

PREFACE

Participation in arts and culture has been under the attention of academics, creative practitioners and policy makers for decades. The Covid pandemic though has caused a whole new and confronting experience of the value of participation. In times when most social contacts were reduced to virtual encounters on computer- or telephone screens we were painfully confronted with the impact of ‘non-participation’. Of course we have also identified the advantages of the digital realm and most of us try to include those in new modes of working and living together: online information exchange is great, quick decision making and a straight a forward discussion works well, we save the time of travel and the environmental impact is reduced. And of course consuming culture that would also in non-pandemic times be difficult is made easier: operas, film, lectures etc are now just a mouse click away.

But everything that makes a cultural experience humane is dearly missed: meeting friends and strangers at events, the physical presence in all its aspects of others around us, the eye contact, the impact of our own presence on the social fabric of a cultural event,—all that is or was painfully absent.

The same limitations we experience in creative processes: as an artist, a producer, a curator, an educator, we need collaboration, not only in an economical or managerial sense, but especially for joint problem solving, identifying urgent issues to be addressed, finding creative solutions, developing methodologies and strategies to reach out to new audiences. All these processes are based on trust and time. Both of these—trust and time—are intrinsically linked. We need to spend time with collaborators, with fellow humans as such, in order to build trust. We need to look one another in the eyes, see the fine wrinkles when we laugh, talk about some personal experiences over coffee, enjoy a meal and drinks together,- all of which the Portuguese call ‘conviviality’, this sharing of life together, even if only for a few hours or a day, creates a space of trust and creativity that

physical distance and the still limited means of an online encounter cannot offer.

In a certain sense during the pandemic we have all experienced what has been an everyday reality for many communities across Europe and the globe: no access to those encounters that create a joint space of trust and understanding and ultimately representation. It is that space of encounter and creativity that offers possibilities of change towards more inclusive societies and a more sustainable living together. For the latter the arts and culture are crucial. They are not an add-on, not the cherry on the cake so to speak. On the contrary they are the gist that gets the whole thing going. In current policy discourse we use a fashionable statement: Culture is a vector, not a sector. Although this is debatable, as we need to be recognised as a sector to advocate for our needs properly and get the recognition that is often missing,—it does point to a truth that those working with artistic participation know all too well. Art must permeate all parts of life in order to make it meaningful and in order to sustain a society on the long run.

The Goethe Institut and Stichting H401 have been collaborating for the past 20 years to address issues of cultural participation in EU funded projects. Back then, in 2012, with a new wave of populism in Europe, we started our collaboration by addressing the phenomenon of group fanaticism to create awareness of the benefits and pitfalls of group dynamics.

H401 is a cultural centre in the heart of Amsterdam that operates from a historic canal house in which a Dutch painter and a German poet had organised a safe house for youngsters hiding from the Nazi occupiers in the 1940s. Later the house became a beehive of artists and poets around the founders Gisèle (1912–2013) and Frommel (1902–1986). Only recently it was revealed that Frommel in the post-war years (60s–70s) has gained a guru-like status and sexually abused some of his followers that could not resist his charisma. In this sense the history of the place must now be seen as one in which lives have been saved and lives have been damaged. This ambiguous history is not an easy feat, but a strong motivation to keep exploring the ambiguities of human existence. So even in hindsight the project on fanaticism could not have been more fitting: when does a bond of friends protect you from the outside world and when does it suffocate you?

From this quest, we went on to explore the role of groups for the formation of identity and then mainly the question, which role memory plays in these identity processes. The project *TimeCase—Culture is Memory in Action* asked how my personal memory relates to collective memory and which tools are there to stimulate more inclusive memory-making.

The Goethe Institute as the cultural institute of the Federal Republic of Germany could relate strongly to the sort of projects we developed together: only by remembering all aspects of history and talking through it, working through it so to speak, positive change and innovation is possible. From that thought, the collaboration between H401 and the Goethe Institute has evolved naturally. And although the two organisations may be in line with their values, they are vastly different in their operational modus: with the Goethe Institutes' countless branch offices around the globe, thousands of staff, educational programmes and cultural services, the small H401 in Amsterdam seems like the little gallic village in the Roman Empire. But it was especially that contrast, that makes the collaboration so fruitful. One of the complementarities for instance is that one has gravity, the other is lean, which is a perfect combination,—and there are many more such complementary aspects. But then in reality organisations collaborate through people. The authors of this piece and editors of this book have in all these years built a unique trust and way of collaboration around which an ecosystem has emerged that made this collaboration possible. an ecosystem of individuals and organisations that have contributed to the projects, have grown in them and have stayed for a shorter while or longer. This collaboration across organisational forms, across national boundaries, across discipline boundaries, counts amongst the most fruitful activities we have experienced. They have fostered divers communities and have empowered artists and creative practitioners to grow and impact on the communities in which they work.

After the *Fanaticism Project* and the *TimeCase Project* we found it was time to focus on education, in order to share the insights gained so far with upcoming and new generations. The artists we had been working with often indicated that they were missing participatory questions and community-related aspects in their education. We were consequently able to secure funding from Erasmus+ to develop and offer an elective summer course for MA students from all arts disciplines that wanted to develop

their knowledge, skills and attitudes of participatory art. We called this multi-annual offer the *European Academy of Participation* (EAP).

From the very broad approach of EAP we felt the need to focus on a specific aspect of participation in the next step, one that would bring the identity question back into the spotlight. With the financial support of the Creative Europe programme of the European Union, we implemented the three-year project *Heritage Contact Zone*, in which the partners developed a participatory methodology of heritage making. Difficult or contested heritage offered opportunities for artists to engage marginalised communities in heritage institutions. The *European Year of Cultural Heritage* (2018) provided the perfect frame for this endeavour.

The journey has started with the *Fanaticism Project* and led us on to *TimeCase—Culture is Memory in Action*, to the *European Academy of Participation*, and to *Heritage Contact Zone*. A lot of spin-off effects have triggered tangible initiatives across Europe: a cultural management academy, an on-line platform for socially engaged artists, new educational programmes, exhibitions, workshops, interventions and residencies.

This book brings together selected contributions from this journey. We hope that they can inspire and support all those readers that wish to work with participation, heritage, identity, the arts and education. We encourage the reader to find their own individual reading pathway. Not all articles may be equally relevant for all readers, but we are certain that there is some relevance for all of you in one or more of the pieces. Some articles are more academic of nature, others more practical. Some reflect on policy and offer benchmarks, others reflect on case studies and experiences of collaboration.

The partners of the projects sketched above keep developing new ideas together. The journey continues and new projects are being launched. In times of global crisis, it seems more urgent than ever to meet and overcome boundaries, to struggle and celebrate together, to analyse and create together and first and foremost to build trust. If we want to overcome fragmentation and polarisation, trust seems the only remedy. We found trust in collaboration and it is this trust that urges us to keep collaborating.

Joachim Umlauf & Lars Ebert
Bucharest and Amsterdam, 2022