



RE-designing Access to Cultural Heritage for a wider participation in preservation, (re-)use and management of European Culture

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PARTICIPATORY THEORY

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This paper discusses the role of participation and its conceptualisation in social science and humanities research and discourse. The competitiveness and social cohesion within Europe are very much contingent on re-formulating the role of culture and reinforcing culture-focused development policies. Looking at historical developments regarding cultural heritage (CH) is beneficial to understand the current political climate.

1.1. EVOLUTION OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION: FROM CULTURE 1.0 TO CULTURE 3.0

Community participation in heritage discourse is emerging and growing in importance, reflecting a paradigm shift from top-down to bottom-up approaches. This shows a parallel to the transformation in thinking about culture. Pier Luigi Sacco describes a change from Culture 1.0 to Culture 3.0.¹

Although Sacco does not define 'culture' as a concept, he formulates **Culture 1.0** as a moment in time ('pre-industrial'), in which culture was neither acknowledged as economical commodity, nor accessible to the majority of people. Instead, this model centred on the concept of patronage, in which culture was considered a privilege shared through individual initiatives of wealthy people with high social status.

The industrial revolution and its political, economic and social changes saw a widening of cultural audiences in **Culture 2.0**, when culture was seen as a universal right, and part of the very idea of citizenship. At the beginning of the 20th century, cultural mass markets emerged and public patronage and cultural policies came to the fore. The earlier role of individual wealthy patrons became a public function instead. In this second phase, cultural and creative activities were considered to produce economic value and thus potentially profitable, but they still represented a specific (although minor) sector of the whole economy.

Recent changes in technological innovation have begun a transition to **Culture 3.0**, characterised by 'the explosion of the pool of producers, so that it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between cultural producers and users'.² The traditional roles of producers/users have become interchangeable and audiences may turn into practitioners, leading to new opportunities for community participation.

¹ Sacco, 2011.

² Sacco, 2011: 17.



One could argue that Sacco's theory of the evolution of cultural production and reception is linked to a European tradition and that this eurocentrism is elitist and controversial. However, the present-day dynamics he describes, where audience and community have become synonyms and where museums and other cultural institutions offer participative platforms for cultural production, seem crucial for our understanding of social participation.³ A good example of innovative and awarded practices such as the community curatorship is provided by the exhibition *Never Going Underground* at the People's History Museum in Manchester.⁴ This shows new levels of volunteering and co-creation of exhibitions, which work especially well when representing marginalised communities (in this case the British LGBT+ community).

1.2. 'HERITAGE FROM BELOW': COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN CULTURAL HERITAGE DISCOURSE

The evolution of cultural production outlined above shows culture as a dynamic commodity. A similar shift from patronising (Culture 1.0) to participatory and involved (Culture 3.0) relationships of citizens with their culture can be discerned in the engagement with CH. No longer top-down and authoritative, heritage discourse comes to include the (more) 'mundane and everyday forms of heritage'.⁵ 'Heritage from below', a term inspired by 'history from below',⁶ implies community involvement, and acknowledges the often conflicted and contested appearances of heritage representation. Rather than emphasising canonisation, broad stroke traditions or collective identities (including the critical rethinking of national narratives; including or excluding, ghettoising or exoticising ethnic, class, racial or gender aspects),⁷ heritage from below aims to give spaces for previously oppressed voices.

Heritage from below does not conform to a top-down narrative, and in that sense does not aim for increased consumption of culture and/or strengthening its economic dimension. Instead, it represents the more 'ordinary' lives and incumbent practices of people who are active agents of their own history (both vernacular and collaborative),⁸ almost acting as counter hegemonic expressions.⁹ Such heterogeneous community-based view of CH (in contrast with previously assumed more homogeneous cultural environments) is more appropriate and effective for achieving successful local development outcomes.

³ Sacco, 2016: 12.

⁴ <https://awards.museumsandheritage.com/feature/volunteers-of-the-year-award-team/>,

⁵ Robertson, 2012: 15.

⁶ Robertson, 2012: 7.

⁷ Littler, 2004.

⁸ Robertson, 2012: 7.

⁹ Robertson, 2012: 1.



Robertson adds that:

'... heritage from below operates most obviously and successfully at a sub-national scale. It is directed from and for localising communities although it should not be assumed from this that there is an automatic fixity to what might be understood as 'local'. In this instance local should be taken to refer to not just (perhaps not even at all) the physical form but also to sub-national identity groupings and to identity groupings that do not treat space as the primary referent. [...] it must be acknowledged that only rarely is the heritage directed solely at the localised. There are nearly always *others* to attract and inform. Here too is yet another manifestation of the dissonance that seemingly inevitably inheres to all forms of heritage'.¹⁰

1.3. COMMUNITY HERITAGE

The questions raised above regarding locality are interwoven with notions of what defines 'community', which continues to be a contested term in heritage studies.¹¹ Communities are made up of people with diverging interests and might display a 'range of either motivating or disruptive energies'.¹² They depend on organisational structures, (professional) communities' spokesperson(s) or advocates, and do not always display internal consensus regarding activities, actions and relationships that constitute the so called community.¹³ The terms 'community heritage'¹⁴ and 'heritage community'¹⁵ seem to be used synonymously with 'heritage from below'.¹⁶ The term 'participatory heritage' (discussed below) is also closely related, with the emphasis on active participation of community members, rather than on the (boundaries or site of the) community. Whatever the chosen term for heritage, current emphasis lies on the involvement of its participants, or 'culture bearers',¹⁷ and ideally brings together different local cultures that form collective cultural frameworks in a specific area.

In an ideal case, this coming together does not necessitate the abandonment of cultural identities or self-interest, but it allows resources and activities of diverse cultures to be harnessed in order to meet general goals and needs.¹⁸ However, it is imperative to remain vigilant when participatory approaches involve previously and/or currently oppressed, marginalised communities. Despite being aware of social exclusion or inequality, existing power relations and smaller-scale inequalities between stakeholders can lead to a continued representation of dominant voices within the community.¹⁹

¹⁰ Robertson, 2012: 18.

¹¹ Waterton & Smith, 2010: 8.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Waterton & Smith, 2010.

¹⁵ Zagato, 2019.

¹⁶ Robertson, 2012.

¹⁷ 'A bearer is a member of a community who recognises, reproduces, transmits, transforms, creates, and forms a certain culture in, and for, a community. They can also function as practitioner, creator, and custodian, according to the UNESCO glossary' (Cho 2018: 226fn4).

¹⁸ Brennan et. al., 2008: 100.

¹⁹ Nakamura, 2014: 6.



An early example of community heritage practices is the **Common Ground** project from the United Kingdom, which represents a unique and organic way to engage people with their local environment and celebrate the intimate connections communities have with the landscape that surrounds them.²⁰ Started as a small environmental charity, it became an important initiative that comprehended the collaboration of, among others, academics, artists, architects, botanists, and filmmakers. Highlighting the importance of plants and animals, familiar and local places, local distinctiveness and their links with the past, Common Ground created several heritage projects that aimed at the conservation of both landscape and culture. Their very sensitive and often poetic projects, such as the early Local Distinctiveness, intended to involve the community in the protection and promotion of any distinctive elements of a local region. This included tangible aspects from the surroundings such as buildings, landmarks, rivers, specific animals and trees, places of worship, literary works and local foods such as cheese, but also intangibles aspects such as customs, dialects, celebrations, names, recipes, oral history, myths, legends and symbols. Their work and engagement can be considered an exemplary antecedent to all community heritage actions that tend to use resilient and integral methods to (re-)use their natural and cultural heritage.

1.4. HERITAGE MANAGEMENT: FROM GOVERNMENT TO GOVERNANCE

Since the 1980s, the integration of social partners and communities has become an integral and indispensable part of most CH development projects. Although a detailed historical overview of cultural changes is beyond the scope of this paper, it seems important to mention a few highlights that led to participatory governance, not only as new concept, but as essential to social and political innovation. These developments can be seen as part of the Culture 3.0 model as described above.

The civil movement in Western Europe and North America rendered systems of representative democracy insufficient, and instead created a strong drive for active participation of communities, in which power and responsibility were distributed equally among a number of various actors. Once advocacy and participation became the main approaches to CH, and CH researchers and professionals were encouraged to collaborate with local communities and citizens who did not necessarily know what to expect from a cultural heritage 'expert', perspectives and dynamics in heritage management radically changed.²¹ This situation called for new strategies for communication, dissemination and co-creation of CH. It included, since the turn of the millennium, a shift from government to governance, which happened within many different political areas and also on national, EU and worldwide levels.

Governance implies involving various stakeholder groups in processes that were previously largely conducted by government parties. Sharing responsibilities is one of its essential characteristics. Nevertheless, the governance process can be conducted top-down, or bottom-up (the latter resembling the 'heritage from below'):

- top-down: authority (traditional cultural heritage institution) releases power and empowers various social actors

²⁰ <https://www.commonground.org.uk/what-we-do/>

²¹ Sonkoly & Vahtikari, 2018: 39.



- bottom-up: communities start initiatives, responsibilities are shared, and decisions are taken by communities rather than by individuals.²²

The role of traditional (top-down) organisational structures has been questioned, since such structures no longer satisfied the public interests. The bottom-up approach, on the other hand, reflects the shift in the role and behaviour of individuals from being passive cultural consumers to cultural producers.

1.5. PARTICIPATORY HERITAGE

The previous paragraph showed that governance can be either top-down, or bottom-up. 'Participatory heritage' is proposed as a hybrid. Individuals and communities define their own heritage more autonomously,²³ engaging in and creating cultural activities independent of, but in collaboration with, existing traditional institutions.²⁴ Participatory heritage can hence be considered as bottom-up perspective, but, since it challenges traditional cultural heritage institutions to make changes in their governance, it also features elements of top-down approaches.²⁵

However, it is important to underline that when traditional cultural heritage institutions try to involve and engage audiences, be responsive to their requirements, and more accessible to a wider public, that does not automatically create participatory practices. This can easily continue to be a top-down, authoritative approach, simply paying lip service to the rhetoric of participation, rather than actual practice itself.²⁶ Indeed, several analyses show a wide range of participatory methods and practices across Europe, which cannot however be labelled as participatory governance.²⁷

The most crucial aspect seems to be the active involvement of relevant stakeholders in the framework of public action.²⁸ It is clear that wide range of actors are needed in every stage of the process, i.e. public authorities and bodies, private actors, civil society organisations, NGOs, the volunteering sector and other interested people.

These actors participate in decision-making, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of CH policies and programmes to increase accountability and transparency of public resource investments, as well as to build public trust in policy decisions.²⁹

Ladders of Participation

A so-called '**ladder of participation**' helps to describe, navigate and monitor the routes to and levels of participatory practice. Various versions of such ladders have been developed over time.

²² Sani et. al., 2015: 3.

²³ Sonkoly & Vahtikari, 2018: 14.

²⁴ Roued-Cunliffe & Copeland, 2017: XV.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ OMC, 2018.

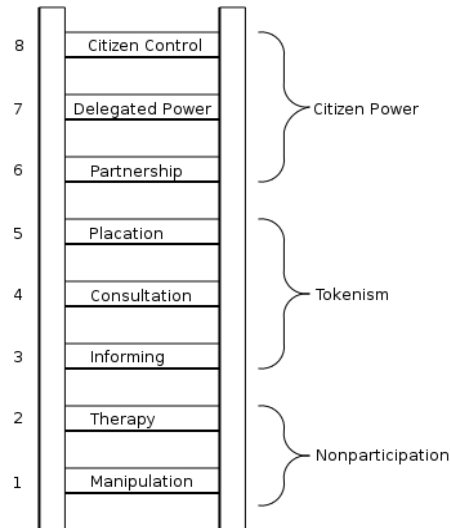
²⁷ Sani et. al., 2015: 3

²⁸ OMC, 2018: 22.

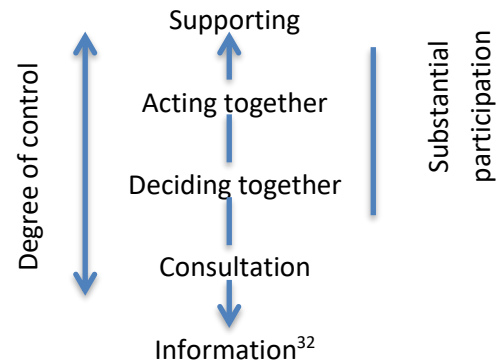
²⁹ OMC, 2018: 41.



One of the earlier ladders of participation, by Sherry R. Arnstein, contained eight different steps or levels (1969). This ladder comprehends the development of participation as authorities foster citizen engagement, release power and share responsibilities (Figure 1). Hence, this model tries to capture participation in a top-down perspective, illustrating the same concept, even though the visual representation is inverse to the term bottom-up.³⁰



David Wilcox formulated a similar approach in 1994. Although it was intended to focus on community participation, it remained institution centric. Again, the argument is maintained, albeit with the most inclusive initiatives are at the top of the ladder, rather than visually illustrating the bottom-up approach.³¹



Nina Simon, in her book *The Participatory Museum*,³³ distinguishes four phases of public participation, the first three of which she derived from Public Participation in Scientific Research (PPSR) project.³⁴ The order represents a development from top-down to bottom-up:

- **contributory projects** where the audience has a small contribution in an institutionally controlled process
- **collaborative projects**: where the audience becomes a partner in an institutionally controlled process
- **co-creative projects**, where audience and institution jointly control a process
- **hosted projects** where the audience is in full control within the context of the institution.³⁵



³⁰ Arnstein, 1969: 216-218.

³¹ Wilcox, 1994.

³² Adapted from Wilcox 1994: <http://www.partnerships.org.uk/guide/frame.htm>

³³ Simon, 2010: <http://www.participatorymuseum.org/chapter5/>

³⁴ CAISE, 2009 (Simon refers to this document as the PPSR report).

³⁵ The bullet points are derived from <http://www.participatorymuseum.org/chapter5/>.



The work of Simon was considered further within the RICHES project, which explored co-creation on a practical basis, specifically through ten case studies.³⁶ It established that 'co-creation describes joint or partnership-oriented creative approaches between two or more parties, especially between an institution and its stakeholders, towards achieving a desired outcome. A co-creation process can enable organisations to:

- find a connection between groups that would normally not collaborate
- raise awareness and sensitivity towards important issues with certain groups/individuals
- create a safe space for sharing
- create a common understanding
- enable the creation of more layered and nuanced exhibitions and events
- build relationships between groups/individuals that exist well beyond the scope of a project
- empower minority perspectives.'

A final trend worth mentioning is Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), which is becoming increasingly popular (mostly in the USA). CBPR concerns research projects that are still controlled by professional researchers, but add a degree of community participation.³⁷

The degrees of community participation in research are the following:

- **controlled by professional researchers** but with greater or lesser degrees of community partnership, e.g.
 - advisory group involved in design, dissemination
 - trained community researchers undertake some/all of data gathering, analysis; professional researcher uses participatory methods (e.g. young people take photos)
- **co-production** – equal partnership between professional researchers and community members
- **community-controlled with professional researchers** managed by and working for the community
- **community-controlled and community-managed research**, no professional researchers involved.³⁸

Top-down



Bottom-up

Most examples of CBPR participatory research seem to be in the natural sciences.³⁹ Introducing participatory approaches in culture and humanities might need some cautious adaptations because of the subject matter, and most importantly because activities might not necessarily concern 'research', but include other participatory activities such as general educational and social activities instead.

³⁶ http://www.digitalmeetsculture.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/RICHES-D4-2-Good-practices-and-methods-for-co-creation_public.pdf authored by the WAAG Society.

³⁷ <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/documents/project-reports-and-reviews/connected-communities/community-based-participatory-research-ethical-challenges/>.

³⁸ The points are derived from <https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/project-reports-and-reviews/connected-communities/community-based-participatory-research-ethical-challenges/>. Please note again that the additions on the right are added for comparison with previous ladders.

³⁹ The term resilience, a major plank of the REACH project's work, is also drawn from the sphere of natural science, making this an especially useful comparative study.



CONCLUSION

Cultural production has evolved depending on the social and political awareness throughout various stages in history. From a top-down view, in which attention for cultural heritage depended on good willing members of the elite, the development shifted towards a bottom-up approach in which users and producers of CH are becoming ever more interchangeable. They become co-creators of initiatives to preserve and share and further CH.

This brings up questions regarding locality of culture, which is hardly ever limited to a specific geographical region, nor solely accessed by its locals. Rather, culture is a flexible concept that transcends boundaries (region, nation, and ethnicity). In order to strengthen its internal coherence and maximise its outward visibility, it needs to be treated in ways that respect that permeability. A similar issue is to establish what constitutes a community, which may be formed of many different people with their own interests without obvious consensus. It is important to question the structures and relationships within the community, and which members actively participate and/or advocate their cultural heritage, without being exclusive to members that are perhaps less visibly active. Special mention needs to be made of those in marginalised positions, and to be aware that giving space to the CH of minority groups does not necessarily negate existing power dimensions within such communities. Are those who speak up well placed to represent the more silent members of the group? Are views of those more quietly present sufficiently represented?

Another important dynamic is the shift from 'government' to 'governance', perhaps specifically in countries where grass-roots movements have not been allowed by a politically dominant regime. It is essential to question who are the 'experts', and to include effective communication strategies, as well as ways to co-create and disseminate CH. However, even governance approaches can be conducted top-down as well as bottom-up, depending on whether responsibilities are shared equally, or one or a few actors hold the power during the process.

Various ladders of participation are available to offer explanations of the different nuances and emphases of active responsibility of various stakeholders within a project. They indicate that participatory governance can also be realised with different levels of involvement and engagement, as well as in different environments including cultural projects and institutional activities, as well as in academic research.

A more recent development concerns the participatory heritage, in which culture bearers take their own autonomous initiatives, supported by CH institutions, but not initiated by them. This too can hold elements of top-down and bottom-up approaches.

Whatever the environment or purpose, the process has to be dynamic and flexible, representing a continuum in which participation refers to shared responsibilities and moreover, to the property of culture. The aim in each individual, local case of creating participatory heritage activities is to establish the appropriate framework of collaboration between multiple actors, so enhancing people's capabilities and contributing to forge strong communities. This renders CH increasingly socially relevant.



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