CO-CREATION AS A MEANS OF CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN LOCAL CULTURAL POLICY MAKING

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Abstract

We have experienced a shift in local cultural policy making towards a more participative governance during the last decades in a situation when understanding of the meaning of culture in cultural policy has enlarged and cultural policy makers are concerned with more active actors in the field, including cultural prosumers. In the meantime, we can observe in our contemporary cities new creative forms of civic activism trying to build sustainable and livable places with creative professionals engaging as facilitators of these creative change processes in local communities.

Co-creation approach is a recent trend in public governance to ensure the engagement of local citizens as equal partners in developing, implementing and evaluating creative solutions for local problems related to raising the quality of life. The application of co-creation approach in local cultural policy making is still comparatively new and experimental, but one can find multiple good practice case studies in Europe, although the understanding of this new concept varies in different contexts.

The goal of this article is to analyse the available literature in order to clarify the use of co-creation concept in the field of culture in different contexts along with the similar concepts of co-production and co-design, to identify the purpose and possible gains of applying a co-creation approach in local cultural policy making.

Keywords: *co-creation, local cultural policy, participative cultural policy, citizen engagement.*

Introduction: From participation to co-creation

In recent decades local cultural policy making in urban and also rural areas has become more complex. The understanding of the meaning of culture in local cultural policy has enlarged and cultural policy makers are concerned with more active actors in the field besides traditional cultural institutions. As a result during the last decades we have experienced a shift in local cultural policy making towards a

more participative governance [Bonet 2018], which forces us to look for better ways of engagement of all the more or less active stakeholders on the local level – cultural creators, audiences and communities.

We can mention at least four main factors which have contributed to this recent development of steering cultural policy to a participative design approach and creating a need for engagement of more stakeholders.

Firstly, local policy makers have not only been concerned with safeguarding traditional cultural heritage and making an effort to ensure professional art access to local inhabitants, but also with the potential benefits from growing a creative economy and cultural tourism sectors, placing enterprises of creative industries in the scene of cultural policy next to traditional cultural institutions [Warren, Jones 2015].

Secondly, fast growing technologies have eased access to creative expressions, and we can observe a growing sector of prosumers – amalgamated producers and consumers [Toffler 1980, Pistone 2014]. The fast flows of accessible online cultural content create new challenges for traditional cultural and art institutions with a need to form a new dialogue with their audiences, placing the audience in the centre of the organization [Bollo, Da Milano, Gariboldi, Torch 2017] and engaging the audiences more and more in creation of the creative content, thus strengthening relations with cultural visitors and users in order to compete for the attention in the global information flow. That means that there is already a certain experience in the cultural sector on how to engage the public in the creation of cultural content using new engagement methods such as design thinking approach, co-designing cultural events and services with their end-users. This experience could be transferred also to a wider field of local cultural policy making, taking into consideration the needs and wishes of citizens, who are becoming more involved in the creation of cultural values themselves.

Thirdly, we can observe new creative forms of civic activism that are trying to build sustainable and livable places with artists in new roles of artivists (activists pushing political agendas by the means of art) [Nossel 2016] or facilitators of creative change processes in local communities. We see different bottom-up community arts, participative arts, creative placemaking initiatives to cherish and to advance the local identity of the place in contrast to the growing mobility and cosmopolitanism thus strengthening the social capital of local communities.

All these factors combined – dilemmas of local cultural policy makers with expanding cultural policy field and more stakeholders involved (active audiences and inhabitants as cultural content creators, growing field of creative enterprises, creative bottom-up civic initiatives) have contributed to the need for a participative turn in local cultural policy making.

That would mean that public decision makers and municipal planners would need new innovative methods and means to work with a growing sector effectively. Traditional models via e. g. consultative cultural councils or voluntary participation in several specific community events would not be enough. There is a need for new forms of engagement with equal roles between municipal policy makers and civil sectors already in the early stages of cultural policy making – during agenda setting and policy formulation (not only during policy realization), in order to consider all the needs and to use the diverse knowledge of actors involved.

Co-creation approach could be one of solutions to ensure the engagement of local citizens as equal partners in developing, implementing and evaluating creative solutions for local problems, to raise the quality of life. According to Brandsen co-creation is different from classical citizen participation in policy making, as it focuses on the output-side of the policy cycle: the provision of public services, with varying degrees of tangibility. The difference in government-civil society partnerships is that co-creation mainly focuses on the contribution of individual citizens rather than organizations [Brandsen 2018].

The application of co-creation approach in local cultural policy making is still comparatively new and experimental, but one can find multiple good practice case studies in Europe, although the understanding of this new concept varies in different contexts. The goal of this article is to analyse the available literature in order to clarify the use of the co-creation concept in the field of culture in different contexts along with the similar concepts of co-design and co-production, and to identify the purpose and possible gains of applying a co-creation approach to local cultural policy making.

Co-creating cultural values with local communities
Co-creation of common value

Co-creation as an approach comes from the business field, where enterprises have started to form bilateral relations with customers asking them to participate in product and service creation, thus adjusting produced products to the needs of consumers [Bluestone, Carvalho 2012]. Similarly, co-creation in the public sector realm has been conceived as creating new solutions with people, not for them. According to Lund in public settings, co-creation can be seen as a strategy for addressing complex societal problems in the context of strained public budgets, i. e. as a means to solve prevailing problems in new and more effective ways by harnessing the resources of civil society [Lund 2018].

The important aspect is **value creation**. In business world clients and suppliers co-create value of the products and services, suppliers apply their knowledge and skills in the production and branding of the product and the clients apply their knowledge and capacities in their daily utilisation [Vargo et al. 2008]. A product

or service thereby incorporates value of the end-beneficiary. According to Alves, in public field public organisations, through the co-creation of value, may respond to serious problems that societies face as this approach enables the generation of truly innovative solutions capable of responding and dealing with diverse social issues [Alves 2013].

Creation of common cultural values can help strengthening the local community, engaging different groups of the local society in a joint effort to reach a common goal connected with the improvement of a local neighbourhood [Crossick, Kaszynska 2016]. According to Crossick and Kazynska, only in recent decades have identity and belonging, memory and symbol, spiritual meanings and cultural practices come to be seen as a significant part of what is seen as common heritage. Participation of citizens in co-creation of built environment, public art and local traditions would be a necessary precondition to be able to deliver sustainable results that are beneficial for the local community.

Another important aspect of co-creation is **an equal partnership** – citizens need to have a decision-making power. The co-creation process should be collaborative, hierarchy flattening and transparent [Bluestone et al. 2012]. According to Bluestone et al., ideally the co-creation process is neither top-down nor bottom-up, all stakeholders learn and gain value from co-creative processes and outcomes, sharing common knowledge.

Co-creation, co-production and co-design

Alternative concepts of co-creation used in academic literature are *co-production* and *co-design*, both with similar meanings to co-creation.

According to Palumbo and Trocciola, the term "co-production" is used in relation to services (e. g. cultural services) implying a revisited relationship between the providers and the users, both parts being engaged in the generation of value, thus paving the way for enhanced outcomes and increased effectiveness. In this regard the idea behind co-production is rather similar to co-creation, emphasizing the value of creation and the importance of reciprocity and shared commitment between users and providers [Palumbo, Trocciola 2015]. The range of users' engagement varies from an individual co-production (a collaborative task for a single provider and a single user), group co-production (an involvement of homogeneous groups of users) and collective co-production (enhancing the traditional relationship between providers and target population and considering the needs of the local community) [Brudney, England 1983]. This collective co-production with inhabitants as end-users could be used in the development of local cultural policy aimed at public innovation and answering different societal needs.

Compared to co-creation the notion of co-production puts a slightly bigger emphasis on providers of services as the most active and decisive part of a collaboration

(citizens as co-implementers of public services), while in case of co-creation both parts have equal, active roles.

Likewise, *co-design* is considered as a new method for finding solutions to complex problems engaging citizens in a creative way [Blomkamp 2018]. If we understand design as a task in which people seek to understand, interpret and address challenges in present reality by conceptually developing and creating things and processes that could create better future reality, then the prefix '*co*' signals the collaborative, cooperative and collective nature of this engagement [Zamenopoulos, Alexiou 2018].

According to Blomkamp an appropriate definition of co-design as a methodology for policy making would recognize it as a design-led process, involving creative and participatory principles and tools to engage different kinds of people and knowledge in public problem solving [Blomkamp 2018]. Design thinking which forms the ground for this approach is the application of abductive reasoning to reframe an unstable problem situation and create a new object, service, or system [Dorst 2010], following certain stages of the design-thinking process – identifying local issues, generating ideas, testing ideas, refining ideas and implementing ideas [Garry, Goodwin 2015].

It would be possible to co-design both certain cultural products and services, and more complex systems and policies enhancing creation and dissemination of cultural expressions in local communities. Compared to the co-creation approach co-designing focuses on the formulation of a certain problem or issue in the local context trying to find the best solution with diverse knowledge, undertaking testing before the implementation of the solution. Meanwhile, in both cases public bodies and decision-makers are working together with local communities creating new ideas, only in case of co-designing more emphasis is put on following a definite process with concrete steps to be implemented.

In practice all these terms could be used as synonyms characterizing similar processes undertaken by municipal cultural planners or cultural organizations trying to involve the stakeholders, that is, audiences and communities, in improvement of the existing cultural services or enhancing innovations in the current cultural ecosystems.

Contextual levels and aspects of co-creation in culture

If we look closer to the use of the co-creation approach in the field of culture, it is possible to distinguish **three different levels** depending on the aims and context of the processes.

The first level is connected with the co-creation of a certain cultural product (e. g. exhibition, event or festival). It could be initiated by a cultural institution or local cultural association creating a cultural product according to the needs and expectations of prospective audiences. This is the most common co-creation use

and it is comparatively simple, directed to the development of ideas for creation of a concrete product or service similarly as the co-creation is used in the business field to provide products and services more suited to customers' needs, in cultural field that would mean – more suited to the needs of target audiences.

Table 1. The range of contextual levels and aspects of co-creation in culture, developed by Asare, I., 2020

The scope of the process	Context	Goals of co-creation	Participants	Possible motivation of the initiator
1. Product / service level	Artistic programme of a cultural institution or sociocultural programme of local cultural NGO.	Creation of a new cultural product(s) (e. g. exhibition, event, festival).	Cultural managers of the cultural institution or members of a local cultural association / NGO. Specific audience and/or community groups.	The wish of a cultural institution to adjust its product(s) to the needs of its prospective audience. Creative ideas of local communities' actors to be developed and realized in cooperation.
2. Strategy level	Future strategy of a cultural institution or association.	Creation of the strategy/ working programme of a cultural institution or association.	Management of a cultural institution or association; founders of the organization. Target audience groups.	The necessity to adjust the future cultural programme of concrete organization to the needs of target audiences.
3. Policy level	Cultural policy of a certain area.	Designing local cultural policy – defining goals and tasks to be implemented.	Municipal cultural planners. Different stakeholders from a cultural sector (public, private and nongovernmental organizations, artists, creative entrepreneurs). Diverse community groups.	The necessity to consider the cultural needs of diverse groups in local community and to use the local knowledge for creating creative solutions for local challenges in the field of culture.

The second level is connected with the co-creation of a strategy or a working programme of a cultural institution or association to adjust it to the needs of its audience. This is a more complex process and requires deeper engagement of participants, or different participants could take part at different stages of the co-creation process, which should be carefully planned to guide participants towards solutions of defined

challenges. This is a possible way of work how to put the audience in the centre of a cultural organization and to plan the artistic programme according to these needs, finding interactive ways of cooperation with identified target audiences.

The most comprehensive and complex is the third level connected with the design of local cultural policy, defining the goals and activities of future cultural development considering the needs of different groups of the local community while using knowledge resources of diverse participants. If we look to culture under "commons" perspective seeing cultural commons as different forms of cultural expressions produced by various communities [Bertacchini et al. 2012], there is a logical argument that the best governance of these various cultural resources and expressions would be ensured by involvement of all stakeholders with diverse interests and traditions.

Co-creation of a local cultural policy could be characterized as a long-term social innovation process which could involve a change in roles of involved stakeholders crossing organizational boundaries and jurisdictions inventing new communication and collaboration processes with possible long-lasting outcomes [Bekkers et al. 2015]. Co-creation of cultural policy by decision-makers and stakeholders can be mutually beneficial as decision-makers can gain legitimacy by incorporating the expertise of citizens, who in turn can gain a possibility to shape new policies according to their needs.

While it's comparatively easy to experiment on the first level, which is inviting audiences and community members to take part in a co-creation of a certain cultural product or service (e. g. local neighbourhood festival), the complex nature of the policy co-creation requires more knowledge, resources (including a setup of an engagement and communication platform, fostering interactions among stakeholders etc.) and long-term devotion from the planners of these co-creation processes. Co-creation approach would require new skills and attitudes from the public sector employees (e. g. advanced communication and facilitation skills), certain level of trust and readiness to devote time and efforts towards common good from citizens [Vodsgaard 2019]. Mentioning all significant factors necessary to ensure a successful realization of co-creation of cultural policy is beyond the scope of this article, but this would be an important goal for future research in order to find and identify the most efficient management practices, including the beneficial use of new digital technologies.

Co-creation in practice: from experiments to strategies

If we look at three different levels of co-creation mentioned above, we can find several examples mentioned in academic literature in each of co-creation levels. In practice there would be many examples which are not always called co-creation, but could be referred also as audience engagement practices from the perspective of cultural producer or organizer.

On the first level we can see examples of different thematic community festivals co-created by local inhabitants, community theatre events, where artists collaborate closely with local participants working with themes and topics relevant to the local neighbourhood, collaborative public art events etc. Co-created events can be started both as a bottom-up initiative from the active groups in the community or a top-down approach when the municipality or cultural institution invites inhabitants to co-create a certain event of exhibition. For example, Wing Luke Asian Museum in Seattle has a well-documented, longstanding commitment to co-creative exhibition development. Their co-creation process is based on dedication to empowering community members to tell the stories that are most meaningful to them, and community members are engaged in every step of exhibition development. The exhibition model focuses on oral history and local issues instead of curatorial or authoritative content [Simon 2010].

On the second level, several initiatives during last years have proved feasible in co-creation of future work of cultural institutions. Communities have been asked to help to rethink and co-create an entire cultural institution that helps to make decisions about the necessary content and services of the local museum, library, cultural centre.

For example, in the United Kingdom the reconstruction of the museum of the Derby Silk Mill (named the world's first factory) was primarily organized with the values of co-creation in mind. The relevance of the object to the local people of Derby was of utmost importance. Any ideas about what the mill's space should be used for were given consideration, from maker fairs and exhibitions, to music events and international learning programmes. Community members were closely involved in the design and building processes of the next museum "Inspired by the Makers of the past, Made by the Makers of today, Empowering the Makers of the future", creating strong narratives, connections and greater relevance and resilience as a result [Westen, Dijk 2015].

Another exceptional example is the co-creation or co-designing of Helsinki City Library. As a result of the transformation from information society to knowledge society it has become increasingly necessary to rethink the framework of libraries, and involvement of the community and users is an important path in creating up-to-date library services. According to Mietinen, a well-designed and user-friendly library can reflect a community's character back to itself, crystallizing who it is, in all its multiplicity, and what it stands for. In order to achieve this, staff members of Helsinki library were educated in design awareness and know-how of co-design techniques, being able to work as facilitators in groups of citizens. Participatory planning activities for Helsinki Central Library started with open collection of "library dreams" from citizens, then the opportunity for Helsinki citizens was offered

to collectively decide for what pilot projects €100,000 of its annual development money should be spent. Finally, a developer community called the Central Library's Friends was founded, offering the citizens an opportunity to help design and develop the future library functions, services, and contents from their own perspective. This developer community worked with several themes: a shared library for communities for all sorts of Helsinki residents, services for immigrants and tourists; library as a space for experimenting and learning, the 21ˢᵗ century civic skills; how stories in books, films, games move us. And now Helsinki library serves as multimedia-equipped public living room offering innovative services (3D-printer in makerspace, using a sewing machine, making video-CV in studio etc.) [Miettinen 2018].

On the third – policy level, co-creation practices can be found in European Capitals of Culture – in order to receive this prestigious title, cities have to think about long-term cultural strategies engaging their citizens as it is a necessary precondition to apply for the title. For example, the cultural policy of co-creation was morphed into the development of the Umea European Capital of Culture 2014 programme with the motto "Curiosity and Passion – the Art of Co-Creation". Umea organized its programme for the year 2014 through ideas of collaboration with lead-users, open-source innovation, crowdfunding and crowdsourcing, thus building competence and creative capacity. However, according to Nasholm et al. in case of Umea European Capital of Culture 2014 the co-creation concept shifted from its original meaning of involving the user or consumer towards cooperation and collaboration with local cultural actors in new ways [Nasholm, Blomquist 2015].

Another example comes from Birmingham in the United Kingdom, where Birmingham Culture Co-Design programme was introduced to increase participation in arts and cultural activity within local communities, paying special attention to those groups which are not involved in cultural activities. Each local project was commissioned to follow an overarching model of cultural co-design, mapped against the aims and outcomes of the programme. The coordinators planned a co-design process through which a group of local people would co-manage the project involving: planning; allocating budget; recruiting artists; marketing and recruiting participants/audiences; delivering the activity and evaluation. The community was not always ready to undertake all these tasks, but at least some of the project phases were realized in co-creative way [Garry, Goodwin 2015].

Setting up a dialogue with communities is always the first step, and different innovative methods are practiced and described in different manuals and toolkits for co-designing and co-creation practices (like storytelling, gamestorming etc. – methods, which can be used in interactive experimental workshops). These interactive methods can help raise an interest, but as co-creation is a long-term process, the motivation of participants is crucial to fulfil different tasks that demand

time and effort from the side of participants and organizers. Participatory budgeting could serve as an additional motivator and in many cases is used in different development projects of municipalities. Another alternative to finance co-creation activities would be crowdfunding – an increasingly popular method of fundraising and community building in cultural and creative sectors enhanced by ICT progress over the last decade.

The "communicative turn" in planning theory, ranging from separate initiatives to long-term neighbourhood development aided by information and communication technologies [Lund 2018] has helped to introduce co-creation approach on a more permanent basis, urging municipalities to seek a dialogue with local activists eager to start creative initiatives aimed at taking care of their neighbourhoods. Planners of local cultural policies in municipalities follow this trend mainly by working with local cultural activists and in some cases by trying to engage inhabitants inactive in culture, thus enlarging the prospective audiences.

Conclusion

We can see that co-creation concept in culture does not have one concrete definition. What can be deduced is that co-creation refers mainly to *innovation and value creation* as a *collaborative process involving different types of actors*. An understanding of co-creation concept in the field of culture can vary from simpler involvement of audiences in creation of certain cultural products or services (community events, festivals, exhibitions) to re-thinking and re-designing of cultural institutions, introducing new services important for local communities (example of Helsinki Library and Derby Museum), or even applying a co-creation approach on a more permanent basis in co-creating long-term cultural programmes (the case of European Capital of Culture in Umea) and local cultural policies.

The result is often defined as a social innovation – introduced new solutions meeting current social needs in an effective way [Bekker et al. 2015], in local cultural policy making that would mean not only innovative cultural forms introduced by diverse local cultural actors, but also better cultural services and possibilities for cultural participation and creative self-expression for different groups of the society, thus ensuring democracy in cultural planning. Or alternatively one can argue that the best governance of these various cultural resources and expressions or cultural commons would be ensured by involvement of all stakeholders in the society.

Co-creation as an open process is rather complex and long, the possible obstacles to realize this process successfully were not discussed in this article and would be an important aspect to research in next studies devoted to co-creation together with the possible use of technological advancements that could engage more stakeholders and improve the communication process with them.

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