Problematising the question of participation in Capitals of Culture[1]

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Participation is increasingly a common feature in both Capital and City of Culture (CoC) programmes such as European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) and UK Cities of Culture (UKCoC). Since the mid-1990s and in particular in the last decade, many ECoCs have been displaying an emphasis on audience development and cultural engagement, impacting both on the balance of their cultural programming and on the design of specific projects and events with the aim of engaging local communities. This development that seems to be putting participation at the centre of both ECoCs and UKCoCs, at least at rhetorical level, is the motivation behind this Themed Section of *Participations*. Why has it become increasingly important and how is participation understood and practiced in the different local versions of CoCs? And how can participation in CoCs be understood in the context of both a broad societal participatory turn and a narrower participatory turn in cultural policy and in the practices of cultural institutions? This Themed Section does not give a simple and conclusive answer to these questions, but it offers partial, case-based examples and can be seen as the first step towards a better understanding of why, how and to what extent CoCs are participatory. In this editorial introduction, we map the landscape in which the specific cases presented in the articles are positioned. We look at the emergence and development of the agenda of participation in mainly the ECoC scheme and we identify some of the challenges that future research needs to address.

Today, the study of participation in the context of the ECoC and of similar initiatives, at national and international levels, across Europe assumes a particular relevance for different reasons. Firstly, participation in cultural activities, in particular in relation to CoC programmes, has a potential redistributive impact. Cultural activities are mainly funded by national or other public organisations through tax payers' money. In some cases, such as the National Lottery in the UK, lower income social groups are arguably those who contribute more to the funding of cultural activities. Nevertheless, high-profile cultural events tend to be designed for and attended by the most privileged (Miles and Sullivan, 2012; Hesmondhalgh et al., 2015). This mechanism builds indeed a compelling case for a broader access to and participation in culture as a means of redistribution.

Secondly, cultural participation is increasingly perceived as a panacea to structural social problems such as social isolation, and lack of cultural awareness and ambition, despite its ultimate inability to solve these issues by itself. This represents both one of the reasons behind the popularity of the concept of participation and one of its key weaknesses. There is nonetheless a growing recognition of the links between cultural participation and individual wellbeing (see for instance Galloway, 2006; Clift, 2012; Tavano Blessi et al., 2014 and 2016) and for example of the fact that engaging in cultural activity may have positive outcomes in dealing with e.g. anxiety and depression. In this context, participation becomes a means to pursue new forms of social and cultural impacts. Based on this broader approach, the positive impacts of cultural participation on residents' perception of their city (Impacts 08, 2010a, 2010b), as well as on individual wellbeing, self-esteem, local pride, and willingness to engage has been documented (Culture, Place and Policy Institute, 2018).

Thirdly, the study of participation in ECoCs and similar initiatives across Europe assumes a crucial significance in the political context of the 2010s, characterised by a profound crisis of democracy, the erosion of trust in public institutions and traditional political parties and the discontent with neoliberal austerity policies. Recent ECoCs have aimed at widening cultural engagement and enhancing participation, in order to encourage social cohesion. In some cases, active participation is seen to have contributed to citizens' political awareness and engagement, as in the case of Maribor 2012 (Žilič-Fišer and Erjavec, 2017). This raises the question on whether ECoCs could be considered, at least in part, also as 'sites of resistance' to such broader processes of political change. However, the connection between cultural and political participation is not simple and its impact may be overestimated.

The hopes for participation are high, despite the acknowledged challenges. This combination of a highly valued but potentially also overestimated concept calls for an academic reflection on the ways in with participation has become a key element of ECoC programmes.

Capitals of Culture as frameworks for participation

The particular significance of CoC programmes, in comparison with other events, as a means to promote participation and engagement in cultural activity has to do with the substantial

investment in culture and the broad media coverage they generate. The volume of activity, the special quality of many of the projects and intensity of programmed activities are among the reasons why these schemes potentially represent great opportunities for participation. In addition to this, we do see a tendency to include specific programmes and projects addressed to targeted specific social groups.

As the first CoC initiative, The European City of Culture was established in 1985 with the aim of encouraging European cultural co-operation and exchange (Sassatelli, 2005, in Bianchini et al., 2013). The programme was renamed as 'European Capital of Culture' in 2001. It had gradually shifted towards goals of economic development and urban regeneration, more recently including goals of 'social regeneration'. Participation appears to be helpful in the 'softer' side of culture-led regeneration. For example, it is especially important for the core of ECoC projects for targeted social groups, such as deprived communities, elderly people, young people and children and people with disabilities. Similarly, virtually every ECoC develops a series of 'supporting programmes' such as volunteering initiatives, creative learning programmes in schools and calls for proposals for cultural projects and events in form of e.g. micro funding for citizen initiatives. Programmes in schools and cultural projects by local artists are important for participation also because they are able to broaden audiences involving pupils' families and friends and local residents, who may not have engaged before with cultural activities.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that the ECoC 'means different things to different people and can be used in various ways' (Deffner and Labrianidis, 2005, p. 247; see also Boland, 2010). This is also reflected in the different understandings of, and approaches to, participation. ECoC indeed display a variety of goals and strategies from this perspective, focusing for example on targeted deprived communities in peripheral areas (e.g. in the case of Liverpool 2008 and Marseille 2013), elderly people, young and low skilled residents, or multicultural communities (Rotterdam 2001), depending on the local context and the specific issues city policy makers set as their priorities.

The UK City of Culture (UKCoC) was established in 2009 and firstly held in 2013 in Derry-Londonderry. It specifically aims to allow cities in the country to benefit from the positive effects of culture in terms of regeneration and local development (DCMS, 2009) that were witnessed in the cases of Glasgow ECoC 1990 and Liverpool ECoC 2008. The UKCoC is then specifically designed for 'lagging' and 'forgotten' cities that were 'left behind' in the wide socio-economic restructuring generated by globalisation, of which the crisis of traditional manufacturing industries was one of the most important consequences. This is particularly true in the case of Hull (UKCoC in 2017), which has focused on contrasting negative external perceptions related to problems of structural poverty and long-term unemployment.

It is also important to note that there are numerous other Capitals of Culture across the world. As noted by Steve Green (2018), twenty-three cities held a similar title in 2017. CoCs have indeed been established at national and international levels in other continents, by several organisations. Examples are the City/Capital of Culture initiatives promoted by

the Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) and the Union of Ibero-American Capital Cities (UCCI). This editorial introduction will, however, focus on the discussion of the history of participation in the long-running ECoC scheme supplemented with the UKCoC. These are the two schemes covered in the articles in this Themed Section.

Different meanings of participation

When approaching participation in the context of CoC programmes, one first element to consider is that the concept of 'participation' itself is understood according to at least four different meanings. Firstly, participation may mean engagement in cultural events, intended as audience engagement by spectators. This concerns in particular audience development policies. Secondly, the concept is understood as active participation or co-creating, in which the citizens themselves create cultural content. In this case it deals with encouraging individual creativity, through the involvement of local people in community arts projects where they are enabled to express themselves and develop their cultural skills, and through co-creation of cultural contents and projects, based on open calls and micro-funding schemes. Thirdly, participation may be understood in relation to the governance processes of CoCs, where local communities are encouraged to contribute to the design of the overall event or specific projects. Fourthly, volunteering might also be seen as a form of participation in which citizens engage in the delivery of the events. In many ECoCs, volunteer programmes have been emphasised as one of the successes, by not only providing the necessary free workforce for the mega event, but also by creating pride and public engagement,

Given the fact that participation includes a variety of activities and approaches, it is not surprising that it is promoted in relation to very different goals and strategies. But this has not always been the case. In the beginning of the ECoC programme, participation was not a main priority. The development towards more participatory approaches took more than twenty years.

ECoCs and participation: a brief historical perspective

Participation was not a key feature of the first ECoCs. In the second half of the 1980s, ECoC programmes focused on a definition of cultural activities centred on high culture. Programming was focused on the summer months. In line with the emergence in the UK of urban regeneration as a dominant policy discourse, Glasgow 1990 shifted towards goals of urban economic development and physical renewal. Glasgow was indeed a watershed in the history of the programme, as European Cities of Culture in the 1990s, and European Capitals of Culture from 2001 onwards, were increasingly seen as components of wider regeneration strategies and involved both a year-round programme (Bianchini et al., 2013) and a broader definition of cultural activity (García, 2004). Economic regeneration was emphasised also

because deindustrialising cities began to host the event (Richards, 2000). In the case of Glasgow European City of Culture 1990, local residents were involved in cultural activities albeit with modest figures in terms of attendance (Myerscough, 1991). In addition, it was not clear to what extent people living in peripheral housing estates benefited from the event (Bianchini et al., 2013) or took part in cultural activities.

If, from the mid-1990s to the 2010s, the main focus of many ECoCs was on urban regeneration, those years witnessed pioneering initiatives in terms of engagement, participation and social regeneration, which progressively gave rise to more structured participatory approaches. For example, Copenhagen 1996 aimed to involve targeted groups in cultural activity, through projects such as *The Paradox Event* (Palmer-Rae Associates, 2004), based on the encounter between people with and without disabilities. Similarly, Stockholm 1998 aimed to develop local audiences, by widening access to culture, to enhance pride and self-confidence and pursue social cohesion, through events such as the *Stockholm Training Programme*, a series of walking tours of the city aimed at local workers, such as bus and taxi drivers (ibid.). In the case of Rotterdam 2001, specific events like *young@rotterdam* or *Preaching in someone else's parish* were designed for targeted groups, such as young people, and ethnic minorities respectively, while other projects aimed at people with disabilities, socially disadvantaged people, gays and lesbians (ibid.). Liverpool 2008 made participation one of its key themes in both the bid and the final programme, with the aim of building up community enthusiasm and creativity (ECOTEC, 2009). Soon after its designation as ECoC, Liverpool designed and implemented its Volunteering Programme, which received more than 4,000 applications and through which 851 volunteers were trained (Impacts 08, 2010c). Liverpool 2008 also delivered education programmes in schools and a wide-ranging Creative Communities Programme.

The shift towards participation

ECoCs in the 2010s, as well as UKCoCs, are still focused on urban economic regeneration. Nonetheless, they appear to be characterised also by a clear focus and a systematic approach to 'social regeneration' and participation in particular. In this phase of the ECoC programme, the social dimension of the event that emerged in the previous phase was strengthened and developed, for example with regard to the connection between culture and wellbeing and the active involvement of local communities in the production of culture and in the design of cultural events, in particular through the introduction and development of concepts of co-creation. Volunteering programmes, cultural projects in schools and for targeted social groups became common features of most ECoCs. For example, Turku 2011 emphasised the link between culture and wellbeing, also through the use of formulas and slogans such as 'culture does good' and 'culture prescription' in the communication of the event (Rampton et al., 2012). Specific events included: *Turku365*, an arts project with a strong element of involvement of local residents in the organisation and implementation; *Neighbourhood Weeks*, which was designed and implemented by neighbourhood associations; and *City Remembered*, which was a series of workshops with elderly residents.

Tallinn 2011 aimed to foster the programme's openness to ideas from citizens and cultural practitioners through an open call for events and projects. Tallinn also delivered events focusing on the active engagement of the local community. For example, *Trumm IT* involved children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds who largely did not take part in organised leisure activities due to economic reasons (Tallinn 2011 Foundation, n.y.). Riga 2014 proposed a 'Road Map' strand in its programme, which included 117 projects about participation (Fox and Rampton, 2015; Riga 2014, 2014).

Umeå 2014 introduced an 'open source' approach based on the concept of 'co-creation' (Fox and Rampton, 2015), where cultural organisations were able to submit project proposals sitting into a programmed set of broader themes. However, this approach also led to criticisms about the implementation of this concept, in terms for instance of the need of co-funding that excluded those organisations which were not able to put their own funding in (Hudson et al., 2017). Examples of events were: *River Stories*, which attempted to engage with riverside communities in the region; *Corners: Turning Europe Inside Out*, which involved artists from different European countries to co-create artworks with local people; and *Fair Opera*, a music project involving children in schools. Wroclaw 2016 adopted the idea of co-creation as well, through the MicroGRANTS ECoC 2016 programme (Wroclaw 2016, n.y.). Several projects focused on the active participation of citizens in the creation of cultural content (Fox and Rampton, 2017). These projects included: *Backyard Door*, a series of cultural events in the communal spaces of housing blocks; *Parks of the European Capital of Culture*, which offered residents the city's parks as public venues to present their artistic work; and *The Voice of the Excluded*, which involved marginalised social groups.

The 2017 and 2018 ECoCs emphasised participation and open-source approaches as key aspects of their programmes. The social impact goals of Aarhus 2017 involved the 'activation' of citizens through volunteering and as audiences, as well as of young citizens who had seldom engaged in cultural projects (Aarhus 2017 Foundation, 2018). Aarhus' ReThinkers Volunteer Programme involved 4,535 volunteers from Denmark and other 85 countries (ibid.). Initially, and in contrast with most ECoCs, a strong emphasis was placed on the active participation of citizens in decision making and in the overall design of the event. About 10,000 people from the region were involved through consultations, which also led to the formulation of the key concept of 'ReThink' on the basis of the needs and ambitions raised by participants. As noted by Jancovich and Hansen (2018), organisational changes occurring from the bid to the delivery of the event led to a narrow focus on audience numbers rather than on participatory decision-making and co-creation. However, participation remained important in some of the decentrally-delivered projects. For example, *ReThink the Village*, a framework for development projects in rural areas (Aarhus 2017, n.y.), made local residents feel that they were 'on the map' (Jancovich and Hansen, 2018, p. 179) and was the chance to test participatory budgeting and co-created theatre performances. *POP-UP Culture House*, held by theatre company Carte Blanche, was conceived as an open platform to which individuals, associations and institutions contributed with they own projects and ideas (Carte Blanche, n.y.).

The other 2017 ECoC, Pafos, combined openness and co-creation with the use of open-air venues through the concept of 'Open Air Factory'. *Celebrating – Pafos2017* was the main platform for local artists and organisations to actively participate in the event. Several events pursued audience engagement and community involvement, in many cases celebrating local history. For example: *The Festivities of Yeronisos* involved students, local people, archaeologists, seamen and fishermen in the celebration of the excavations in Yeronisos; *Galatea's Myth* included educational programmes, exhibitions and workshops with the aim of promoting dance in the country; *Music Together* involved professional and amateur musicians in performances in different locations (Open Air Factory, 2016). Pafos' bid was also considered innovative as it aimed to offer cultural activities throughout the city and in rural areas: an example was *Travelling Playground*, that aimed at engaging local children with Cyprus and Europe's history (Selection Panel of the European Capital of Culture 2017, 2012).

In the case of Valletta 2018, the model of co-creation of culture arguably aimed at raising the awareness of the local community about the socially-constructed knowledge of places. Events such as *Subjective Maps*, which encouraged residents from six localities to create subjective maps of their neighbourhoods, *Design4DCity*, a community arts project focused on the use of public space and *Ġewwa Barra*, another community arts project encouraging people to approach creatively their neighbourhood (Valletta 2018, 2017a; 2017b), focused on how local communities related to the urban environment. In addition, events such as *Magna Żmien The Magnificent Memories Machine*, a project of collection of memories and oral histories from the personal and family collections of residents, focused on the social and open construction of knowledge about Valletta and Malta. Nonetheless, initiatives such as *Naqsam il-MUŻA*, showed the importance of the active involvement of citizens. In that case, residents, who had complained in the past about the imposition of top-down initiatives without prior consultations (Valletta 2018, 2015), were encouraged to choose artworks to be displayed in the new art museum MUŻA.

Finally, Leeuwarden-Friesland 2018 designed a regional programme, with half of the events to be held across the region, focusing on participation as a means to tackle the challenges of a rural region characterised by depopulation. The title in Frisian that was proposed in the bid, *Iepen Mienskip,* referred to an 'open society' and in particular to an open 'sense of community', with the aim of strengthening the local social bonds through cultural participation (Leeuwarden 2018, 2013). The bidding team emphasised the 'goal to focus on citizen participation in each and every event' and that the programme itself was about 'exploring new ways of citizen participation' (ibid., p. 1). The final programme included a variety of community projects, such as for instance *Iepen doar[p]*, which explored the lives of citizens in all 128 households in the village of Feanwâldsterwâl (Leeuwarden-Friesland 2018, n.y.).

This recent focus on participation is also visible in the case of the UK City of Culture (UKCoC), held every four years since 2013. Many of the towns and cities which applied for the 2013, 2017 and 2021 UKCoC title are deindustrialising urban areas, in some cases in

disadvantaged peripheral regions. This arguably contributed to the interest of UKCoC candidates and winners (Derry-Londonderry 2013, Hull 2017 and Coventry 2021) in community engagement and participation, although the needs and challenges are different and relate to local historical, socio-economic and cultural specificities. For example, Derry-Londonderry 2013 focused on the process of post-conflict political reconciliation between the Catholic and Protestant communities and on contributing to shaping a new image and narrative of the city (Doak, 2014). Hull 2017 aimed at engaging audiences who did not usually participate, considering the traditional imbalance between existing cultural provision and low levels of audience engagement. Participatory projects focused on self-esteem, positive feelings about the city, civic pride and ambition (Hull 2017, 2013). The preliminary evaluation of Hull UKCoC 2017 showed that, although the programme did not involve local people as frequently as initially hoped, the impacts of cultural engagement and participation on wellbeing could be transformative (Culture, Place and Policy Institute, 2018, p. 250). The next UKCoC, Coventry 2021, appears again to be different, by adopting a focus – expressed in particular through the theme *Being Human* – on welcoming migrants and on intercultural exchange in the context of a post-Brexit Britain (Coventry 2021, 2017; 2018). So far, the UKCoC has appeared to target similar social groups across these three cities – marginalised groups, young people, elderly residents – although in very different ways.

With regards to the different meanings of participation mentioned above, goals and approaches to participation in cultural projects depended on the specific needs and ambitions of cities. Audience development goals shaped cultural programming in cities with low cultural provisions (e.g. Pafos ECoC 2017) or low levels of engagement (e.g. Hull UKCoC 2017). Intercultural exchange and encounter between people belonging to different ethnic groups was important for ECoCs such as: Rotterdam 2001, where a large amount of the local population was born outside the Netherlands, Linz 2009, Essen for the Ruhr 2010 and Wroclaw 2016. Goals of social reconciliation and cohesion shaped participation strategies in the case of Pafos 2017, where a key aim was to bring together the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities, and Derry-Londonderry UKCoC 2013. Conversely, in the case of Aarhus ECoC 2017, less attention was paid to engaging ethnic minorities, with the exception of events such as the *EUtopia International Festival 2017*, while a strong focus was placed on co-creation and active participation. Finally, active participation was also oriented by the goal of encouraging the social production of knowledge about places and the collection of memories. This happened for instance in the case of Pafos 2017, through the programme *Schools in Action* where students engaged in writing stories set in the city (Pafos 2017, 2016), and, as suggested earlier, case of Valletta 2018.

The challenges for participation in CoCs

From the different experiences of being CoC and dealing with community involvement and participation, a set of challenges emerges. Firstly, a key challenge is legacy: CoCs are temporary projects, which are generally run by temporary organisations. Legacy has proved to be one of the main weaknesses of the ECoC scheme, where huge investments are

concentrated in the title year and are sometimes followed by a sort of 'cliff-effect' that brutally marks the return to ordinary life. The challenges addressed through participation, whether this is building new audiences or influencing decision making, or fostering civic engagement, all depend on long-term efforts. Participation is thus highly influenced by the nature – or lack – of legacy strategies, since its positive outcomes in terms of, for example, civic engagement, self-esteem and wellbeing may soon disappear when the enthusiasm around the event is over.

Secondly, the growing interest and focus on participation raises a question about whether CoC schemes are putting less emphasis on tourism and regeneration and are shifting towards a citizen-centred approach. If it is probably too early to be sure that such a shift has happened. Many ECoCs in the last decade contributed to raising a debate about the balance between the social and economic goals of cultural mega events and, ultimately, of culture-led urban regeneration. Much work is required in detecting cities' needs and challenges at the bidding stage which can raise awareness of social issues. However, such initiatives can hardly solve deep seated and structural socio-economic problems by themselves. At best, it might work as a catalyst for change, in particular when it is seen as an occasion to experiment with, and explore innovative approaches to participation and engagement as it is clearly stated in the case of Leeuwarden-Friesland 2018.

Thirdly, CoCs are large-scale events with a high level of public and private investment, and consequently public attention is considerable. This means that there is little room for failure and thus also for experiments in which citizens and the cultural sector can try out new approaches to participation and new activities. Beyond the bid books, the tendency is that projects based on participatory decision-making constituted only a small part of CoC cultural programmes, in which a larger role was often played by massive, spectacular mega-events delivered by experienced professionals. This raises an open question about the rhetoric of participation within CoCs. While participation has become a popular policy discourse, the top-down, almost authoritarian, approach required in many cases to deliver CoC events tends to reduce its actual role from initial statements and objectives. However, this should not belittle the relevance of this discursive shift towards participation.

Fourthly, another challenge for participation has to do with the broadening of the concept of culture in CoC programmes. ECoCs and UKCoCs appear to be ready to change their approach to and definition of culture, although only up to a certain point. For example, Hull UK City of Culture 2017 arguably gave relatively little attention to the meanings of culture for young people, and tended to neglect the importance of sport in local culture. This selective 'resistance' to the broadening of the definition of culture is likely to have an impact on participation understood as engagement with local cultural activity.

Finally, another element to consider is the instrumental use of participation in the context of culture-led urban regeneration. The ECoC initiative has long been criticised for being a tool to pursue urban renewal and local economic development, and even a Trojan horse that diverts funding towards arts-led regeneration goals (Evans and Foord, 2000, in

Evans, 2003). CoC programmes may indeed negatively affect the life satisfaction of local communities, by contributing in some cases to rises in house prices and rents, and to the relatively sudden growth of tourism, which mainly affect lower income groups (Steiner et al., 2015) and contribute to gentrification. In this context, an open question emerges about whether participation is deployed, instrumentally, as a means to mitigate dissatisfaction and protests around culture-led regeneration, mega events, gentrification and mass tourism.

The challenges related to participation in CoCs show that participation is not the solution to the problems experienced with the CoC programme. First of all, it needs to be specified what is meant by participation and what the aim of a participatory strategy is. Secondly, participation needs to be taken seriously also in practice and throughout the process, including not only the bidding and delivery phase, but also in the legacy phase which in itself is a challenge to most CoCs. But despite the challenges, participation has as a key issue for most recent and current ECoCs and UKCoCs changed the focus of these cultural mega events from a merely economic towards a more socially and democratically engaged focus. Whether these attempts are successful or not and which types of impact they create varies based on approach and on the local context. This is demonstrated in the articles in this Themed Section.

The contributions

Linda Hudson, Linda Sandberg and Ulrika Smauch present a critical analysis of the way in which Umeå ECoC 2014, despite its proclaimed co-creation approach, and a local tradition of DIY culture, largely failed to integrate the work of independent cultural actors into the official programme. Their case study is *Kulturhuset Lokstellarna* which was established during the ECoC year as an independent space for cultural production. The ambition to build up an alternative to official cultural institutions failed because of lack of support by the bureaucracy of the municipality.

Angela Chappell and Louise Ejgod Hansen focus on carnival arts as an element of UK-based Cities of Culture. They argue both for the value of the inclusion of carnival arts as a cultural form transgressing the traditional, Western concept of art and as a mass event able to attract a large-scale audience. But they are also critical of the political context and the possibility that carnival is used mainly as a token for multiculturalism. Based on the analysis of Derry/Londonderry UKCoC 2013, Hull UKCoC 2017 and the Leeds ECoC 2023 bid, they argue that the way in which carnival is integrated into the programme depends on local traditions as well as on key individuals' views of carnival as an art form.

Birgit Eriksson, Camilla Møhring Reestorff and Carsten Stage examine participation in European cultural centres, through their experience of the initiative *Rethinking Cultural Centres in a European Dimension 2015-17* (RECcORD) as part of the Aarhus 2017 ECoC programme. They identify six forms of participation and nine potential effects, which were developed through the active involvement of participants in the RECcORD project. They propose a definition of participation in cultural centres as: voluntary actions that create specific or imagined communities and facilitate change or 'something larger'. They

emphasise how participation in such centres is generally understood and practiced in an open way.

In the article by Anna-Maria Schielicke, Cornelia Mothes and Valentina Marcenaro a small but significant project – Apropos Prohlis – demonstrates the way in which policy makers and cultural managers in Dresden, as part of their candidature to the German ECoC title in 2025, attempt to address social and democratic issues. They describe the ways in which locally embedded cultural production can be a small step towards the solution of one of the main contemporary European challenges: the related rise of xenophobia and of neo-nationalistic movements. However, they also state that the cultural interventions that address the problems of marginalised groups need to be followed by political actions in other areas of public policy.

Szilvia Nagy rounds up the theme by analysing the framing of participation in ECoC policy documents in the context of participatory governance. She applies Critical Frame Analysis in order to assess whether selectivities in the framing of participation may reproduce existing power relationships. She focuses on detecting performative practices in ECoC policy documents and on placing their participatory frameworks onto Schaap and Edwards' (2007) participation ladder. She problematises the variety of participatory frameworks and the issue of the 'veil of inclusivity' and highlights the difficulties in moving towards a participatory governance approach.

In addition to the articles included in the current issue, an article by Trish Winter and Caroline Mitchell is planned to be published in the next issue of *Participations*. Their article will focus on participatory mapping in an area of low participation in arts and culture. The case is Sunderland, a city that unsuccessfully bid for the UKCoC title in 2021.

What's next for Capitals of Culture and participation

This Themed Section is work in progress, with the aim of beginning to fill the gap in research about cultural participation in ECoCs and UKCoCs. By examining examples of current, previous and future Capitals and Cities of Culture and by addressing both the challenges and the potential of participatory approaches, it attempts to make a significant contribution to the area of research.

The Themed Section also raises some key questions for future study. Three issues appear of particular relevance.

First, there is a lack of comparative studies. Participation is mostly approached through the study of a single case, which is seldom connected to broader theories or to other cases. Comparative efforts would put different experiences in conversation, allowing more critical interpretations to emerge and encouraging theory building. For example, a relevant theme for a comparative study of participation in ECoC programmes is volunteering. Many ECoCs praise their volunteer programmes as positive examples of participatory cultural policies. Participation through volunteering appears nonetheless a 'restricted' or 'privileged' form of participation. A comparative analysis that explores

whether volunteers in different localities are able to encourage wider participation would make a key contribution to the field.

Secondly, the literature on ECoCs and participation shows a weak theoretical basis, in line with criticisms of the wider literature on cultural events and urban cultural policies (e.g. Markusen and Gadwa, 2010). A more reflective approach towards participation in ECoCs could counter the tendency towards the adoption of an all-encompassing concept of participation. A more differentiated analysis of different forms of participation appears to be key to examining different policy approaches and outcomes.

Finally, the link between discussions of participation and of ECoC legacy strategies is lacking, despite the fact that both participation and legacy are key concepts in most ECoC programmes. Many ECoCs did elaborate legacy programmes related to participation. In this context, longitudinal studies on participation are particularly needed in order to assess whether the innovative experiences of participation undertaken by many ECoCs are able to continue after the events that triggered them. Exploring the relationships between participatory approaches and legacy would also contribute to the analysis of the longer-term impacts of these events, about which little is known at present.

Leila Jancovich, Louise Ejgod Hansen and Franco Bianchini have been the editors of this Themed Section, and we hope that it has shown that the link between participation and various Capitals and Cities of Culture brings forth new perspectives on these major cultural schemes as well as add a new framing to the study of cultural participation because of the link to the high level of attention, investment and claimed ambitions of the Capitals and Cities of Culture.

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Note:

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[1] Enrico Tommarchi, Louise Ejgod Hansen and Franco Bianchini co-authored this Introduction, while Louise Ejgod Hansen, Leila Jancovich and Franco Bianchini are editors of this Themed Section of *Participations*.