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The participative turn in cultural policy: Paradigms, models, contexts

Lluís Bonet^a, Emmanuel Négrier^{b,*}

^a University of Barcelona, School of Economics and Business, Av. Diagonal 690, 08034, Barcelona, Spain

^b CNRS, University of Montpellier CEPEL, Université de Montpellier, 34060 Montpellier cedex 2, France

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ABSTRACT

There is a participative turn in Cultural policy. Nevertheless, far from being coherent and generalized, it has first to deal with one of the peculiarities of Cultural Policies: the coexistence of several paradigms that induce distinct versions of participations. Secondly, it faces three major changes that affect the relationship between culture and society. Technological, societal and political trends explain the growing protagonist role of participation in today's western societies, with significant consequences in the reconfiguration of cultural behaviours and cultural institutions strategies. In order to enlighten the plural dimensions of participation and its results and consequences for 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 its relationship with stakeholder's positions and people behaviours. This discussion will be inspired by some results of a European research-action project that aims to experiment active citizen participation in the field of performing arts.

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 (Bell, 2008; Heinich, 2001; Ranci ere, 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 (Jancovic & Bianchini, 2013; Pawley, 2008). 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 & N egrier, 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

* Corresponding author at: CEPEL, Universit e de Montpellier, 39 rue de l'Universit e 34060 Montpellier cedex 2, France.

E-mail addresses: lbonet@ub.edu (L. Bonet), emmanuel.negrier@umontpellier.fr (E. N egrier).

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commons that disputes the traditional role of government in defending and leading the public interest (Bertacchini, Bravo, Marrelli & Santagata, 2012; Etzioni, 2004).

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 & Frewer, 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 (Baumann, 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!*,¹ 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 programme, 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 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-

¹ Project co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union, www.bespectactive.eu

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