Forms and potential effects of citizen participation in European cultural centres

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Abstract:
This article proposes a framework for understanding citizen participation in European cultural centres. Europe has thousands of cultural centres with many millions of annual visitors and actively involved citizens. Citizen participation is a core value of the centres but has, like the centres themselves, been under-researched. The article presents a participatory research and action project that was part of the programme for the Danish city of Aarhus as a European Capital of Culture in 2017: *RECcORD: Rethinking Cultural Centres in a European Dimension* (2015-17). In RECcORD, we researched citizen participation as a method: with networking employees or 'citizen scientists' from centres across Europe; and as an object: as practices and understandings of participation at the centres. Based on an inductive research methodology, we offer a typology of the forms and potential effects of citizen participation in the centres. We identify six forms: attention, education, co-creation, co-habitation, publics and co-decision; and nine potential effects: aesthetic intensity, feeling of togetherness, social inclusion, wellbeing, learning, empowerment, cultural/political reflection, local development and sustainability. We further suggest a definition of participation in the centres and argue for the importance of exploring both 'vertical' power and 'horizontal' communities when aiming at an understanding of citizen participation in cultural centres and beyond.

Keywords: citizen participation, cultural centres, participatory methods, power, communities.

Introduction

Across Europe, there is a demand for institutions to engage citizens as active participants. In the wake of the political and economic crisis of the early 21st century, many social and political institutions seem to have lost legitimacy. This is especially visible in the cross-

European rise of populist, anti-institutional and anti-establishment movements – and in efforts to reduce these by involving citizens, creating social cohesion, and increasing people's influence on their own lives. Cultural institutions are ambiguously situated in this development. On the one hand, they take part in the declining legitimacy of public institutions. While cultural life increasingly unfolds on/with digital platforms – conditioned by extremely powerful commercial media conglomerates but also enabling new modes of accessing, producing and circulating cultural contents – the relevance of traditional cultural institutions and hierarchies are challenged. On the other hand, cultural institutions are expected to tackle the problems of declining social cohesion and public engagement. They try to reach out to and 'include' new and maybe marginalized audience groups, to turn users and audiences into active 'participants', and to involve citizens with a variety of expectations, e.g. that their contributions make a visible difference.

The focus on involving citizens as active participants is manifest also in recent European Capitals of Culture (ECoCs). When the Danish city of Aarhus in 2012 applied to become ECoC in 2017, it emphasized the inclusive citizen consultation process leading to the bid. The participatory process was one way of demonstrating Aarhus' interest in answering what the applicants saw as a general need 'to look at new models for citizenship, to make it easier for citizens to assume roles of responsibility within society. Formal political systems can no longer claim to engage our citizens sufficiently – this democratic deficit needs to be addressed' (Aarhus 2017, 2012, 7).

As the year 2017 came closer, the ambition of rethinking citizenship and reducing the democratic deficit became less prominent. Even though Aarhus 2017, in the *Strategic Business Plan* from 2015, defined democracy as one of its three core values (the others being sustainability and diversity), the way this was motivated had changed significantly. The democratic deficit was replaced with a 'very Danish attribute of collectivity and cooperation' (Aarhus 2017, 2015, 30). Instead of designating democracy as a current social challenge in Europe, it was now designated as a (Danish) social tradition, 'the core principle that underpins all' and 'the bedrock upon which our year is built' (ibid.). Everyone was still invited to take part, but the key performance indicators of long-term impact regarding 'activating citizens' were limited to more volunteering, bigger audiences, and a growing number of young cultural entrepreneurs (ibid., 19). The democratic and challenging aspects of engaging citizens were now absent.

Citizen participation, also in the democratic meaning of the concept, was, however, an important aspect of several of the projects and events in the 2017 programme. In the project in focus in this article, citizen participation was the method as well as the object of study. *Rethinking Cultural Centres in a European Dimension* 2015-17 (RECcORD) was a research and action project which involved and investigated 38 centres across Europe as arenas for citizen participation. The project was developed through collaboration between researchers (the authors of this article) and organizations for Danish and European cultural centres.[1] It was carried out through experimental collaboration between researchers and 20 employees, named 'reccorders', from the cultural centres.

In RECcORD, we asked the following questions: What kinds of participatory activities are present in the centres? Which understandings of participation are expressed through these activities? Which potential effects, dilemmas or challenges characterize these participatory practices? In addition, we wanted to experiment with a participatory research design and to share knowledge by letting practitioner-experts with various backgrounds collect and produce data, interpret and disseminate the results together with us researchers, and (hopefully) contribute to the impact of the project by developing it further in future practices and networks. Inspired by community-based research and participatory action research, the project was thus *about* but also an experiment *with* citizen participation (Lezaun, Marres, & Tironi, 2016). It identified participatory activities *in* the cultural centres but also identified participation and enhanced understanding of it *through* activities in the centres.

This article presents some of the results of the RECcORD, which, to our knowledge, is the first research project that systematically compares citizen involvement in European cultural centres.[2] After an introduction to the topic and to the project's experimental methodology, we present two basic conceptualizations of participation and how these are reflected in the project. Based on our empirical data from the cultural centres, we then unfold a typology of the forms of citizen participation, offer a definition of participation in cultural centres, and present the potential effects of participation in the centres. Finally, we discuss how cultural centres as open and multi-purpose hubs enable various modes and potential benefits of participation, and discuss how the findings of RECcORD are relevant for understandings of cultural participation also beyond the centres.

Researching participation in European cultural centres

Europe has thousands of cultural centres (3,000 of which are represented by the European Network of Cultural Centres, ENCC) with millions of annual visitors and actively involved citizens. However, the knowledge of the ways in which they engage citizens and the social impact of their activities is limited. Lack of research on the social impact of European cultural centres can partly be explained by their diversity and variations. As institutions, they exist in multiple forms and even without an agreed name. The forms vary from the neighbourhood centre (often but not always founded in the 1960s or 1970s) with a focus on community activities and local cultural forms; centres created and run by (groups of) artists; and the new creative hub (often created in the 21st century) that uses art and culture to boost the entrepreneurship, innovation capacity and attractiveness of a city or region. The names, in various countries and languages, include such denominations as 'houses of culture', 'centres for socio-culture', 'citizens' houses' and 'activity centres'.

The lack of national as well as transnational research is, however, not specific to cultural centres but more broadly characterizes the fields of amateur arts (Ramsden 2013) and everyday cultural participation (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016). While many reports and much research has been done on a narrow set of state supported cultural activities (e.g. going to museums and the theatre), the quantity and quality of everyday socio-cultural

participation is much less researched – and more difficult to measure. In the last decade, though, we have witnessed a rising interest in going beyond the narrow set of activities and measuring and researching participation in a broader variety of socio-cultural activities, including amateur and community arts – e.g. in British projects like *Pathways through Participation: What Creates and Sustains Active Citizenship* (2009-11, *Pathways* in the following), *Understanding the Value of Arts and Culture – the AHRC Cultural Value Project* (2012-15, *UVAC*) and *Understanding Everyday Participation – Articulating Cultural Values* (2012-17, *UEP*). Like RECcORD, these projects go beyond the orthodox valuation of state-subsidised culture and institutions that are used frequently only by a minority of people - 8% in the UK according to *UEP* (Taylor 2016). Instead, they include a rich variety of participatory and/or cultural practices and – often from a phenomenological first-person perspective – investigate the meaning and value people attach to these in their everyday lives. The projects are important because they – like RECcORD – widen the understanding of cultural participation: *UVAC* includes the 'commercial, amateur and participatory [cultural practices] which, after all, are where most people find their cultural engagement' (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016, 7); *UEP* moves beyond the interest in a limited set of cultural forms, activities and institutions to investigate 'what people themselves value about their own everyday participation practices' (Miles and Gibson, 2016, 151); and *Pathways* studies not only cultural but also social and political participation.

Compared to these projects, RECcORD differs due to its focus on a specific type of cultural institution. However, a broad and inclusive approach to cultural participation is key for understanding what is taking place in cultural centres. As institutions, they have historically combined a variety of aims and ideologies (also reflected in the various names). These include promoting active citizenship through cultural and artistic activities; revitalizing abandoned industrial buildings and developing neglected urban areas; enhancing creativity, community, networks, entrepreneurship and innovation. Focusing on the common traits, a cultural centre can nevertheless be described as a particular cultural institution that often combines *arts and creative activities* (with spaces and technical facilities for exhibitions, rehearsal, performances, workshops) with a *focus on diversity* (a variety of activities, users and user groups), *civic engagement, involvement of volunteers and openness to bottom-up initiatives*. The centres are normally closely tied to the *local neighbourhood*, they often run on a rather low budget (with a mix of public and sometimes private funding and tickets/fees), they offer open and *flexible spaces,* and they combine *professional and amateur* as well as *cultural and social activities*.

The characteristics above entail that the cultural centres can be difficult to compare, hence the scarcity of knowledge in the field. But they also entail that cultural centres have a specific role in the cultural landscape. They are, or have the potential of becoming, important arenas for everyday cultural, social and democratic citizen participation. This is also emphasized by The European Network of Cultural Centres (ENCC), which defines its core values as 'cultural equality, interculturalism, democratisation and active citizenship through participation in cultural and artistic activities' (https://encc.eu/about). In cultural

centres, 'citizen participation' is frequently stressed as a key goal. Despite variations in organization, size, economy and facilities, they all share the aim of involving citizens as participants in voluntary socio-cultural activities. This is a core value of the centres – and a value and set of practices that RECcORD researched and engaged in.

An inductive and participatory research design

RECcORD was not based on a predefined concept of participation. Well aware of the multiple and sometimes contradictory theoretical (and everyday) understandings of the 'infinitely malleable concept "participation"' (Cornwall 2008, 269), we chose an inductive approach in order to develop our definitions and typologies based on knowledge gathered and produced by the reccorders. While our theoretical preconceptions of participation informed our design of a participatory method (based on aims like diversity, shared ownership, knowledge sharing and networking), we tried not to force these preconceptions onto the empirical field of practice. We wanted to understand the concept through its uses and thus designed a research process with five phases:[3]

In the first phase, in early 2016, we recruited the participants. Based on responses to an open call to the members of ENCC, we researchers and representatives of KHiD and ENCC selected 20 reccorders and 20 host centres in which the reccorders were to conduct ten-days fieldwork. The criteria for the selection and pairing of reccorders and hosts, apart from their motivation and language skills,[4] were diversity/balance in terms of location (national, regional, urban/rural) and type (size, organization, primary activities). We ended up with a total of 38 centres (two of which both acted as hosts and provided a reccorder) from fourteen European countries and organized the fieldwork in order to maximize regional and organisational diversity between the reccorders and the host centre.[5]
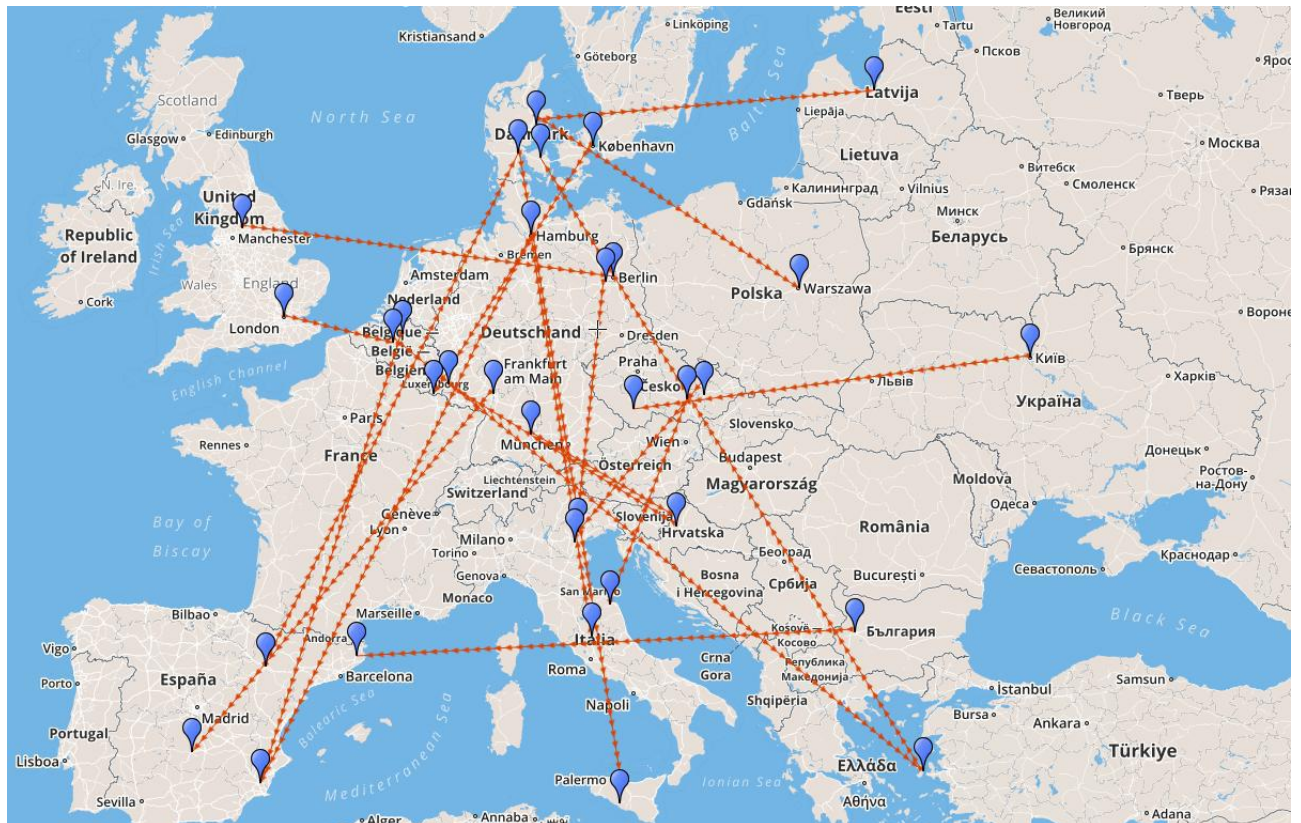
Fig. 1: Locations of participating reccorders and hosts.

In the second phase, in the spring of 2016, the 20 reccorders answered a survey and provided data about their own centres. Without offering a definition of the concept, we asked the reccorders to identify what they perceived as 'participation', to describe participatory activities in their own centres and share their best and worst experiences of participation. Based on an analysis of how participation was described and understood in this material, we developed a preliminary typology of participation in cultural centres.[6]

This preliminary typology was discussed with the reccorders in the third phase of the process: a methods seminar in Aarhus, Denmark, in June 2016. Here, we also introduced them to the research design, and they received written guidelines to, as well as hands on experience with, five methods they were going to use to collect and produce data during their fieldwork. The methods all linked to specific tasks at the centre:

1) Interviews on citizen participation (with the manager, one staff member or volunteer and two users)
2) Observation (of at least three participatory activities)
3) Participatory mapping conducted together with a staff member (of the centre and stakeholders)
4) Document analysis (for instance, of programmes of activities and mission papers)

5) Visual and written auto-ethnographic texts (of the reccorders' subjective experiences).

An important purpose of these methods was to achieve a diverse set of data that could provide an overall impression of the participatory profile of the centres (methods 3 and 4), of the ways in which their users and staff practice and understand participation (methods 1 and 2), and of sensory aspects of participation (method 5). The methodology was further motivated by a wish to balance a systematic investigation with an activation of the reccorders' different kinds of expertise, and to combine our research questions with an open and diverse research frame.

In the fourth phase, all the reccorders conducted ten days fieldwork in their host centre, collected and produced data through the methods, and uploaded these to a closed Facebook group and a collective server. The Facebook group was further used to clarify questions about the methods, and to share experiences, ideas and support before, during and after the fieldwork. It thus contributed significantly to the feeling – among both reccorders and us researchers – of being part of a shared research project. As one of the reccorders, Vassilka Shishkova from Bulgaria, wrote in an evaluation of the project in August 2017: 'the best is the feeling of being connected, belonging to something bigger (and good, interesting, useful) which has also given me the opportunity to grow professionally and in a personal manner.'

When all the reccorders' empirical material was uploaded onto a collective server in early 2017, the diversity was manifest. The five methods and the diverse skills and interests of the reccorders resulted in – compared to many other research projects – an unusually extensive and heterogeneous archive of material.[7] However, when we researchers read and selectively coded all the material with a systematic focus on how different modalities of participation were presented and identified, we were able to detect various patterns across the different types of data and the 20 centres. Our analysis of these patterns enabled us to define participation in the cultural centres but also required us to significantly revise our preliminary typology (from phase two). This was a tangible consequence of the open and participatory research design: the data from the fieldwork made it necessary to change our preliminary typology of participation in cultural centres. The preliminary (six) forms were now divided in forms and potential effects and supplemented, thereby resulting in six (partly new) forms and nine potential effects.

Ontologically, these forms and effects exist in a difficult grey zone between the reccorders' observations and auto-ethnographies, the mapping and documents, the centre professionals' ideals and ambitions, and the experiences of volunteers and users. Our analysis is based on five methods that in different ways represent the centres and their stakeholders. This in particular is a problem regarding the effects. While the forms of participation were rather easy to deduct from the material, the typology of effects necessarily depends more on the interviews and thus on the (self) understandings of the people involved in the cultural centres. The effects are, in short, harder to observe than the

forms. Nevertheless, the typology is not only based on the good intentions and polite data provided by informants who may have a professional interest in the centres, but also on interviews and other information from ordinary users. This means that we have not just taken the words of the hosts (or reccorders) at face value. We have also attempted to find patterns between the various kinds of data and between the different cultural centres. Our typologies and definition of participation are based on these patterns; further, in spite of the ontological uncertainty, they represent, we expect, a socially robust knowledge that makes sense to people working in the field. By referring to 'social robustness' as a criterion of academic knowledge production, we follow the work of Helga Nowotny et al. (2001) who explain how participatory research must often give up on a more traditional academic approach that foregrounds the importance of researcher control to ensure reliability. Instead, academic knowledge is validated by producing, testing and discussing it through close social interactions with relevant stakeholders. This does not imply that academic knowledge becomes a question of banal consensus but rather that academic methods and practices are validated in ways that exchange researcher control with contextual recognisability and co-creation. The knowledge produced in the RECcORD project was understood as valid by us because it increasingly resonated with stakeholders and participants, who described it as accurate, useful and inspiring based on their multifaceted knowledge of the centres. This was manifest when we presented the new typologies and other research results to the reccorders and received positive feedback (in emails and on the closed Facebook group). The results were recognizable and made sense for the expert-practitioners who played an important role in discussing them – and the research process – in the fifth phase: a concluding conference, held from 17th-19th May 2017, that was part of Aarhus' ECoC programme.

The reccorders were strongly involved in discussing the results and methodologies and deciding how to communicate them to fellow cultural centres at the conference. As a continuation of the project, some reccorders have independently disseminated and debated the research results and methods further, thereby taking ownership of the project itself, making the knowledge more robust, and continuing the ambition of making participation an issue to discuss, understand and develop.[8]

The concept of participation

In the theoretical landscape, participation is defined and used in a variety of ways. These include (but are not limited to) ones that insists on the democratic character of the concept – the empowering involvement of citizens in equal decision-making – and ones that focus on collective experiences, belongings and identities.

In the first understanding, participation is concerned with sharing power. This is the one alluded to in the 'democratic deficit' of the Aarhus 2017 bid. In Carol Pateman's influential definition, participation is a right and a means to have 'equal power to determine the outcome of decisions' (Pateman 1970, 71). This understanding of the concept is used in political theory where meaningful participation is defined as sharing power' (Cammaerts et

al. 2014, 647). In this part of the theoretical landscape, one often finds hierarchies of participation: partial vs. full participation (Pateman 1970), manipulation vs. citizen control (Arnstein 1969), or fake/pseudo vs. true/real participation. Whereas participatory governance or budgeting may be examples of true participation, fake participation occurs when governments (or others in power) 'seek the democratic legitimacy but not the accountability that comes with public participation' (Snider 2009). This may for instance be the case in public consultations, which in *Pathways through Participation* are identified as a particularly demotivating and fake form of participation: 'People's experience of formal public consultations had almost always been negative', had 'reinforced an existing sense of ambivalence and lack of trust in political processes in general' and contributed to 'a wider feeling of disempowerment' (Brodie et al. 2011, 7, 24 and 70).

Fake participation equals fake democracy, and it easily reinforces the problems with disempowerment and distrust in authorities, which consultations and similar initiatives appear to solve. This is also the case beyond democratic institutions in the narrow sense. The sharing of power is pivotal, e.g. in research in participation in development studies (White 1994, Servaes 1999), media studies (Carpentier 2011, Kelty et al. 2015), and (critical) theories of cultural policy and institutions (Jancovich 2015, Sternfeld 2013). In all these fields, we find arguments that participatory processes involve interests and conflicts, and that citizen participation requires visible citizen influence on or even control with decisions and resources. Ownership, power and agency are key concepts here, articulated in various theoretical contexts as questions on whether participation is invited or self-created (Cornwall 2008); whether it is more (democratic) than access and interaction (Carpentier 2012); whether the participant only undertakes tasks or also helps set goals (Kelty et al. 2015); or on whether participation is simply about joining the game or also enables one to question the rules of the game (Sternfeld 2013, 4).

Whereas participation in the first understanding refers to a *vertical* redistribution between those with and without (or with less) power, it can also refer to being part of a *horizontal* whole. In this second understanding, participation is not about distributing power in an unequal and potentially conflictual relationship. On the contrary, it involves shared identities, belonging and community. This horizontal understanding, manifest in the strategic business plan of Aarhus 2017, is present, for example, in sociological studies of participation or membership of a group or a subculture, or in theories of the 'participatory culture' of digital media that involve various forms of engaging, connecting, sharing and co-producing (Jenkins 2006 & 2009, Gauntlett 2011). But it is also common in the cultural sector where participation in a given activity, art form or institution is frequently promoted and measured – motivated by (commercial) interests in increasing audience numbers and/or by a conception of cultural participation as a general human right and need. This idea – that 'Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts' (United Nations 1948, art. 27) – has been a premise for cultural policy in Europe and elsewhere. It has, however, not hindered participation in the state-supported cultural sector from remaining highly unequal. The acknowledgement of this inequality has

led to strategies of democratisation and diversification, expressed, for instance, in policies of 'cultural democracy' and in the *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*, where 'all persons have the right to participate in the cultural life of their choice and conduct their own cultural practices' (UNESCO 2001, art. 5). Here, a common, unified culture *of* the community is replaced with a recognition of the highly diverse forms of cultural practices and belongings *within* communities – and of the importance of peoples' own choices and ownership. This brings us back to the vertical understanding of participation and its recognition of conflicting interests and unequal ownership and power. As also argued by the researchers involved in *UEP*, horizontal cultural participation is theoretically and politically unequally framed (e.g. Taylor 2016). The acknowledgement of cultural diversity has not prevented the continuation of unequal status, power and resources, and whose culture to value, promote and explore is an object of often very hierarchical and non-participatory decision-making. Why is it, for instance, that museum visits are measured repeatedly but participation in cultural centres is not?

In the design and process of RECcORD, it was important for us not to exclude the horizontal or the vertical understanding of participation. While both of these basic understandings can sharpen our attention to and analysis of citizen participation, they also have blind spots. The vertical understanding, linked to a discourse of rights, often makes the social, emotional and affective experiences of participation disappear from focus. And the horizontal understanding, linked to a discourse of identity, often ignores the questions of ownership, agency and (in)equality that, even if they are inconspicuous, are important also for (research in) topics like shared identities, belonging and community. In RECcORD, our interest in studying an under-researched and not high-status cultural institution was linked to the above questions of unequal theoretical and political framing of cultural participation. But this did not entail that we only wanted to research – or prioritised – the more alternative, autonomous or political aspects of citizen participation in the centres. We also wanted to grasp the social, emotional and affective dimensions – and to explore the complex field and multiple meanings between the two basic understandings sketched here. The result was a typology with six forms of participation.

Forms of participation in the investigated cultural centres

In the design of RECcORD, we did not lament the lack of any precise, meaningful content of the word participation but understood the multiple understandings as an advantage. Contrary to theoretical concepts like 'active citizenship', the word participation is frequently used and easy to relate to. Focusing on the concept without defining it gave access to the experiences, understandings and meanings of people's own participatory practices (cf. Brodie et al. 2011, 12).[9]

Our research into the reccorders' collected dataset revealed several hundred cases of participatory practices. The forms of participation and the frequent intersections and crisscrossings between these vary significantly from most parameters for analysing participation (e.g. Cornwall 2008, White 2011, Carpentier 2011, Kelty et al. 2015). They

differ in levels, temporalities and intensities from micro to macro, from long to short-term, and from deep to wide participation. In one example, a few citizens are continuously deeply involved in co-creating and co-deciding the life of a centre; in another, a whole village is involved in a festival; in a third, various groups of citizens participate in specific art classes once every week; in a fourth, people primarily use the cafe or garden and meet other people there. Participation in the cultural centres are both occurring because of 'invited participation' (Cornwall 2008) in pre-established cultural activities, because of bottom-up initiatives where people define their own participatory activities and decide 'the rules of the game' (Sternfeld 2013), and because of hybrid forms with various influence on goals and tasks (Kelty et al. 2015) in between these two poles. The mixed origins of participation affect its mental and material ownership, and the forms affect the communities around them. By focusing particularly on how participation was defined and understood, we identified six different forms of participation in the investigated cultural centres. We define these forms as follows:

> 1) *Attention*: attending and paying attention to cultural activities together with others (e.g. going to a concert, an exhibition or an outdoor cinema).
> 2) *Education*: taking part in learning activities (e.g. a language class taught by poets, a dance class for children).
> 3) *Co-creation*: making specific objects, events or processes together (e.g. a festival involving a whole village, a performance made with people with Down's syndrome, or a wall of memories made with immigrants).
> 4) *Co-habitation*: sharing spaces together with other citizens or cultural agencies (e.g. using a ceramics workshop together with people with similar interests or sharing space with artists in residence).
> 5) *Publics*: engaging in collective verbal interaction (e.g. a public meeting to discuss issues relevant to the centre or neighbourhood, or a conversation with somebody one might not have met elsewhere).
> 6) *Co-decision*: engaging in equal and shared decision-making (e.g. co-deciding what to do in a specific centre space, or how to use other resources).

These forms complicate the two basic understandings above. A simple observation would be to link 1-4 to the horizontal understanding, and 5 and 6 to the vertical. But on closer inspection, they all raise questions of both ownership/interests and belonging/community. For instance, some of the centres have problems making the locals attend more experimental artistic events, while others solve this problem either by securing ownership (e.g. hosting activities initiated by the locals) or linking the artistic events to the interests or needs of the locals (for example in the case of UFA, in Berlin, a circus for the children, a garden, a parcel service and a bakery). Similarly, many cases of co-decision involve communities – groups of people who are already active and belong to the centre – but have challenges in giving voice to more or less lonely/vulnerable individuals.

Among the six forms, 1-4 are the most salient. In almost all the investigated centres, we found numerous examples of attention, informal education, co-creation and co-habitation. Compared to most theories of participation, education and co-habitation (2 and 4) indicate an unusually broad understanding of the concept (although informal education plays a role, e.g. in Participatory Action Research in development studies). In our preliminary typology, they were not included – because we researchers, in spite of our intention to adopt an inductive approach, had not asked questions that made them visible. But in the dataset from the fieldwork, education and co-habitation are described as participation by the reccorders as well as by the people they interviewed, talked to and observed. Frequently, the two forms are linked to other forms of participation. Informal education often includes processes of co-creation and a sense of the collective. In the cultural centre Cekate in Croatia, a female user (interviewed by reccorder Stephanie Bichweiler from Germany) speaks about her son's theatre class and says that he 'learned some whole new stuff there – they learned to collaborate, to talk to each other, to listen, to accept the other kids' ideas.'

Co-habitation also means sharing a multi-functional space that enables one to join an event, attend a workshop, or interact with others in the café. The mother above describes the centre in general as 'a combination of art, theatre, fun and a place for neighbours to get together, enjoy their free time and to learn new stuff and to socialize'; and reccorder Hannah Vallis from England writes in her auto-ethnography how she (and others) enjoy the bar/lounge area in Elzenhof in Brussels:

> A young Muslim mother takes the table next to me to have a coffee and play with her baby who she sits on the table. In the armchair, someone is sat reading a graphic novel. There is also someone else working on a laptop.
>
> All of sudden, the area is filled with children taking over (…) with their vibrancy. It seems they are taking part in a film workshop. They start acting out scenes and filming them, using the table and bar as key locations and props.
>
> This place is sometimes quiet, sometimes busy, always changing.
>
> Mostly it is a place to just be. For anyone to do anything.

Across the centres, education and co-habitation are identified as participatory practices and combined with other forms of participation. This is, we claim, a specific trait of participation in cultural centres: it often combines several of the participatory forms. This is also the case for attention and co-creation, which are both very prominent in the dataset. These are often combined in ways that blur the distinction between producer and audience/consumer. An example is the AliBaba Festival in the small Spanish villages La Cueva and Monteagudo, organized by the cultural centre La Postizia in Murcia. Here, professional artistic

photographers were hosted in private homes in the village, and at the festival both the professional photographers and the local inhabitants exhibited photographs of life in the village and participated in guided tours and workshops. This festival – apart from being really fun and 'for everyone: grandfathers, old, young, teenagers' (according to a participant interviewed by Ruth van Tendeloo, Belgium) – used two tools to bridge professionals and amateurs: it let the locals host the artists instead of allowing them to be invited visitors (of exhibitions and workshops) only (cf. Cornwall 2008), and it used photography, a practice we all engage in and share on social media platforms, to bridge vernacular everyday creativity and photography as an art form (cf. Crossick and Kaszynska 35).

Another example is the project 'Tišnov in movement' in Městské cultural centre in Tišnov, Czech Republic. The director of the cultural centre says in an interview that she wanted to get closer to the high school community, to find out what they wanted. She went to a couple of high school classrooms and 'asked them what they want and if they would like to participate somehow in creating a programme for them'. She engaged some girls in making a festival together with her and was surprised about their participation and curiosity: 'So they had the main role of creating the programme, they asked 100 people in the school what they wanted. So it was based on their ideas of what they wanted. It worked' (interview by Irene Pizella, Italy).

In both of these festivals, the involved citizens – the village inhabitants and the high school students – were both producers and consumers, both hosts and visitors, had ownership and ventured into new cultural experiences. And this is often the case when the cultural centres host bottom up initiatives or co-produce with the citizens. In general, co-creation and co-habitation (form 4 and 5) involve publics and co-decision (form 5 and 6) – and thereby also the questions of voice, agency and power that are central in the vertical understanding of participation. Forms 5 and 6 are present in the material but in pure form they are less salient than we expected – and much less salient than in the vertical understandings of participation.

In the investigated cultural centres, publics and co-decision are manifest in deliberative publics, e.g. in meetings about the creation of Zephiro, a new cultural centre in Castelfranco in Italy. However, in Castelfranco, and also in general *within* the centres, publics and decision-making are mostly described with a focus on creating new ideas and finding out what people want to and can do, rather than on conflicts or issues of distribution of power. When participation is described vertically, as challenging power, it is almost always directed towards the *outside*, with disagreements between the centres and the ones in power: the commercial interests, the municipality cutting down funding and ignoring culture, the national government reducing arts education, the democratic deficit in society or similar. Internally, the horizontal understanding of participation dominates. Not only the staff members but also many of the users articulate a strong sense of identity, belonging and community – and very few mention or observe unequal decision-making. Asked about their possibilities to influence or change the centre, the interviewees may mention their own lack of time or resources, but not their lack of power. Typical answers include, 'I think I

have the door open, and it is up to me to go in with a proposal', 'I think I already do it. My little part, I think. I give my opinion, I always say what I think during our meetings', or 'I believe that everyone involved in the projects at TUFA has influence' (user of Nau Côclea in Spain, volunteer in the kitchen in Laboratorio Culturale I'M in Italy, and user of Tuchfabrik in Germany; interviewed, respectively, by Vassilka Shishkova from Bulgaria, Eva Gartnerova from Czech Republic, and Nika Ajdukovic from Croatia). One may of course question this critically. However, based on our material, there is no doubt that the professionals in the centres in general try to make them democratic and open to bottom-up initiatives – and that many users and volunteers experience or feel this.

Defining participation in cultural centres

RECcORD's inductive methodology entails that we do not evaluate some of the six forms of participation as being better or truer participatory practices than others. We acknowledge that they are all understood and practiced in a way that requires a broad definition of participation. They are also practiced in a way that involves both the specific conditions and resources of the cultural centre and the engagement and motivations of the citizens. In this aspect, our research supports the results of *Pathways*, where Ellie Brodie et al. explored what created and sustained active citizenship. They suggest that all forms of participation, despite their immense diversities, have four common features. Participation is 1) *voluntary*: it can be encouraged and supported, but always involves a free choice; 2) *about action*: motivations differ and engagement may be limited, but all participation requires some kind of action; 3) *collective or connected*: it has a sense of common purpose and a collective impact or ambition; and finally 4) *purposeful*: 'all participants are concerned about doing something that is worthwhile in their own terms and every participatory act has, and is intended to have, consequences' (Brodie et al. 2011, 6).

These characteristics, identified in *Pathways*, are crucial also in the cultural centres. Two points are worth noticing. Firstly, the above general features do not mean that questions of power and ownership, or distinctions between invited or self-created participation, are not important. However, they indicate why participatory initiatives that do not acknowledge the intentions, motivations and actions of the citizens, do not thrive. Participation depends on voluntary engagement and action and has to make sense both for the participants involved and for some kind of common good – and if participatory initiatives in cultural centres and elsewhere do not live up to this, they are seriously challenged. In our material, this happens, for instance, with some arts projects that are not seen as relevant, fun or meaningful for the local citizens and communities.

Secondly, the emphasis by Brodie et al. on participation's sense of common purpose and collective impact strongly resembles what we have found in the cultural centres. In our dataset, there is a clear sense of 'orientation' – an implicit or explicit sense of directedness towards communities, towards change, towards 'something larger'. This orientation is sometimes explicitly political but more often not so, although it is frequently political in the broad sense of taking common social practices out of their taken-for-grantedness. Based on

our analysis, we suggest the following definition: in the investigated cultural centres *participation is understood and practiced as voluntary actions where centres and citizens relate in order to create specific or imagined communities and to facilitate (the potential of) change or 'something larger' through cultural activities.*

In this understanding, participation is 'more' than just joining cultural or social activities at the cultural centre. In our material, the observed activities and the way people (professionals, volunteers, artists and citizens) talk about them add an important dimension to the cultural experiences and social encounters at the cultural centres. Activities at cultural centres are not isolated, self-contained events that exist for their own sake. Instead, they are, implicitly or explicitly, practiced and understood as elements that create or facilitate various forms of progressive transformation – in and among individual citizens and local communities and sometimes also in societies at large. We will exemplify this below where we present the effects of participation that were identified in the dataset.

Potential effects of participation

We identify various positive effects of participation in cultural centres. Two points are worth mentioning. Firstly, we do not refer by 'effects' to a unilateral causality where encoded artworks or designed processes determine the impact on passive recipients. As we will explain more fully below, we stress the *potentiality* and use the word as a multidimensional umbrella-term that may include, for example, the participants' individual or social knowledge and meaning-making, their emotional or bodily responses, and their pragmatic use of the participatory forms, just as it may cover short or long-term changes in the neighbourhood and beyond (e.g. transformations in cultural or symbolic discourses, in habits, in cultural policy).

Secondly, it is of course worth mentioning that participation may also have less positive effects. It may cause conflicts when participants have different goals, expectations or means. It may be frustrating, time-consuming or disappointing when priorities, tastes, energies or resources are diverse. Or participation may just simply be exhausting because the ambitions are often higher than the resources at hand. The dark side of the cultural centres' volunteers, amateurs, civic engagement and bottom up-initiatives is that the centres depend on a lot of unpaid work, and that sometimes participation seems more like a demand than a possibility (Cooke and Kothari 2001, Miessen 2010).

These dark sides of participation are present in our material but they are overwhelmingly overshadowed by nine types of positive effects:

1) Aesthetic intensity: sensory stimulation of the body, feeling affected, experiencing art as a promise of a better world
2) Feeling of togetherness: emotional and cognitive sense of bond to various others
3) Social inclusion: moving persons/groups from a marginalized to an included position

4) Wellbeing: physical/mental positivity/vitality (e.g. having fun or feeling that you do something for others)

5) Learning: achieving certain skills or competences (e.g. learning to perform or to collaborate with others)

6) Empowerment: feeling of (shared) agency regarding certain self-defined goals

7) Cultural/political reflection: stimulating critical analysis of society and thinking about or experimenting with possible alternatives (e.g. sharing economies)

8) Local development: changing the centre and/or surrounding environment (neighbourhood, city, region) for the better

9) Sustainability: stimulating positive green/environmental changes (e.g. through repair cafes or recycling initiatives).

These nine positive effects of participation happen at different levels and with various strengths. Some of them (especially 1, 2 and 6) involve feelings, some (like 1, 4, 5 and 7) can be understood as bodily or intellectual responses, and others (especially 3, 8 and 9) have a broader social or political influence. All the effects are prominent in the data. 1-6 are the most salient but 7-9 also occur frequently. Some effects, like for instance well-being, learning or empowerment, may at first sight be personal experiences, but they are often also shared in cultural centres through communities, publics and co-habitation. This is also what distinguishes them from an individual aesthetic experience, like reading a novel at home, which may also have the effects of e.g. aesthetic intensity, wellbeing and cultural/political reflection. In the cultural centres, these are often linked to other forms and effects, including more social ones. This is, for instance, the case for a female user of La Postiza in Spain (interviewed by Ruth van Tendeloo, Belgium). She says:

> Every time I go there I have fun. In our city, it's the only place that does this kind of things … to mix fun with culture and surrounded by how La Postiza is. Because it is a special place (…). It is the only place where we can go to participate or enjoy different things in Murcia. We have some galleries, some concerts, some places to go, but La Postiza has a bit of everything and mixes them really well and (…) it is not expensive, good quality, and so interesting. (…) You feel like you are at home but … you know, where somebody was preparing a really nice day to do a lot of things, that's why you want to go with your family, your kids, your grandpa if you want.

Here, the fun and wellbeing is indistinguishable from the aesthetic intensity and the feeling of togetherness, which contributes to making her feel simultaneously at home and part of something special. Other effects, like social inclusion, cultural/political reflection,

sustainability or local development are very clearly linked to social change – strived for through a mix of pragmatic problem-solving, prefigurative modelling and cultural activities.

Participation can make people feel, do, experience or change. What happens is due not only to the cultural centres' different practices but also to the fact that people participate according to various conditions and for various reasons. The connection between the six forms and the nine effects of participation is not a clear and single-valued causality linking one form to one effect. The effects are not prompted automatically. On the contrary, one form can and will often have multiple – or sometimes even lacking – effects. One case of co-creation can have the effect of, for instance, social inclusion, well-being or empowerment for one participant and none or completely different effects for another.

Acknowledging that one of the effects is empowerment and defining this as a feeling of (shared) agency regarding certain self-defined goals also entails that these goals may be different from the ones imagined by the professionals of the cultural centre. With the words of the director of Centro Cultural Puertas de Castilla in Spain:

> It's people who are there (…) when you are doing this kind of process of participation you must be really open to fail because in the end you are in a big laboratory (...). I really love when something fails because then the participation is fine (interview by Sabine Engelhart, Germany).

The point in this paradoxical statement is that the director has to give up his own control and criteria of success if he takes citizen participation (in the vertical and democratic understanding) seriously. The success criteria for a participatory project often differ depending on whether it is seen from above, from the perspective of the producer, or from below, from the participant's viewpoint (cf. White 2011). Thus, a failure for the director does not hinder – or may even paradoxically indicate – that everything is fine for the ordinary participants. Forms of participation can be designed but not determined. Often, they are transformed by the participants who use, perform and ascribe meaning to them. Effects can be facilitated but are always co-created and dependant on the specific motivations, skills and situations of the participants. Some may want to improve their own lives by learning or experiencing something new or doing something fun, while others may want to meet other people, join a community, do something together and feel less alone. Some may want to transform society or the local environment – by experimenting with alternative forms of living, by making life more creative or more sustainable. And some may want a bit of everything. Participation in cultural centres may have all of these effects but can hardly guarantee any of them. And this, as reccorder Sabine Engelhart also notices in her comments to the interview, may raise problems for the participatory intentions. Based on her experiences from Germany, laboratories and failures are very often not possible: 'we have to get funding for every project/workshop we do and the guidelines from the foundations/municipality are very tight. We have to state exactly which steps will be made, give information about the target, target group and the material we are going to use'. These

requirements, present also outside Germany, may directly work against participatory laboratories and the empowerment – the feeling of (shared) agency regarding certain self-defined goals – that is an inherent part of citizen participation, at least in its vertical understanding.

'Something larger'

As argued above, participation needs to fulfil the meaning that people ascribe to it. Our data shows that a specific quality of cultural centres is that they actually are able to involve people who have different motivations for doing so. Cultural centres organise cultural activities that people can be involved in for various personal, social or political reasons. As multi-purpose spaces and institutions, they are open to a variety of activities and forms of participation – and thereby also to a range of different inputs and outputs. A female user of Cekate in Croatia sees a 'big potential for creative people to do what they want. They opened their doors to us, and now it's our turn to get from that as much as we can. It's ok, we have freedom to do as much or as little as we want: it depends on us' (interview by Stephanie Bichweiler, Germany).

Openness is repeatedly highlighted in the data as an important quality of cultural centres, and this quality is linked to all the six forms of participation: attention, education, co-creation, co-habitation, publics and co-decision. Compared to other types of cultural institutions, cultural centres seem more open to various forms of engagement both *in* and *between* the various co-present forms.

Brodie et al. emphasise how citizen participation (and active citizenship) very basically depend on such spaces for co-habitation:

> The importance of physical spaces where diverse groups can meet, and bonds and networks are formed and maintained, was found throughout the research: without access to a hall or a room many collective activities would simply not happen. These spaces that provide access to a range of activities and people allow pathways and connections to be established that support sustained participation (Brodie et al. 2011, 72).

Brodie et al. especially highlight how 'sites that served as multi-purpose hubs (…) came across as being particularly valuable resources for participants' (ibid., 46), not least because they could provide spaces for and foster interaction between different groups, organisations and activities. How citizens approach these multi-purpose hubs differs significantly in our material. Two examples can illustrate the spectrum: the first is an interview (by Hannah Vallis from England) with Fatima, a frequent user of Elzenhof, a cultural centre in a poor neighbourhood with many nationalities in Brussels. Fatima says:

> I love the atmosphere here in this centre because there is coffee, there are lots of activities for mothers, for the family, for the children and also the cultural

music: Arabic music, African music (…). On a Thursday, they are here for a concert. For my family it is very important, I read on the internet all the activities for the week. During the holidays when it is not open, it is very difficult for me. There is a big and very nice garden. For my children, it is perfect. In the city of Brussels this is very good (...) I think this is very important for the neighbourhood. You see your neighbours but you don't know them.

The second example is an account of a conversation, made by reccorder Linda Franklin from England in the huge UFA Fabrik, Berlin. Linda had talked to a woman named Sonya who for a long time sat at the table next to her reading a book:

> Sonya said that she lived nearby and when she had a day off work she came down here to read, as it got her out of her flat. She told me that she worked in a psychiatric hospital and she felt UFA offered her a place for peace and quiet. Sonya had not been to any of the cultural events or used any of the services offered at UFA, but she was aware of what goes on here, and said that one day she might come.

The two women illustrate the radically different ways of using a centre. For Fatima, there is a whole range of positive effects of her and her family's use of Elzenhof. Apart from the general importance emphasised in the quote, the interview specifies how she, contrary to the isolation outside the centre, has conversations with people in the garden, how she has got acquainted with an American and a Canadian woman, and how her son through an expressive dance class became more self-confident and able to talk and dance with others.

While Fatima keeps track of all the activities at the centre, make contacts and mentions (at least) effects 1-6, Sonya only uses the café. But importantly, she stresses the possibilities and feeling of potentiality when she says that one day she may come to some of the cultural activities. She gets out of her flat and very literally experiences the potential of change and the 'something larger' of our definition of participation in cultural centres.

In an interview, one of the founders of UFA generalises Sonya's position, saying that the majority of users express their deep appreciation of the many possibilities at UFA, even though many of them only use the shop, the café or similar. They primarily enjoy the *potentiality* of the participatory activities and the imagined communities enhanced by the physical space of the cultural centres. This is, we argue, a very important aspect of the cultural centres. By providing access to physical spaces and to a range of activities, people and groups, cultural centres enable pathways and connections both for those who engage actively and for those who use them as a space for potential activities and communities: a space where one can place oneself in new socio-cultural circumstances and imagine other possible futures.

Conclusions

In this article, we have presented some of the results of the RECcORD project. We have defined participation in cultural centres, developed a typology of the forms and potential effects of this participation, and discussed the relationship between the forms and effects. We have argued that the openness and variety of the forms of participation mean that cultural centres have the potential of meeting very diverse motivations and interests, of creating specific or imagined communities and of facilitating change or 'something larger' for the participants and communities involved.

Participation is crucial for cultural centres, and the investigated centres understand themselves as important arenas for citizen participation. However, participation is understood and practiced more inclusively and broadly than what we see in most theories of participation. Likewise, culture is understood and practiced more inclusively than we see in most theories, evaluations or measurements of cultural participation. RECcORD shares an interest in this inclusiveness with other current projects. But while these aforementioned projects often place the individual at the centre of the study, we have also focused on how a specific cultural institution, the cultural centre, enables various forms and effects of participation. In this way, we have dealt with participation as a situated practice and specifically argued for the importance of the openness and potentiality of the multi-purpose cultural centres.

Returning now to the basic distinction between a power-oriented vertical and a community-oriented horizontal understanding of participation, the latter has been dominant in our material. In the numerous cases described in our dataset, only a minority explicitly concerns power and inequality. One may ask if a reason for this could be our inductive approach: if the horizontal understanding of participation is dominant in the dataset because it is closer to everyday experience and therefore what most people refer to when they are asked about participation. Another reason may be the voluntary aspect of participation: citizens in cultural centres mainly participate in activities or communities where they feel they belong. They do not necessarily want to set different goals or to question the rules of the game but may instead have chosen an activity and group in which they feel at ease with their specific roles and tasks and with their fellow participants. Like all participants, they want to gain something from their participation, but they may simply aim for sociability, fun and joy rather than power and control. And if we as researchers require them to have other aims (like empowerment), we would paradoxically disempower them.

This does not entail that power is unimportant in cultural centres. As we have argued, empowerment of participants easily entails a disempowerment of the organisers or project-owners – in 'socially robust' participatory research as well as in other projects. They (or we) must be willing to (and institutionally able to) give up control, and if this is recognised in the cultural centres' focus on diversity, involvement of citizens, openness to bottom-up initiatives, and flexible spaces, it is very often not recognised by funding bodies who want a more predictable return on investment. But it is an important aspect of cultural centres that they not only involve local citizens in horizontal communities around cultural

activities but also enable them to influence centre activities and thereby to assume some kind of ownership and empowerment regarding the local life of the community.

Further, if the sharing of power is thematised in our material, it is very often through an opposition of, on one side, the cultural centres and their artistic, sustainable, multicultural and socially inclusive priorities, and, on the other, the outside world dominated by other agendas. In this way, the centres enable experiments with and imaginations and articulations of the kind of society and future the citizen participants want to live in.

Finally, we have argued that unequal power and status frame the socio-cultural forms of participation practiced in cultural centres and in other realms of local everyday life – compared to a narrower set of cultural activities, practices and institutions. What we have tried to do in RECcORD – and in this article – is to investigate these socio-cultural forms without evaluating some as more important than others. This also means that we cannot conclude that vertical participation is more genuine than the horizontal one – or for that matter that the identification of a democratic deficit in the early Aarhus European Capital of Culture 2017 bid indicated an ambition of real participation while the collective and co-operative orientation of the later strategic business plan did not. Based on our investigation of cultural centres, we find it necessary to explore power as well as communities, agency as well as wellbeing, when aiming at understanding participation – or at developing new participatory practices in cultural centres, institutions or cultural mega events like the European Capitals of Culture.

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Notes:

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[1] RECcORD was funded by Aarhus European Capital of Culture 2017, European Network of Cultural Centres (Creative Europe), the Danish Association of Cultural Centres (KHiD), Aarhus University, and The Cultural Production Centre Godsbanen, Aarhus. It was developed mainly by the researchers from AU and representatives from KHiD.

[2] In two forthcoming articles, we cover the project's experimental participatory methodology more in depth and develop a typology of European cultural centres.

[3] For more details about the research design and methodology, see Eriksson, Reestorff and Stage, 2017, and Stage, Eriksson and Reestorff (forthcoming).

[4] Since we wanted cross-European exchanges, the call asked for reccorders and hosts with good skills in English. This was necessary in order not to have to involve translators in all the fieldwork (e.g. interviews). However, many of the reccorders involved local staff members in translations and explanations of e.g. documents and observations. Some of the data were influenced by limited language skills (of hosts and/or reccorders), but in general the reccorders found ways of providing nuanced and rich impressions of the various cultural centres and their participatory practices.

[5] The participating reccorders and host centres were: *Reccorders*: Mette Dalby, Nicolai Kultur, Kolding, Denmark; Thomas Kruse, Beboernes hus – Sølystgade, Aarhus, Denmark; Eva Gartnerova, Prostejov, Czech Republic; Michel Gelinne, Cultural center la Venerie, Brussels, Belgium; Irene Pezella, Casa Delle Culture, Ancona, Italy; Linda Franklin, Square Chapel Centre for the Arts, Halifax, England; Martin Zaharkin Pedersen, Karens Minde Kulturhus, København, Denmark; Ruth Van Tendeloo, Cultuurcentrum Zwaneberg, Heist-op-den-Berg, Belgium; Matina Solomakou, Cultural Centre Vokaria Chios, Greece; Hannah Vallis, Tate, London / East Street Arts, Leeds; England; Vassilka Shishkova, Global Libraries – Bulgaria; Sofia, Bulgaria; Nuria Rivas Zarazaga, Civic Center Delicias. Zaragoza, Spain; Trine Sørensen, Godsbanen, Aarhus, Denmark; Nika Ajduković, Youth center Ribnjak, Zagreb, Croatia; Stephanie Bichweiler, ROXY, Ulm, Germany; Chiara Organtini, CAOS, Terni, Italy; Sigfried Dittler, Waschhaus, Potsdam, Germany; Charlotte Arens, zeitraumexit, Mannheim, Germany; Anna Kravets, Visual Culture Research Center, Kiev, Ukraine; Sabine Engelhart, Kulturhaus Dehnhaide e.V./ Kulturpunkt im Basch, Hamburg, Gemany. *Host centres*: Farm Cultural Park, Favara, Italy; Culture palace ZIEMELBLAZMA, Riga, Latvia; Laboratorio Culturale I'M, Abano Terme, Italy; Cultural Centre Vokaria, Chios, Greece; Mestske kulturni stredisko Tisnov, Tišnov, Czech Republic; Die UFA Fabrik, Berlin, Germany; Kulturfabrik, Esch-sur-Alzette. Luxembourg; Le Postiza, Murcia, Spain; Vollsmose Kulturhus, Odense, Denmark; Elzenhof, Brussels, Belgium; Nau Côclea, Girona, Spain; Nicolai Cultural Centre, Kolding, Denmark; Pracownia Duzy Pokój, Warzaw, Poland; Tuchfabrik Trier, Trier, Germany; Centar za culture Trešnjevka, Zagreb, Croatia; HausDrei e.V, Hamburg, Germany; Zephiro, Castelfranco Veneto, Italy; La Harinera, Ciudad Real, Spain; Plum Yard, Malovice, Czech Republic; Centro Puertas de Castilla, Murcia, Spain. The smaller imbalances between regions/countries reflect the number of applicants (e.g. many from Germany, non from France, and few from Eastern European). The prominence of Danish hosts and reccorders was due to RECcORD's link to and support from the European Capital of Culture in Aarhus.

[6] We here distinguished between cultural attention, co-decision, material co-creation, creating publics, empowerment and social inclusion.

[7] The data included e.g. 68 transcribed interviews, 25 structured observations, 26 field notes and 15 other observations, 105 Facebook-posts with visual and written auto-ethnographies, 392 pages of documents, 26 participatory maps, and more than 1000 photos and 40 videos.

[8] See also the evaluation in Eriksson, Reestorff and Stage 2017, pp. 31-36.

[9] A similar but in some ways more radical approach is taken by Andrew Miles in the UEP project where he explores individual 'participation narratives'. In order not to 'impose or suggest a particular understanding of what it is or means to participate "culturally"' (Miles 2016, 184) he asks his interviewees to talk about how they spend their time over the past week and weekend, how they organise their daily lives, what interests are most important to them and so on. In RECcORD we chose another approach, because we wanted to raise participation as an explicit issue of collective concern and discussion and to connect this issue to everyday experiences and further development in the centres (cf. Stage, Eriksson and Reestorff forthcoming).