, but also limits. They must therefore be taken into account to explain how participation in the system of cultural interactions is evolving.

The first dimension is technology, with the development of new communication tools that make participation at the same time easier, more directly communicable and more individual. Speaking of spectator participation in a project like BeSpectACTive! shows the inter-individual dimension associated with these new forms. The expressiveness that passes through the tools corresponds to two very distinct dimensions. On the one hand, new technologies (analysis of social networks, algorithms, web marketing, etc.) allow cultural institutions to know more and more accurately the expectations - real or potential - of their audiences. The use of these means of expression is socially unequal, according to age, social backgrounds and levels of education (Djakouane & Négrier, 2012). But they are changing the way in which cultural institutions interact with their audiences, with the risk that they may lead to new forms of aesthetic conformism, underestimating the diversity of expression of opinions or tastes (Hindman, 2008). On the other hand, new technologies contribute to the aesthetics of cultural projects. This is the case of interactive performances via digital tools (Lindinger, Mara, Obermaier, Aigner, Haring & Pauser, 2013). Admittedly, interactive art precedes the development of the digitization of society (Popper, 2005). But it is also undeniable that this development has led to new creative forms, around virtual and / or augmented realities, as well as new perspectives of participation (Van Dijck, 2013).

In the BeSpectACTive! Project, the implementation of a web platform aimed to test the possibilities of participation in a choreographic creation, by generating comments, criticisms, and advices. It did not achieve this objective on the citizen's side, who were not very active in this work in progress, via digital networks, except when these remote interactions were associated with a collective event, such as the European Spectators Day. On the other hand, it has succeeded for exchanges between professionals (programmers, artists, cultural leaders). The use of new technologies does not erase the social and political conditioning of cultural practices. Similar conclusions are made on the use of new tools, such as crowdfunding (Bonet & Sastre, 2016).

The social dimension of the participatory turn in culture corresponds to two trends. The first is on the side of audiences, linked to Bourdieu's model of structural homology between hierarchy of cultural tastes and hierarchy of social groups (Coulangeon & Duval, 2013; Glévarec, 2013). The orientation of tastes is more a function of horizontal relationships like in the case of peers or friends. They are less hierarchical, even though they can be sociologically criticized (Pasquier, 2008). Emphasis is placed on the capacity for autonomy or interdependence of individuals within several relational circles. Cultural participation gains in singularity - since everyone has a wide range of possible influences - what it loses in collective determination. The spectator can be seen less and less as the ventriloquist of the programmer, made of good cultural intentions and symbolic inferiority, since he-she navigates in an eclecticism of tastes and sociability that gives him-her a certain autonomy (Corcuff, Le Bart & de Singly, 2010). Naturally, this autonomy does not mean the end of sociological influences due to "hard variables" (age, social category, gender, housing, etc.). Some even have still considerable weight that defeats most cultural democratization policies (Donnat 2009). But the discussion of Bourdieu's model simply says that cultural participation is possible despite the elitist fatality.

The other social dimension of the participatory turn is on the side of artistic production. It questions the artistic offer and its adaptation to the challenges of contemporary

societies. The discussion is about the tendency towards the self-legitimation of art in today's world (Heinich 2005), and its effect of detaching artistic production from the society to which it belongs. It leads to the project of reintegrating the art issue into a new social use of art. For example, the program *The Nouveaux Commanditaires*, initiated by the *Fondation de France*, can be cited as one of the projects most explicitly turned towards a renewal of the social question from and within an artistic perspective (Négrier, 2013). It is based on the idea of offering to citizens the possibility to ask an artist to address one of their social problems, with the help of a mediator who manages all relations (technical, financial, political, artistic, etc.) needed to implement the project. It constitutes a radical break with the model of the socio-aesthetic closure of art on itself. Many initiatives are emerging today in the form of spectator collectives, citizen commissions for works, and co-creation through artistic and participatory residencies, to give art a new social vocation.

In the case of BeSpectACTive!, there have been developed instruments that resonate with these social changes. Artists hosted in residency have involved the spectators in a participation process that responds either to the purpose of documentation, or to that of co-creation. The first situation is illustrated by the work "Walking on the Moon" by CK Teatro, where the spectators are interviewed by the artist who then presents his creation inspired by these collected materials. The second situation is illustrated by the work of Bridget Fiske "Yes Move, No Move", where the whole creative process combines the experience and inventiveness of the participating spectators. We can also mention the Barbora Latalova's piece, "Different", which works according to the same commitment. For other cases, the participatory dimension is more a pretext, or downright a failure. This is the case of "Denuded", by Bruno Isakovic, whose proposal for public participation could not really materialize. These experiences show that participation strategies change according to the personal social sensitivity of the artist involved. Participation cannot be imposed by the venue or the festival. In fact, the differences in implementation are more related to the personality of the artists, their experience and willingness to play the participatory game, than to local political strategies.

Social and technological changes, therefore, have a major impact on how participation is today at the centre 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 implemented by the different stakeholders involved. The political dimension is not necessarily linked to the presence of professional political actors, but it is the expression of social and technological changes at the local level. A political interaction can take the forms of a balance of power within an organization, or between this artistic organization and its neighbourhood. A second political dimension is more explicitly linked to the changes that affect the political world, at the level of government policies. The model of cultural democratization responds to a top-down dialectic that is widespread among dominant actors –government policies, venues or festivals. Its legitimation is linked to its support to other models of cultural policy, such as cultural democracy or cultural rights (Lucas, 2017). Finally, a third political dimension addresses the evolution of relationships between citizens and local political leaders in the field of culture. In a classic model that is still in use in many contexts, local (but not only) political leaders have an elitist relationship with artists. The Artist / Prince elitist construct assumed an overhanging relationship with the population. This vision has evolved strongly, and

technological and social transformations have reoriented the initial Prince / Artist legitimacy relation, towards a Prince / Society / Artists relation.

In this regard, the case of BeSpectACTive! is a clear example of the existing and shifting tensions among the different paradigms illustrated in Figure 1. The propensity towards a paradigm or another varies on a continuum, depending on the geo-cultural and organizational contexts, experiences and values. This tension affects the typologies and degrees of active participation in several ways. This scheme of participation describes actors in interaction according to different types of processes. Its purpose is to underline the complexity of the landscape, and not to reduce it to one single path, as if this were a new system, at the same time radically new and coherent. Rather, this scheme allows us to make two comments. First, audiences' participation does not produce a single model. It has more or less developed tools because it is influenced by philosophical orientations, material constraints, and political and contextual visions. Second, participation is a strategy that creates tensions with pre-existing paradigms, but it does not lead to the emergence of a new paradigm as such.

The analysis of the BeSpectACTive! project experience allows to observe, in more detail, the tensions and complementarities in the implementation of the different paradigms of cultural policy. On one extreme of the continuum, the maximum openness to civic engagement and cultural democracy is involving and giving responsibility to citizens in the production and programming activities. The case of York Theatre Royal (UK) provides an example of this engagement process: TakeOver Festival is entirely managed by a group of teenagers and young people. In order to avoid socio-cultural discrimination, a mediator from the theatre promotes the project among different communitarian institutions. The theatre used a grant scheme from the former labour government for fostering cultural democratisation among the youth to create a new generation of civic leaders. In this way, the theatre reaches not only the original political purpose of cultural democratisation, but extends its action to a dimension of cultural democracy. Thus, the case of York illustrates the complementarity, as well as the tension, between both cultural policy paradigms. The process appears to be closer to cultural democracy, in terms of delegation of power granted by the organization. But the democratization paradigm is notably achieved as well, if we examine the sociology of the young audience of the festival and even the composition of its board.

In San Sepolcro (Italy), the tension / complementarity between cultural democratization (programmer's key role in enlarging audiences in a small urban area) and cultural democracy (empowering audiences) is as well quite visible. Part of the programme of the San Sepolcro Kilowatt festival is chosen by volunteer spectators called *visionari*, through a procedure of presentation / discussion of projects with an active advising role of the festival director. The experience obtains a good reception from the local community, who attends massively the shows chosen by its fellow citizens. Likewise, it has legitimized the obtaining of public resources that had previously been in danger. On the other side, the debate on the day after the show between the *visionari* and the companies chosen by them allows an exchange, without professional filters, between the expectations of the programmers and the actual live performance.

Participatory programming is, as well, at the crossroads of the paradigms of *excellence* and *cultural democracy*. This tension, which could be seen already in the Kilowatt festival case, becomes more visible when the strategy begins to be applied to festivals

located in European countries of the former communist orbit. At the Tanek Praha Festival (Czech Republic), the demand for artistic excellence, guaranteed by a demanding artistic direction, has gone hand in hand with the desire to incorporate innovation. The perception of a delicate balance between the two objectives explains the high tension in the implementation of the participatory programming strategy. Instead, the experience of innovative models of artistic residency to develop co-creation processes have flowed more naturally. In the case of the Festival of Sibiu (Romania), characterized by first-level international performances, the participatory programming aims at preserving the highest quality: the experiment is addressed only to cultural management students who depend, from an academic and professional perspective, on the theatre direction. In this case, the director's personality and a tradition of hierarchical relationship affect the development of a complete cultural democracy experience.

For its part, the case of Bakelit (Hungary), which also implements the same participation strategies, shows the tension between the creative economy paradigm and cultural democracy. This new artistic venue located in Budapest suburbs shows the great difficulty of attracting an audience who would agree to play the participatory game. This case illustrates that participation is not easily usable as a tool to conquest a position into the cultural market place, especially for a young and peripheral artistic venue. Here, the instability of the organization goes hand in hand with the uncertainty about the reality of participation.

Through these results, we perceive how much participation has a direct bearing on the political nature of the local context. The factors that facilitate participatory dynamics are: a good integration of the artistic operator into his social environment; the ability of the direction to lose some programming power in order to expand their cultural project; the quality of the management of the spectator groups. Given the examples provided, one could be tempted to make distinctions between different geo-political cultures. Although it is true that the former communist countries inherited an organizational and political culture with strong and hierarchical leadership, being the preservation of excellence one of its main merits, this may be the case also for Western European countries. Furthermore, the idea of opposing "political cultures" is too fixed to account for the evolutions observed.

By highlighting different interpretations of participation in a particular case, we see that its implementation within a certain context may reveal totally opposed strategies. Thus, a participatory approach can effectually be more compliant than expected with the classical model of cultural democratization. It can be even confronted with the maintenance of typical behaviours of excellence, implying a certain schizophrenia between explicit ends and implicit constraints. All these cases show that participation is a strategic tool for cultural organizations in a period of transition. Like in every transition period, one can find resistances, opportunistic behaviours, distinct perceptions of the purpose and finality. In a more decisively way than in ordinary periods context, individuals whose leadership can orientate the project in one direction or the other are of crucial importance.

## 5. Concluding remarks

Citizen participation has emerged recently as an important contemporary issue. Society is moving from a focused and hierarchical model to a diffuse and shared one, pushed by technological, societal and political streams. But the notion of active participation corresponds to different features, in particular in the field of performing arts; a field where prosumer behaviour has been much less studied than in the field of digital cultural creation and participation. The development of audience behaviour and participation have been traditionally taken into account at different levels of intensity by the main paradigms of cultural policy. The analysis has made possible to specify the type and level of the tensions, complementarities, hybridizations and intersections in the achievement of the different paradigms, in the framework of a model that describes different proactive roles of cultural audiences and its interactions. The empirical cases of the *BeSpectACTive!* project has allowed us to evaluate the role of the context and the political and organizational culture of some European theatres and festivals.

It is from this framework that we can say that participation strategies do not offer a model in itself but rather a medium available in specific contexts according to specific strategies. It is then interesting to explore these contexts, given the territorial conditions expressing particular orientations. However, in a dynamic reality formed by the interaction of a plurality of stakeholders, the capacity to change a participatory strategy from the initial vision is quite notable. This fact leads us to raise four research questions:

The first one is to better know who is involved in pro-active participation in the field of arts. In quantitative terms, it is clear that we are almost always dealing with limited numbers, a fact that hardly supports the assumption that active participation will become socially dominant. Furthermore, as Ben Walsmley (2013) reminded us, the participation processes - particularly those of participatory programming - do not destroy artistic decision pattern hierarchies. According to their social, educational and cultural capital, participants follow a logic of belonging and loyalty to the performing arts venue or festival. But this finding is less evident in the case of co-creation processes and residences, which involve more heterogeneous populations. In self-management strategies, most citizens committed are highly educated people from the middle class. But when the project is aimed at young people, the social gap can be overcome if mediation assumes the challenge of social diversity as one of its objectives. Therefore, the discussion is whether or not participation strategies face the same criticism as cultural democratization in general. And, to what extent, a conscious and appropriate mediation can rebalance, to a certain extent, the natural tendency to relegate those layers of population with lower cultural and relational capital.

The second question regards the impact of participatory experiences on the participants. By "participant" we mean both the audience and the artists. Here, there are probably new approaches that are called into play. Social psychology can allow us to analyse the emotional dimensions that are at work in these interactions. For a discussion of these processes in artistic terms, however, we should draw more on a social history of art. In any case, this second track questions the new uses of art. And it would be interesting to assess the originality of these experiences compared to the traditional ones found in

community theatre, social art, or cultural neighbourhood programs, among others.<sup>2</sup> The interviews conducted in our case study indicate a high level of learning by all participants, which in some cases are perceived as extraordinarily satisfactory but in others not. The difficulty of recruiting and replacement rates are indicative of the existing contradictions of a society that values empowerment but at the same time flees from strong or long term commitments.

The third question concerns the most efficient conditions for overcoming three key challenges of cultural democracy: a) questioning the boundaries between public and professional environments; b) recognizing the creative capacity of citizens in high-quality artistic productions; and c) including laypersons in artistic and managerial decisions. These challenges affect artistic organizations located in different contexts and with different wills and possibilities. The cases analysed in this paper illustrate how some organizations adopt a participation strategy for political, institutional or social reasons. These reasons could pursue more or less intrinsic or instrumental goals. In all these cases the political cultures shape the relationship between audience and the programmer in multiple ways.

The fourth and last question concerns the political dimension of participation. There are multiple political uses: participation as a central tool to reinforce cultural action and policy; a purely demagogic interpretation of participation based on cultural relativism; participation as a tool for socio-cultural inclusion (affecting minorities and targeting urban peripheries). In this last case, the strategy could be seen as separated from the professional cultural environment. Finally, participation could emerge as a general practice in other public policy areas (environment, budget, planning, or education). There is still a lot to do in order to put participation strategies at the heart of the cultural policy agenda.

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<sup>2</sup> Each one of these notions claims to transform the relationship between art and society. Social art induces the artist's involvement in his/her contemporary social movements, as opposed to bourgeois art or the "art for art's sake" notion of autonomy. This current was born at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Mc William, Méneux & Ramos, 2014). The community theatre is a tradition of performing art involving a concrete community (and not society in general) born in the Sixties. The cultural neighbourhood programs emerged rather during the Nineties, in particular in underprivileged neighbourhoods (Lamont & Small, 2007).



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