

The Role of Participation in European Capitals of Culture: Various Patterns and Consequences on Impact

Michael Habersam, Martin Piber

Purpose – Participation plays a prominent role when cities become European Capitals of Culture. This chapter aims at analyzing different patterns of participation and how these patterns relate to diverse impact dimensions.

Design/methodology/approach – Two case-studies of European Capitals of Culture in 2018 and 2019, based on qualitative research methodology and method.

Findings – The phenomenon of participation is embedded in political settings which result in specific pressures on stakeholders involved, and make some patterns of participation more probable than others. Participation oscillates, shows diverse qualities and remains as well fragile. Actively ‘taking part’ as an intense format of participation allows for impact dimensions to be characterized as emotional, immaterial, opaque, and therefore addresses dimensions beyond numbers and indicators.

Originality/value – This article sheds light on the plausible aspects of how patterns of participation relate to impact dimensions, as well as on the difficulties to perceive this relation adequately. Furthermore, we interpret ‘participation’ not exclusively as stakeholders participating in European Capital of Culture-events as consumers and/or (co-)producers, but rather in a reflexive way. Due to the importance of the political and organizational setting as framework for participation and impact, we raise the question who participates in the organizational development process of the management body itself. This shift in perspective is of practical and theoretical relevance.

Keywords – participation, impact, European Capitals of Culture, cultural heritage, regional development, tourism

1. *Introduction*

European Capitals of Culture (ECoCs) trigger participation on many stages in various patterns. They are set up in co-evolution with urban and regional development processes and are prepared, implemented and evaluated over a timespan of a decade or even more. They offer spaces, where individuals and organizations meet, connect, and generate knowledge by exchange. Their aim is to provide a framework and platform for artistic creation, entrepreneurial innovation as well as new networking within the social fabric of the city and the connected region(s). In short, it is intended to leverage the cultural heritage and legacy by generating knowledge at present, and in favour of civic wealth in the future (Lumpkin & Bacq, 2019). ECoCs set an example for leveraging these ‘assets’. However, to implement this vision and to strive for a positive impact on wealth creation, the participation of diverse stakeholders is needed. This results in a multi-layered setting of interests, where preserving cultural heritage, improving living conditions of citizens, supporting sustainable tourism and a socio-economic push for a region tending to become depopulated have to be balanced. In our research, we focus, first, on different patterns of participation and ask, who is participating, when and with which motive. A second research aim is to describe consequences of possible patterns of participation on diverse impact dimensions and their role in generating civic wealth.

To bring various processes of participation with possible impact dimensions to the fore (Grundy & Boudreau, 2008), we analyze two ECoCs: Valletta/Malta 2018 and Matera/Basilicata 2019. For both case studies (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1989), a series of expert interviews with executives, staff and stakeholders of the organizational bodies as well as representatives of the funding institutions has been conducted. Other data have been retrieved from official documents and webpages. Both case-studies analyze a timespan of several years because becoming an ECoC is a project for at least a decade. This allows us to describe and analyze different patterns and consequences of participation on impact dimensions over time. The paper starts with a compact glance on the literature regarding participation in cultural projects. Thereafter, the two cases are presented and analyzed. Finally, insights from the cases are discussed, conclusions drawn and an outlook how to potentially proceed in practice and research is given.

2. *Participation in Cultural Projects*

Within the literature on participation in cultural projects, different strands of discourse are to observe. Sacco *et al.* (2014) and Eriksson (2019) stress that certain stakeholders already participate in the idea generation and outlining of cultural activities. Therefore, a first pattern of analysis may be to distinguish different stages of participation along the timeline of a project. In a second stance, the management literature focuses on participation in order to improve the quality of decisions taken by responsible actors and the understanding of affected persons (Enke & Reinhardt, 2015). In organizational development, participation is also instrumentalized to reach organizational aims (Nurick, 1982). Cultural projects benefit from participatory action when key stakeholders contribute to planning, organizing and implementation. Participation may as well be a contrast to strategy, in case the latter is generally understood as an overarching narrative with a comprehensive outreach for planned activities. Then, participation is rather the practice part in a strategy-as-practice approach, consisting of small, sometimes hidden and mundane processes in manifold arenas (e.g. Kornberger & Clegg, 2011). In a third stance, participation occurs in terms of programming cultural content and finally, also the involvement of audiences can be understood as participatory action. Biondi *et al.* (2020) mention participation as co-creation, as social innovation and focus further on citizens who participate as co-initiators, co-designers and co-implementers of cultural initiatives within urban settings. They set up the notion of participatory cultural initiatives, analyze how they are ‘orchestrated’ and discuss three different phases: starting, opening-up and implementation. Demartini *et al.* (2020) analyze the conditions of conducting effective participative processes in cultural projects. Our paper bridges various stages and patterns of participation with the impact dimension of ECoCs. Sacco *et al.* (2014) argue, that the impact of cultural projects is always complex and cannot be easily reduced to simple cause-effect relationships. Insofar we will provide a deeper insight how participation might shape various patterns of impact.

3. *Two case-studies on European Capitals of Culture*

The following two case-studies refer to Valletta/Malta and to Matera/Basilicata as ECoCs in 2018 and 2019. In general, the competitive process to become an ECoC starts latest six years before the title year by a call published in two or three different cities or regions of member states.

The so-called ‘Bid Books’ of this first round are pre-selected by a Panel of thirteen independent members, resulting in a short-list of cities which get the opportunity to present a refined ‘Bid Book’. Around nine months later the Panel presents its final decision. Afterwards, a monitoring process brings together the ECoC-management of the nominated cities with the Commission and the Panel-members. Latest eight months in advance of the title-year the Panel’s formal role as monitoring body ends. To guide this process, the EU defined in 2006 two specific issues:

“1. As regards ‘the European Dimension’, the program shall: (a) foster cooperation between cultural operators, artists and cities from the relevant Member States and other Member States in any cultural sector; (b) highlight the richness of cultural diversity in Europe; (c) bring the common aspects of European cultures to the fore.

2. As regards ‘City and Citizens’ the program shall: (a) foster the participation of the citizens living in the city and its surroundings and raise their interest as well as the interest of citizens from abroad; (b) be sustainable and be an integral part of the long-term cultural and social development of the city.” (Official Journal of the European Union 2006, Decision No 1622/2006/EC, Article 4).

Furthermore, since 2009 the ECoC-initiative centers on ‘impact’, including participation, subjective experiences and learning as important facets (Piber *et al.*, 2019). However, within the years before the title-year, the situation is quite often very dynamic: Bid Book-ambitions change, fluctuation of personnel results in substantial conceptual changes, stakeholders’ expectations lead to conflicting goals, and (time) pressure grows when the title-year comes closer.

3.1. *European Capital of Culture Valletta/Malta 2018*

Malta is a rather small country in Europe, basically composed of three islands: Malta, Gozo and Comino. It has a total population of approximately 520.000 citizens. Consequently, the options to organize an ECoC-project were limited and Valletta – together with other regions – became the only applicant for the country. The project was launched in 2011, finally designated in 2013. From the beginning it was embedded in the long-term cultural strategy, published by the Arts Council Malta (2015). It was the aim of the project to trigger participation and engage creativity: “We need to lead a collective national effort to address current low participation in specific artistic activities” (Arts Council Malta 2015).

From 2013 to 2017 severe political entanglements prevented a smooth preparation of the ECoC-project, of which the assassination of the

investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia is probably the most remembered one. This also had a considerable influence on the Valletta 2018 foundation – the organization in charge of preparing and organizing the ECoC project. Several key members of the organization had to be replaced already in the pre-title period. Finally, the ‘Valletta 2018 Foundation’ presented its program in autumn 2017, a few months before the opening ceremony on January 20th in 2018. During this period, also the slogan of the project changed: “Imagine 18” became finally “Valletta 2018: an island-wide fiesta”.

After the title year, Malta established in 2019 the Valletta Cultural Agency as a successor-organization for the Valletta 2018 foundation. This was already rooted in the 2015-strategy document:

“We want to ensure that the investment in the European Capital of Culture programme and the resources in the Valletta 2018 Foundation are developed further after 2018. To do so, we plan to design a legacy programme whereby the current Festivals Directorate within the Arts Council Malta will become an autonomous structure with a remit to develop the current festivals portfolio and new programmes developed through Valletta 2018.” (Arts Council Malta 2015).

It is based on the legacy of the ECoC project and should guarantee a continuity of the long-term cultural strategy. In the mission statement they state: “The Valletta Cultural Agency (VCA) sustains and strengthens the capital city’s vibrant cultural life through the creation of an annual program of creative events developed in collaboration with artists and other public cultural organizations.” (Valletta Cultural Agency webpage, 2022). With the VCA, the established knowhow is made accessible for the future. Among other factors, this is ensured via a continuity of staff: Some former key members of the Valletta 2018 foundation were afterwards employed by the VCA.

In the chronology of the project several patterns of participation occurred. In the first place, we can mention the general participation of citizens in the public life. “We need to pedestrianize different areas, create new public spaces for people to meet, to interact, to actually hold the activities. So, in that sense the city has changed for the better I suppose.” (Impact Researcher, Valletta 2018). Nevertheless, before and even during the title year, the residents felt somehow excluded from the project: “And over the four years, people consistently said the greatest beneficiary would be business, and tourists. And the least beneficiary would be the residents. So, there was always this idea of Valletta 2018 is great for all the people apart from me.” (Impact Researcher, Valletta 2018)

In a second pattern, visitors of events were understood as participants themselves: “The visitor becomes a kind of participative researcher in its own way referring to art.” (Project coordinator 1, Valletta 2018). The explicit aim of the Foundation was to motivate people to participate in events, who were not regular participants of cultural events before:

“I have seen a Farmer who [has] never been to Theatre, came for the first time to the Theatre during the event, and two months later when [the] event was over, I have seen him (..) on another Theatre event which happens to be “cantina”; that was for me one of the most satisfactory moment (...). I have seen him again, again and again. That is the change, we are aiming for” (Program curator, Valletta 2018).

And the most intensive form of participation took place in some projects, where the residents participated even in the planning and the enactment of the events themselves. The projects gave them a ‘voice’:

“So, one important aspect that was you know really influencing the life of the Valletta people, especially in the past years, was change. Basically, they have seen their city changed, and they have very little power to influence that change. Somebody has, however, had the power to influence that change. The people who are the means, the part of the influence of the change, but they were being affected without having any say. I see that the so called/the residents are stakeholders. To get have a stakeholder was simply bent on the stake. Was no choice. They can only adapt. They have no say. And they have no voice. Gewwa Barra tried to, also conquered this, with this dynamic.” (Project coordinator 3, Valletta 2018).

Another project coordinator even said, that the people curated the city: “There were other things, we had a similar philosophy on being open and on being participative as much as possible and letting, letting the community curate this space in a way. And of course, bringing the professionals to curate and shape the input. So, that kind of collaboration for me, in a way, if you say, I, I could consider that a positive impact.” (Project coordinator 2, Valletta 2018).

This was also seen as a political voice of people, who otherwise would not participate in the discursive process of developing opinion: “The project [mainly Gewwa Barra] was like a catalyst for the people and it basically works out well. In this case there was not the government at the centre of the picture but instead the people, or better the citizens of Valletta become the centre and they contributed to make any difference,

from mentality to expertise they need.” (Program curator, Valletta 2018). *Gewwa Barra* was a neighborhood project, where the project members first talked to the residents of an underprivileged area of Valletta, and in a second stance the residents themselves participated and enacted a theater – in their own square in the neighborhood. First, they were definitely hesitating, but thereafter the participation was overwhelming.

However, the research coordinator said, that there was even a disillusionment concerning higher expectations of some citizens: “I feel a very strong sense of not disengagement, but disillusionment by the community, I tend to feel that they expected more, they expected to be sort of invited to participate more actively, probably because the message wasn’t communicated as it should.” (Research Coordination, Valletta 2018). The reason for that might be found in the way the Foundation communicated: “So the dissemination was sometimes done in a very academic way which limited the dissemination as a result, because of the language, the setup, the whole presentation of it.” (Member of the Arts Council, Valletta 2018).

On the other hand, the whole intensity and bandwidth of participation, bottom-up processes and the triggering of grass-root movements were one of the key impacts of Valletta 2018: “I think if I had to sum up the conclusive element of all the reports is the focus on community. It’s the need to have more of a bottom-up, grassroots approach to planning because in the end, if it’s done top-down, it will be self-defeating. It will have very limited impact, limited desire, and it will be just waste of resources, so very simple.” (Member of the Arts Council, Valletta 2018). “And the community programs were the one I think had much more impact, deeper than the large-scale ones of course because the other were spectacle-focused.” (Member of the Arts Council, Valletta 2018). And it was the participation laying the ground for a sustainable impact: “I think that the impact was very positive. From the point of view of participation [...] then at a certain point I also think that they realized this was about, that this spoke a lot as well to, their pride of being [...] you know, from Valletta.” (Project coordinator 3, Valletta 2018).

3.2. *Matera 2019*

Matera is located in the south of Italy, in the region of ‘Basilicata’, and is one of the oldest cities in the world, being settled from Paleolithic until present day. The city itself counts about 60.000 inhabitants, surrounded by an ancient landscape, an extension of the ‘Murgia National Park’ which looks like a canyon, and where churches, monasteries and hermitages are located. The main attraction in the city itself are the ‘Sassi’, ancient

habitations built into the rock and declared ‘World Heritage of Humanity’ by the UNESCO in 1993 because of its uniqueness (Baldassarre, Ricciardi, & Campo, 2017). This development is remarkable, having in mind that due to poor health and sanitary facilities in the ‘Sassi’, Matera was even called ‘national shame’ when Carlo Levi’s description of the living conditions in Basilicata/Lucania became widely known after the publication of ‘Cristo si è fermato a Eboli/Christ stopped at Eboli’ in 1945.

In order to implement the ECoC-project, the ‘Matera-Basilicata 2019 Foundation’ was established in 2014, being in charge of operations, programming and evaluation, and financed till 2022 to support longer lasting effects of a cultural program independently of becoming ECoC or not. Although the foundation emphasized the societal net of the city as well as its manifold social relations with much room for solidarity (Matera Basilicata 2019 Foundation, 2014), the motto ‘Together’ in the first version of the Bid Book in 2013 became ‘Open Future’ in the final version one year later. Matera’s ECoC-program was organized around two flagship projects and five main themes. One pillar project was the Open Design School, the other was called I-DEA. I-DEA as an archive of archives “explores the archives and collections of Basilicata from an artistic perspective” (Matera Basilicata 2019). It shows the rich and complex history and culture of the region. And it is a vehicle to re-think traditional concepts of museums and educational institutions (Matera Basilicata 2019 Foundation, 2014). The Open Design School is a physical space in the South of the city, where the foundation, inhabitants and also visitors collaborate together in order to “self-produce everything needed for the cultural program of Matera 2019: from the infrastructure to the service supply” (Matera Basilicata 2019). Apart from this direct aim, the Open Design School was meant to be a place for open talks, open reviews, community workshops and open days. The five main themes were 1) Ancient Future 2) Continuity and Disruptions 3) Reflections and Connections 4) Utopias and Dystopias and 5) Roots and Routes.

In order to meet the aims of a ‘European Dimension’ and the participatory aspects of ‘City and citizens’, Matera combined the interests of the citizens and the visitors of the region which results in resilient and sustainable tourism projects. In this vein, Matera tried to change the self-understanding of tourists as a one-time-visitor of the city. Tourists as visitors did not buy a ticket, but got a so called ‘passport’ by what they became ‘short-time citizens’ of Matera. This should open the door for a better commitment of the tourists to the city and the region. With this specific ticketing-policy, visitors as well as inhabitants got access to all cultural events and all sites of the ECoC-year.

A few years before nomination in 2014, the project to become ECoC began as an idea of a small group of people, founding an association called 'Matera 2019'. Right from the beginning, there was not only enthusiasm, but as well some skepticism if the ECoC-project was probably too ambitious, and in permanent danger to become 'manipulated' by political interests (Journalist). The story is to a large extent one of "political animals" (Member of University) being more or less smart in perpetuating power by evoking the efficiency and effectiveness of hierarchical decision-making compared to bottom-up empowered participative initiatives. Backed by "very strong (...) political support" (Member of University) on national, "but also at the regional level" (Member of University), leadership was executed by persons characterized by critical voices as persons who do not "want to have any forms of interference with the local, (...) whoever could have had a strong opinion, or could be a critical thinker" (Member of University). Some protagonists left the arena, willingly or unwillingly. As a matter of fact, the association 'Matera 2019' became irrelevant in political decision-making after the foundation 'Matera Basilicata 2019' was established (see in detail Demartini *et al.* 2020). The skeptic felt confirmed observing how the foundation started to organize and channel participation, i. e. who is allowed to participate and when to get involved. Consequently, there was immediate critique discussing what characterizes inadequate participatory processes:

"I am aware that it is very complicated to govern this kind of process, but there should have been much more stakeholder engagement in a (more) deep sense (...); a lot of stakeholders have been excluded like the association, like (..) citizens. So (...) in order to engage (...) you need to build a conversation with them, communicate; (...) there [has] been no proper mechanism of involvement of stakeholders. When you involve the stakeholder, you need also to be open to change the plan. Otherwise that's not stakeholder engagement. Why you should ask them if you don't want to hear what they say? Otherwise it's fake (...)". (Member of University).

Having a closer look at one of these stakeholders, the University of Basilicata, its participation was judged as inadequate compared to the "substantial role" (Member of University/researcher) it should play, and provoking non-use of expertise in architecture or "scienze dei beni culturali" (Member of University/ researcher). However, this judgment is a differentiated one, not presented in a black-and-white stereotype, because diverse interview-partners (Member of University/ researcher; Member of University, I-DEA Research member) insisted on reciprocity in this case.

The problem was not only located at the policy-level of the foundation regarding participation but as well ‘homemade’: “The problem is the management of the university.” (Member of University/researcher).

Leaving the perspective on institutional stakeholders, and focusing on citizens we become aware of different views on the quality of participation. Whereas interview-partners agree on how decisive it is for an ECoC in general to be ‘participatory’ (I-DEA Research member; Member of Foundation 1), the judgment varies on how convincing the participation of citizens took place for real. The foundation sent the message that participation was at the core of Matera as ECoCs and gave examples like an online-community to generate ideas for Matera 2019, or an opera-production “with the citizens” (Member of Foundation 1) helping to write the lyrics, the music, all with a “strong community dimension” (Member of Foundation 1), or other community projects which per se had “to be very bottom-up presented by a community” (Member of Foundation 1). Figures on the percentage of involving local cultural organizations range from 50% (Member of Foundation 1) to 80% (Member of Foundation 3).

Other interview-partners who took part in diverse events were more critical. They asked for the quality of participation achieved by the way involvement was planned and allowed for in a top-down manner: “But what’s bottom-up here, I ask (...), there is nothing bottom-up, nothing. If you see other projects, ‘Purgatorio’, (...) it was my favourite one, (...) I won’t forget for all my life. But (...) also in this case people [of] Matera participate in the show, they were part of the exhibition. But they didn’t [participate in elaborating the project, in its planning; original in Italian; translated by the authors]” (I-DEA Research member).

An even more critical aspect of citizens’ participation is seen in a trade-off between top-down planned ‘consumerism’ or ‘spectatorship’ (I-DEA Research member; Member of University/ researcher) versus bottom-up initiatives for ‘real’ participation. The critique refers to ECoC-projects where the format of participation is organized as ‘consuming an event’ instead of being supported to actively taking part in the whole process of preparing and performing a cultural initiative. Top-down oriented planners tend to prefer a consumerism-approach because, compared to bottom-up processes, the results seem to be more predictable and measurable. This is not to say, that the motivation of participants always has to transcend a consuming attitude, which would be a paternalistic approach. But the quality of participation is seen as closely related to being actively involved. The latter is probably achieved more effectively in ‘bottom-up’-approaches to participation compared to events primarily consumed. The main argument is that bottom-up activities have more impact on the individual

because “everything is about the emotional ... the emotion of taking part” (I-DEA Research member). The trade-off between close involvement versus distant consumerism is a value-laden dispute. This becomes clear when interview-partners complain that Matera is seen as “Disneyland” and James Bond-scenery which lacks “respect” for its cultural heritage (Member of University/researcher).

Time pressure plays a role in providing adequate arenas for participation. To communicate with a broad range of participants needs more time than hierarchical top-down planning of events. The nearer the ECoC-title year comes, the more the focus shifts towards ‘delivery’. This has various effects on participation, and further consequences on goal achievement regarding the vision of what an ECoC stands for. There is less time to experiment with different formats of participation, for instance “a theatrical representation with professionals and non-professionals (...) and having also a democratic discussion right after. (...) For me, the mission of the European Capital of Culture is not only to do projects for tourists or big events. That’s not the point anymore.” (Member of Foundation 2) Another effect is, that time pressure fosters a management mentality (and legitimizes its representatives) of a more marketing-oriented functionalist approach to value creation:

“This is some economic value that is created and then profiting. But is there any other form of value? [B]ecause I’m also happy that the economy is growing but as a community I want to see other kinds of value. I would like to see either more initiative in the schools. I would like to see, you know, I’m not saying they didn’t put projects there. But again the feeling is they (...) need to tick the box.” (Member of University).

Furthermore, concentrating on ‘ticking boxes’ probably evaluated exacerbates to focus on qualitative aspects of participation which are less easy to measure or represent – although their ‘immateriality’ would need more attention instead of less. The degree of competences developed during participatory activities, for instance, needs a longitudinal approach to make learning processes visible – for instance having been one of the more than 300 volunteers helping during the opening ceremony, practicing languages, informing tourists and helping to make the events working (Member of Foundation 1). Even more opaque remains the dispersion of these individually built, in participatory activities experienced, competences across the citizens’ communities throughout the city. This transfer from the individual to the organizational may be important for potential changes in living conditions of the citizens in and around Matera via participatory

activities. But how far-reaching the transformation of cultural legacy by dispersed competencies practically occurs is not easily represented by some condensed figures of measurement.

The outreach of transfer and transformation, however, is not only an aspect of competencies built by citizens participating in ECoC-projects, but even more obvious when we focus on the staff of the foundation, because “(...) what is getting lost every time is the capacity building of people working, [in the foundation], the knowledge of people working (...)” (Member of Foundation 2). S/he was not the only interview-partner who was very much aware of the lost potential when participation is not taking place, not developed, not given institutionalized spaces to meet (like a library, theatre, or an archive in Potenza, but not in Matera; Member of University/researcher), or left without perspective for the staff’s expertise to support generating civic wealth for Matera and its region in the future.

There are various further examples given, and many questions raised by our interview-partners, pointing to probably ‘lost chances’. The most prominent was a lack of communication – one interview-partner described the foundation as a fortress with a drawbridge raised (Journalist) – which is directly linked to a lack of participation and (more comprehensive) presentation of the cultural heritage:

“So, (...) we haven’t had the possibility to talk with people [who] decide. [Who] don’t know the place, the city. They have imposed some models that haven’t [been] our models. And they give an imagine of this place [a]s Disney Land, (...) for that I am a little sad. Because we have a culture very, very ancient. And we have a lot of things to say and a lot of things to show [to] people. So, the positive thing is that the people (...) come here; the [in]habitants of Matera are so (...) welcoming (...) they explain the culture (...) and so a lot of people come (...) home with this sort of experience.” (Member of University/researcher).

Although it is a dimension not easily measured – the experiences of people, tourists, getting in profound touch with Materanian culture – it is a dimension of impact on a personal level which may get lost when adequate formats are not developed.

A lack of communication diminishes as well participation in the permanent societal discourse on what ‘culture’ of Matera means. This provides less occasions to create projects connecting with what characterizes the local culture since ages, for instance the cultural heritage in terms of “agri-culture which is dominant in Matera and the landscape. It is Greek, Albanian, the ‘pensiero mediteraneo’ as a non-consumerist philosophy, a different culture from the North” (Member of

University/researcher). From this perspective results a harsh critique: Events with no relation to this cultural heritage, produced by the foundation 2019 representing the capital of culture lost “(...) the sense of the word culture.” (Member of University/researcher) Consequently, there is no impact to expect on the preservation and transformation of cultural heritage.

Another interview-partner sees less of a lack of communication, but rather a tactical use of it to create a double layer communication. Towards the European Union events and projects delivered are communicated in order to get legitimization. “So, it’s a surface. And what is beneath the surface?” (Member of University) As soon as you leave the surface behind, communication becomes a rhetorical but not a participative exercise which could lead to empowerment. To make “(...) this stakeholder really protagonist, (...) I think this didn’t happen.” (Member of University) Consequently, tactical use of communication results in lost chances for participation and impact.”

“(...) the missing point (...) [is] engagement. (..) The level of engagement of citizens in the process I think has been generally very low and people feel very detached, the general detachment in the sense that the city probably didn’t really felt in involved and there is a general feeling that there is a missed opportunity but the missed opportunity is not about the discovery of Matera. It is more about what could have been done. So, there is an internal intuition that this could have been exploding much better to improve the quality of life of the citizens. That is missing.” (Member of University).

Having the big picture in mind, we can confirm the findings of Demartini *et al.* (2020: 180): “Indeed, after the designation was granted to Matera, a progressive decrease in the participatory process can be noted”.

Our second research question aims at describing consequences of possible patterns of participation on diverse impact dimensions, and – in a more general view – on generating civic wealth. What most interview-partners are aware of is the difficulty to represent impact in its diverse dimensions adequately. What is easy to measure are, for instance, numbers of tourist inflows due to the fact of the nomination and media coverage. Or the number of B&B’s established in expectation of more tourists to come. Out of this perspective, Matera was a success but the relation to participatory initiatives is not compelling.

Less easy to measure but well to describe are impacts like becoming proud of Matera. Mere “nomination has created a very strong sense of identity (...) immaterially you feel (...) proud, (...) because you feel the

discovered. You have not to explain anymore when you are talking ‘where are you from?’ Matera. Ah you are from Matera, nice, beautiful. You feel this like Matera is mine.” (Member of University) Similarly, you feel part of a necessary radical change compared to the “bad reputation” (Member of Foundation 2) the South had before, turning it into “confidence” (Member of Foundation 2). An impact more attached to participation is that to participate shows the value of the culture present in terms of “collaboration, generosity, passion, magic but also frugality in Matera. Frugality is (...) a way of life. (...) When you get connected with someone else this is added value. (...) And intensity maybe.” (Member of Foundation 2) Without participation in diverse formats, these aspects of mentality would not be in the focus. Again, these aspects are not represented easily by numbers in a spreadsheet.

What remains opaque in terms of impact, but may provide some legacy, refers to the topic of ‘transfer’. Although “honestly, I don’t even know now how to transfer this experience. (...) Maybe [by] being less ambitious but more focused like. (...) And you can experiment it in another place and because you have some connections (...)”. (Member of Foundation 2) In addition, time lags make impact difficult to present because “you have a seed, not the harvest yet; we still don’t know what we have in terms of legacy. It could be a lot it could be very few.” (Member of Foundation 2) Being confronted with medium- and long-term impact, we could change our methodical repertoire to evaluate impact and “try to capture the quality of the process rather than the output.” (Member of University).

4. *Discussion and conclusions*

The analysis of the two cases with a specific focus on patterns of participation shows a number of similarities, as well as differences. In general, the political setting for participatory initiatives in both ECoCs is remarkably dynamic with direct and indirect effects on both Foundations and the way participation takes place. These effects refer to the replacement of key players and responsible persons, changes in motto and conceptualization of projects, power struggles causing partly paralysis, partly a lack of communication, including a clash of top-down versus bottom-up leadership ambitions of protagonists responsible for management issues. The political channeling of opportunities to participate is criticized as inadequate by protagonist who argue for more empowerment through participation in order to achieve (sustainable) impact in various ECoC-projects. In both cases, we have seen descriptions and judgments

like ‘disillusionment’, that tourists may profit from it more than the residents, or a low level of engagement of citizens and other stakeholders as a kind of disappointing impression. However, it would be an inadequate conclusion to characterize the political arena by turmoil and micropolitics exclusively. A positive effect of political decisions in both cases is the will to preserve the expertise developed by the staff of the Foundation, and to maintain an organizational setting. In Valletta, the cultural ministry decided to continue the momentum of the ECoC-project by employing former Valletta 18-experts in the Valletta Cultural Agency with the intention to further strengthen long-term impact. Matera decided to finance the Foundation for some more years. Which patterns of participation emerge because of these organizational settings, and which impact dimensions may relate to these patterns is, however, not yet to judge based on the empirical material collected so far. Nevertheless, we see an oversimplification and reduction of impact dimensions in ex-post evaluations of ECoC-projects in order to ‘sell’ quick results (see also Sacco *et al.*, 2014).

Concerning participatory practices, similar patterns occur in both cases when quality issues are in focus. The discourse shows a certain fluidity, but as well clear-cut criteria to distinguish more from less quality in participation. To merely consume an event is seen by interview-partners in Matera as a participation of low(er) quality. A high(er) quality is achieved by participating in the process of planning and implementing a project from its beginning. Actively taking part is key and fosters competence building which may disperse and have a community-wide impact on bottom-up projects following. In Valletta, the ‘Gewwa Barra’-project is an example for a bottom-up initiative of high quality where residents planned, participated and enacted a theater play in and about their historic quarter of town. The play was meant to inform politicians and others what the living conditions are and what can and should be changed.

A second observation is the oscillation of participation in both cases. Participation is not a steady phenomenon: it oscillates due to diverse degrees of intensity in participating along the time line, and it takes different forms while the process of becoming an ECoC advances. The association ‘Matera 2019’ has been an initial booster to the idea of becoming an ECoC, but as an influential organization it became irrelevant in decision-making as soon as the Foundation has been established. The engagement of the university started as well with enthusiasm of some protagonists, and far-reaching aims for giving the youth a real opportunity to create civic wealth (Mininni, 2018), but transformed into a much less ambitious involvement due to a lack of top management support. However, the involvement did not fade out but sustained, for instance four

evaluation studies were published on the Matera webpage under ‘reports 2019’. In the Valletta/Malta-case it was clear from the beginning, that Valletta will play a certain role in the ECoC-project. It was the political will to make people participate in the different stages of the project. After this top-down political decision, many events were conducted and co-created in a participatory manner. As a consequence, we saw a continuously rising participation – starting from a low level before the main events started. Finally, in the second half of the title year, the level of participation decreased due to a certain ‘fatigue’ – too many events for too few people.

To focus on oscillation of participation shows how participation is not guaranteed to perpetuate. The way participation takes place depends very much on its context. This brings us back to the political and organizational setting. The Matera-case may tell us not to underestimate the extent to which institutions become ‘personalized’ – with far-reaching consequences. Persons in power decide for the institution on who is allowed to participate and with which degree of involvement, with whom to cooperate, on how the communication with a whole spectrum of stakeholders, citizens and critical voices does (not) take place, or which impact dimensions should (not) be in the focus of evaluations. Consequently, these decisions as well as the allocation of resources are channeled by personal attitudes, values and political background. ‘Resources’ not only mean budgets and staff, but as well attention, communication and estimation. In the Valletta/Malta-case, driven by the background and values of the organizational team, the communication was directed and customized more towards academics and intellectuals, and participatory action concentrated on these groups. Hence, we can conclude, that the protagonists set the stage for which formats of participation are more probable to evolve by determining specific constellations of resources and activities. This is not to say that bottom-up participatory initiatives will not occur independently of dominating resource constellations. But their development will be probably more laborious and time-consuming for the stakeholders involved.

This leads us to the dark side of oscillation, or – as some of our interview-partners pointed out – ‘lost chances’. Often, we do not know about the initiatives not undertaken. What we know not much about is, at least from our case material, how stakeholders interested in bottom-up participation anticipate resource-limitations due to the political setting described, and how they decide on their degree of participation along the time-line – or if they decide not to participate at all. However, in our case-studies there was noticeable regret of ‘lost chances’. A lack of communication or its tactical use, as well as a lack of consciousness regarding the character of the cultural heritage provokes disconnectedness

and superficial activities with little respect for the valuable cultural heritage at hand. Consequently, participation will develop on a low quality-level or even non-participation will be the case. Although it is not always transparent up to which extent an impact is not achieved due to low-level or non-participation. However, experienced participants raise plausible concern over impact dimensions not put into effect. In the following, we will discuss impact related to diverse patterns of participation in more detail.

From both cases, we may learn about the variety of impact dimensions, the difficulty to represent these adequately, and how these may (not) connect with diverse participatory initiatives. At first, we become aware of impact dimensions relatively easy to measure by a set of indicators. This is not to disdain the time and labor necessary to collect baseline data, train personnel to investigate into statistics and interpret responses from surveys. But there is a strong legitimation-function to represent impact-dimensions like how numbers of tourists develop, how many B&B's were established before the title-year and closed after, employment rates in newly established creative industries, social media coverage of specific events, how many pedestrian zones in the historic center haven been declared, etc. The representation of these impact-dimensions is described by one of our interview-partners from Matera as satisfying the communicative 'surface'. Relating these dimensions to patterns of participation, however, shows some limits in argumentation. That more tourists come because of professional marketing campaigns, or more B&B's are built because of quicker administrative permit procedures, are impact dimensions which could be achieved with much less active participation than planning and enacting the, for instance, 'Gewwa Barra' neighborhood theater play in comparison. A consumer-pattern of participation is sufficient, also because many of these impact dimensions are managed by the ECoC-management centrally in order not lose control over this communicative channel to gain legitimation. What we do not know from the case material is, how much of a bandwagon-effect is included (the B&B would have been opened in any case) as one end of a continuum. Or, on the other end of the continuum, how often more active patterns of participation with specific experiences emerge when people come to Matera, are welcomed by Materanians interested in mutual exchange of culture, and take part in discussions on literature or collaborative craftwork-courses. These impact dimensions may develop subsurface, but are usually not covered when impact is represented by numbers and indicators.

The idea of experiences fostered by mutual exchange, which you take home when you leave the ECoC as a kind of immaterial gift, points to impact dimensions based on emotions, which are less easy to measure but

well to describe. The example in both cases is ‘being proud’ or being part of a ‘larger movement’, for instance to change the reputation of your city or, more concrete on community level, to change the living conditions you are confronted with. It is not by accident that citizens in Valletta chose the expressive format of a theater play. And it is rather obvious that we will not succeed in representing these emotional impact-dimensions adequately by numbers. However, we may describe the impact deriving from this ‘actively taking part’-pattern of participation as probably more intense, with more of a leverage of cultural heritage by preserving and transforming it via mutually created experiences, and providing civic wealth through cultural enrichment and exchange. This conclusion is even more compelling if we understand how significant tourism is with its sound entrenchment of local and touristic interests in both cases. Local populations and neighborhood initiatives realize the potential of art and cultural projects for the sustainable development of their city in its region on the one hand. On the other hand, citizens are often much aware of non-sustainable developments like over-tourism in hotspots, gentrification, brain-drain of the young generation, and disdained rural areas progressively depopulated. Consequently, it is important to equally represent urban, regional and touristic interests in ECoC-projects. This will presumably work more effectively by ‘actively taking part’-patterns of participation with a certain intensity to generate impact-dimensions which leverage cultural heritage, preserve and transform it, and hence support civic wealth creation.

The two cases show as well a third range of impact dimensions which remain ‘opaque’. Legacy becomes something uncertain, when you have the ‘seed’, but you do not know how the ‘harvest’ will develop. Large time-lags result in less plausible relations between input and output or outcome. This is not to negate analyzing the relation of impact dimensions with patterns of participation. If some opaque impact dimensions do not clearly point to patterns of participation, we could nevertheless refer to oscillating participation as a strategy to create a cultural potential for civic wealth creation and impact dimensions we cannot know yet. Therefore, we need to trust in open ended processes of relations between impact and participation.

5. *Outlook*

Practices of participation in the future may see a shift in perspective. What is lacking when analyzing participatory processes and their diverse patterns in an ECoC-context, is the perspective on ECoC-leadership and

-management itself. If we interpret the term ‘participation’ more widely, we could ask: Who is allowed to participate in developing the ECoC itself and its personnel to handle the success, more precisely “not (...) getting lost because of the success” (Member of Foundation 2, Matera)? Winning the title is a starting point of a vibrant process full of change. What we know about participation from our case-studies is that it oscillates, that the quality and intensity of participation varies in different ECoC-projects, and that political resource allocations support specific formats of participation compared to others. In addition, the timespan of an ECoC is more than a decade. It would be a surprise not to be confronted in all these years with political struggles, fluctuation of leading personnel, cash-flows too late but fast growth in staff. These characteristics of demanding change processes have to be handled professionally. Is the ECoC with its stakeholders aware of what support is needed for its managerial body itself? And if so, who would participate in these change management processes?

Research on participation in the future may reflect on this shift in perspective. This means to embed research on participation and diverse patterns of participatory activities in, for instance, a theory of change and organizational development-approach with a focus on impact. Diverse impact dimensions occur in an obvious relation to participation. To have a closer look at this phenomenon may enhance our understanding of how cultural projects can engage various stakeholders and trigger desired results. Furthermore, this research endeavor could lead towards plausible representations of impact by following the effects of participatory projects and cultural initiatives.

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