

ROLE OF PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE IN SAFEGUARDING THE TRADITION OF THE SONG AND DANCE CELEBRATION

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Abstract

The authors discuss the role of participatory governance in safeguarding and developing intangible cultural heritage using the Nationwide Song and Dance Celebration (SDC) tradition as an example for an analysis.

Although the surveys of the community show that the SDC tradition maintenance is considered to be satisfactory and the organisational system at the moment is working fine, for fostering the tradition and increasing the role of the tradition bearers' stronger involvement and support for the bottom-up activities of the community would be recommended. This is also needed to develop a more democratic and sustainable approach to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, as recommended by the international standard setting instruments that introduce the concept of participatory governance. Moreover, occasional dissatisfaction with authoritarian and top-down governance of the SDC emerges in public and social media, implicitly indicating the need for a more bottom-up approach and greater involvement of community members in the decision making. In addition, the principles of participatory governance should be incorporated in the Song and Dance Celebration Law to be in line with the more recent Law on Intangible Cultural Heritage. Taking into account the activities of the most powerful NGO *Latvian Song Celebrations Society*, the overall direction can be considered as positive, although there is still a need for improvements.

Keywords: *participatory governance, participatory arts, intangible cultural heritage, communities, Song and Dance Celebration.*

Introduction

Cultural heritage is considered to be a 'shared resource' and a 'common good' held in trust for future generations, whose care is a 'common responsibility' for all stakeholders [European Union 2018: 12]. Such an emphasis on the role of civil actors matches with a 'democratic' turn in cultural governance in general, and this might also be directly applied to the use, access and management of the heritage [Cortés-Vázquez, Jiménez-Esquinas and Sánchez-Carretero 2017]. Therefore, the protection and safeguarding, management and promotion of cultural heritage requires effective multilevel governance and good cross-sectoral cooperation, involving all stakeholders, from public authorities and professionals to private actors, civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the voluntary sector [European Union 2018: 12]. At the same time this orientation on practices of participation has provoked a wide array of critical studies that have investigated the intended and unintended consequences of participation, and question whether the various ideals of participation, including consensus, better decisions, legitimacy and support are actually met.

In this paper the authors will discuss the example of the Nationwide Song and Dance Celebration (further on – SDC or Celebration) tradition, which is inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO [UNESCO 2008]. The community – SDC tradition bearers – is made up of at least 2% of the Latvian population, making this the largest community of intangible cultural heritage in the country. Regardless of the impressive size, the data show that 87% of the community admit that they do not have a chance to impact the decision making, the development of the tradition or the organising process of the SDC [Research Centre of the LAC 2014]. The safeguarding and sustaining of the tradition are strictly regulated by the Song and Dance Celebration Law [Saeima 2005] and authoritatively organised by the public institutions (Cabinet of Ministers, Ministry of Culture, Latvian National Centre for Culture (LNCC) etc.). On the contrary, the recently introduced Intangible Cultural Heritage Law [Saeima 2016] declares the important role of the community in safeguarding this particular tradition. Hence the research question arises – what is the role of participatory governance in safeguarding and developing the tradition of the Nationwide SDC in Latvia?

The authors have set the following tasks: (1) to analyse theoretical assumptions about participatory governance and its role in intangible cultural heritage; (2) to assess the role of the legislative and cultural policy framework as a standard setting instrument for participatory governance in Latvia; (3) to describe the existing mechanisms for participatory governance using the example of the Song and Dance Celebration; (4) to outline the views of participants and community members about

the distribution of power and responsibilities among different stakeholders; and finally (5) to make conclusions and recommendations for the future. The article has been divided into five chapters: Introduction, Theoretical discussion, Research results, Conclusions, and Sources.

Theoretical discussion

Participatory governance has become a very popular topic in the past three decades. As pointed out by Wampler and McNulty [2011], it has taken root in tandem with the so-called 'third wave' of democratization where a significant emphasis has been placed on the issues of decentralization and participation [Vidović, Žuvela 2018: 26]. Governance goes beyond the formal institutional framework of the state to encompass the interaction between formal and informal institutions, rules, processes and relationships. It is a process of bargaining between those who hold power and those who seek to influence it [Sharma 2008: 3]. Citizen participation in *government* has traditionally centred on measures to facilitate greater public access to information about government, enhance the rights of citizens to be 'consulted' on matters which directly affect them, and ensure that all voices can be heard equally through fair systems of representative democracy. Such measures typically include standardised rules, protocols, and enabling legislation and regulation. However, participation in *governance*, or participatory governance, involves different principles and methods for engagement. These might include developing transformative partnerships; establishing system-wide information exchanges and knowledge transfers; decentralising decision making and inter-institutional dialogue; and embracing relationships based more on reciprocity and trust [Aulich 2009: 45]. The concept of participatory governance involves sharing the governance responsibilities among the stakeholders who are directly involved in the process and understand it, and this can be directly applied also to the cultural heritage. The stakeholders can be either politicians, officials or experts (as presumed in traditional governance) or include also lower level (local) administrations, public institutions, non-governmental organisations, civil initiatives, local community representatives, artists, the bearers of the tradition in the case of intangible cultural heritage and others. In the participatory governance model, the authority is granted to all the involved sides, emphasising that in this model the decisions are made by a collective, not by an individual [Sani et al. 2015].

Key aspects of participatory governance – participation and access – have been popular in cultural policies for a long time. However, this has been the case more in relation to ideas, ambitions and visions; participatory governance of cultural heritage expresses the will to move towards more participation in everyday, common practice [European Union 2018]. Historically speaking, the governance of cultural

heritage has often been a top-down approach: from institutions (i.e. the 'experts') to the public. By contrast, participatory governance of cultural heritage combines knowledge of the real interests and needs of society with those of the cultural heritage assets (collections, staff competence, etc.). As a result, it recognizes many different *experts*, builds relationships with communities and communicates, facilitates and partners with communities. Of course, both types of governance are relevant, and will be applied when appropriate in the future [European Union 2018: 7]. Recently in cultural policy documents the view of the cultural heritage and its importance has changed, and its role has been recognized as a 'strategic resource for a sustainable Europe'. The active engagement of communities in cultural heritage contributes to unlocking its potential for sustainable development and its enhanced quality of life [European Union 2018: 11].

In general, participatory governance means that the voice is given to the individuals when decisions, that directly affect them, are made. But what to do in the situation when the community involved in safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage is very large as in the example of the Latvian Nationwide SDC? In this case it is impossible for the authorities to listen to every single individual tradition bearer and this is the place where collective representative organisations take a place. Civic engagement outlines multiple ways that the citizen can engage with the state, although it is rarely the individual citizen that can interact with the state but a collection of individuals. Citizens can be organised in civil society organisations, political parties and organisations as well as the private sector [Sharma 2008: 3]. And even if the state provides the legislative framework for the participatory governance that does not mean that civil society or NGOs will definitely show their will in participation. Participation has clear virtues, for both intrinsic and instrumental reasons. However, unintended consequences are also possible. In certain circumstances, participation may not be efficient, in others it may not be equitable, and in yet others it may be neither. Like market failure and government failure, there can be community failure, too [United Nations 2007]. There are plenty of obstacles to participation that can be seen as gaps in capacity, incentive and/or power:

- Capacity means that certain skills may be needed to participate in governance. These skills are both general (i.e. laws concerning cultural heritage) and specific (i.e. knowledge of cultural heritage);
- Incentive means that on an individual basis the totality of intrinsic and instrumental values must exceed the costs of participation;
- Power means dominant groups may use participation only as a means to forward their own interests [European Union 2018: 21].

The studies of participatory governance in heritage demonstrate that participatory governance might lead to conflicts and to political and ideological tensions

that are linked to the power relations between different stakeholders that construct, negotiate and reconstruct different heritage meanings and specific institutional and legislative frameworks that determine the capacity of different stakeholders to influence the process of decision making [Cortés-Vázquez, Jiménez-Esquinas and Sánchez-Carretero 2017]. This is especially risky in the above-mentioned large-scale communities where opinions between different stakeholders might vary greatly. Also, organising participatory processes is an endeavour with fundamentally unpredictable outcomes. Although such lack of control may be uncomfortable for planners and organisers, unpredictability is also an opportunity for the emergence of new perspectives and ideas. From this perspective, unintended forms of citizen involvement are not to be discarded as solely resulting from either illegitimate repression or control or from the wrong application of a fundamentally good method. Instead, both intended and unintended responses will have to be recognized and appreciated as meaningful forms of citizen involvement [Turnhout, Van Bommel and Aarts 2010: 37].

In conclusion, traditional approach to governance involves standardized rules, procedures (legislative measures and regulation). However, participatory governance, which has an increasing role in management and governance of cultural heritage as recommended by international and European policies, requires a different approach: new type of partnerships, information exchanges, decentralized decision making which can lead to mutual trust between authorities and community members. Yet, participatory governance may also bring along risks. Even though the civic participation may lead to the stronger identification or comprehension about the heritage, without the public support the experiments may lead to even higher endangerment to the heritage itself. It is significant in case of endangered cultural heritage, but also where large scale communities are involved (which is the case of the SDC), as the opinions between different stakeholders might vary greatly. Therefore, a tentative approach is necessary, combining top-down approach in setting the regulations and bottom-up approach in engaging the community members.

Research results

The role of participatory governance in intangible cultural heritage will be discussed using the example of the SDC in Latvia. The community for safeguarding this tradition is formed by all the participants of the choirs, dance groups, amateur theatres, brass bands, folk ensembles (vocal and instrumental), kokle ensembles, groups of ethnic minorities, handicraft artists, craftsmen, traditional applied arts studios etc. from Latvia and diaspora that aim to participate in the SDC. Amateur art movement is very well developed and popular in Latvia – almost 70,000 people are involved in different amateur art activities, the largest part of them also participate in

the Nationwide SDC that takes place once in 5 years since 1873, being an important and widespread national tradition and heritage.

In general, the community of the SDC is as the minimum of 2%¹ of all the inhabitants of Latvia (number of the SDC participants in 2018 – 43,219 [LSM.LV 2018], number of inhabitants at the end of 2018 – 1,927,174 [Central Statistical Bureau 2019]), that is the largest community of intangible cultural heritage in the country.

To draw the context and conclusions about the participatory governance of the SDC tradition maintaining process in Latvia, this chapter will be divided in three sub-parts discussing (1) the role of the legislative and cultural policy framework as a standard setting instrument for participatory governance in Latvia; (2) the existing mechanisms for participatory governance using the example of the SDC; and (3) the views of participants and community members about the distribution of power and responsibilities among different stakeholders.

Mixed research methodology was applied, using primary and secondary data. Document analysis was applied for the description of legislative framework; a semi-structured interview with the head of the board of the *Latvian Song Celebrations Society* Ints Teterovskis was conducted (Nov. 12, 2018) to assess the role of this NGO in participatory governance of the SDC. As quantitative data sources surveys (2014, 2017) of the SDC participants conducted by the Research Centre of the Latvian Academy of Culture (LAC) were used, as well as financial data from the annual report of the *Latvian Song Celebrations Society* obtained from LURSOFT database.

Legislative and cultural policy framework as a standard setting instrument for participatory governance in Latvia

As one of the priorities of the Cultural Policy Guidelines 2014–2020 “Creative Latvia” [Ministry of Culture 2014] the preservation and development of cultural capital involving community members in cultural processes is outlined. It means that cultural policy officials have recognized the importance of the participation in the arts, mainly in terms of social impact, as a tool to improve the quality of life and boost creativity of individuals and communities [Tjarve, Zemite and Freiberga 2017: 388–

¹ Not all the artistic groups that were preparing for the Celebration, were selected for participation, so the percentage is even higher. As stated in the Cabinet of Ministers Order No. 772 by the Cabinet of Ministers *About the Plan for the Safeguarding and Development of the Song and Dance Celebration Tradition in 2016–2018*, in 2015, the Latvian Song and Dance Celebration Community is made up of approximately 145,000 members of various generations of artistic groups who acquire and foster their knowledge and skills through choirs, dance groups, brass bands, vocal groups, amateur theatres, folk ensembles and other groups related to traditional culture [Cabinet of Ministers 2016]. That means the Song and Dance Celebration community might reach up to 7% in 2015.

389]. Consequently, the Ministry of Culture in its SWOT analysis has admitted that one of its opportunities for the planning period 2014–2020 is to “improve cultural governance through broader involvement of the cultural non-governmental sector and the development of public-private partnerships” [Ministry of Culture 2014]. So, the participation in arts and participatory governance is a topical debate in Latvian cultural policy.

The first document that came into force in Latvia regarding the safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage and the role of community in the process was the **UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003)**. It is underlined that each of its Member States (States Parties) is responsible for the inheritance of the intangible cultural heritage and the preservation of its cultural identity as opposed to the cultural standardization. As an intangible cultural heritage UNESCO recognizes customs, games and oral forms, knowledge and skills as well as related tools, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces, recognized by communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals, as part of their cultural heritage. Each State Party shall endeavour to ensure the widest possible participation of communities, groups, relevant non-governmental organisations and, where appropriate, individuals in efforts to identify, define, preserve, create, maintain and transmit intangible cultural heritage, and to involve them actively in its management [UNESCO 2003]. So basically, the principles of participatory governance have already been included in the Convention that serves as an umbrella document for other state and national cultural policy documents.

Soon after Latvia acceded the Convention, **the Song and Dance Celebration Law** was also prepared and adopted [Saeima 2005]. Most of the internationally and in the Convention accepted principles of participatory governance have not been included in the Law. The law strictly regulates the role of the state institutions and of the municipalities in the organisational process of the Celebration as well as the management of everyday processes. For example, The Cabinet of Ministers decides on the time and location of the next celebration, organises and approves the Council of SDC and its by-law, determines the procedure for the selection of representatives of different artistic fields, non-governmental organisations and cultural centres for approval by the Council of the SDC, as well as the selection criteria; determines the procedure for the distribution of the state earmarked grant for the remuneration of collective managers and the payment of social tax, as well as the criteria for the distribution thereof.

The latest document regarding the governance of intangible cultural heritage in Latvia is **the Intangible Cultural Heritage Law** [Saeima 2016]. Firstly, the law clearly defines the terms regarding the intangible cultural heritage – the community, the intangible cultural heritage, its elements, safeguarding the intangible cultural

heritage. Then, the law helps to regulate the concept and the compilation of the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The list is being compiled with the help of the local communities under the monitoring of the Latvian National Centre for Culture. Since 2017 there are 19 elements inscribed in the National List [LNCC 2020]. The only two exceptions – the tradition of the SDC in Latvia and its symbolism, as well as the Suiti cultural space – have been included in the National List automatically without going through the submission, nomination, valuation process as they have already been internationally recognized by UNESCO. The Section 8 of the law describes the participation of communities in the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage, stating that the community cares for ensuring the sustainability of its intangible cultural heritage, and it also participates in legal, technical, organisational, administrative and financial measures implemented by the State administrative institutions, including local government institutions. The third part of section 8 states that the community has the right to refuse to participate in the measures for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage implemented by other persons (including the measures implemented by the State administrative institutions and local government institutions) [Saeima 2016]. This draws to a conclusion that regarding the safeguarding the SDC tradition and its community these two laws are slightly in a contradiction – the Song and Dance Celebration Law delegates all the organisational processes of the Celebration to the public sector, while the Intangible Cultural Heritage Law empowers the community to participate in the organisational process or even to refuse to participate in the safeguarding measures implemented by public authorities.

Existing mechanisms for participatory governance

As the community is so large and the tradition of the SDC is so nationally and internationally significant, it is impossible to ensure that the opinion of each individual participant is heard. In the following subchapter, the authors will identify those mechanisms which are in place to ensure participatory governance in the SDC. They are: participation of representatives of the community in the highest-level governance structures (the Council, the Artistic Council and the Action Committee of the SDC); the role of the non-governmental sector; and brief outline of different activities aimed at engaging community members carried out by the National Centre for Culture.

The Song and Dance Celebration Law [Saeima 2005] describes the governance of the Celebration and outlines the responsibilities of each stakeholder. The highest authority is the Cabinet of Ministers. The Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education and science with its subordinate institutions – the Latvian National Centre for Culture and the National Centre for Education being the main organisers

and the responsible state institutions for the maintenance of the Celebration for two target groups – adults and children and youth. The authors in this article mainly focus on the process of the SDC and its main event – the Nationwide SDC with its target audience, adults. This event and process is supervised by three authorities: the Council, the Artistic Council and the Action Committee where we can identify some representation of the community. There are 15 members in the Council of the SDC including the current officials, 8 representatives from different artistic fields and 1 member from the NGO sector. All the members excluding the officials (politicians) are at the same time part of the Artistic Council of the SDC meaning they can decide on the artistic content of the Celebration. Additionally, there is also an Action Committee of the Celebration including representatives from the ministries, municipalities, medical emergency and other important services for the organising processes [Saeima 2005]. As the maintenance of the tradition of the SDC is so important on the national level the organisational process of the Celebration is so strictly regulated by the law that it is almost impossible to include the lower level in the decision making – the civil society or the NGOs. Formally of course, there is one representative from the NGO sector. In the Song and Dance Celebration Law the participatory governance is instituted horizontally by involving different state and municipal stakeholders. Meanwhile it excludes the vertical, bottom-up cooperation – actual members of the SDC community, participants of the Celebration.

Taking this into account, the main responsible body LNCC takes some efforts to organise the involvement of the participants and to listen to their opinions and needs. Regular SDC participant and artistic group leader surveys are carried out. The LNCC organises diverse activities (workshops, seminars etc.) to facilitate networking of the community representatives [LNCC 2018]. In addition, social media campaigns are organised on a regular basis aiming to include every individual (e.g. the campaign *Folk Costume for Everyone* (*Katram savu tautastērpu*) is a project that enhances the knowledge and encourages the involvement of community members to make his/her own Latvian folk costume). All these activities facilitate networking and are aimed at more deliberate participant involvement in SDC process. Still, they are top-down activities that exclude direct participation in the governance or other bottom-up initiatives.

Non-governmental organisations are a widespread instrument for representation of community needs in governance. Larger organisations and associations may represent the opinions of individual community members and serve as a tool for adhering to the principles of participatory governance of the SDC. Examples include NGOs established by a single artistic group, the members of one particular field of the amateur art (e.g. *Latvian Association of Vocal Ensembles*), or larger part of the community including other NGOs (e.g. *Latvian Song Celebrations Society*).

In general, the NGO sector of the amateur arts in Latvia is still quite weak and underdeveloped, as only about 10–12% of all the amateur artistic groups in Latvia involve non-governmental organisations in their everyday work [Tjarve, Zemite and Freiberga 2017, 2018]. As a good practice, authors can highlight the *Latvian Song Celebrations Society* (further on – LSCS or Society), an NGO aiming to take over several functions from the LNCC in the SDC process maintenance.

The LSCS was founded in 2009, and its main goal is to consolidate in a unified and coordinated manner different groups of a community with a goal to maintain the tradition of Latvia's cultural pride – the tradition of the SDC, strengthening the understanding of its value both in Latvia and abroad [LSCS 2017]. More regular activities of the Society started only after 2014, reaching its peak after the Centenary SDC in 2018 and currently concentrating mostly on the educational issues that impact the inheritance of the choir singing tradition starting from the primary schools. In 2019 there were 288 members of the Society including individuals and several other NGOs (including professional associations of the field). Members representing all the fields (choirs, dance groups, brass bands, amateur theatres, cultural centres etc.) and different involvement levels (chief-conductors and chief-leaders, artistic leaders and participants of the amateur art groups, municipal coordinators or even the interested members from the audience) are invited to participate in the Society. Since its beginning the LSCS has aimed to become an umbrella organisation of other NGOs involved in the field and being the one that collaborates with the state and municipal sector in improving the organisational process and ensuring the continuity of the Celebration, which has also been stated in the statutes of the LSCS [LSCS 2017]. The board of the organisation mainly consists of choir conductors. The overall activity of the Society in recent years is surely connected to the strong personalities who have engaged into the work of the NGO.

The role of this specific organisation has already been stated in the official documents connected to the Celebration. In its annual report of 2017, the LNCC in its SWOT analysis as one of its strengths mentions that the role of NGOs in the governance of the choir field is increasing thanks to the *Latvian Song Celebrations Society* [LNCC 2018]. Also, in the Cabinet of Ministers Order No. 772 *About the Plan for the Safeguarding and Development of the Song and Dance Celebration Tradition in 2016–2018*, chapter No. 2.2. *The governance of safeguarding and developing the tradition of the Song and Dance Celebration* states that the safeguarding and development of the tradition happens through cooperation between the state, municipal and non-governmental sectors, as well as international institutions. The document mentions three types of NGOs: (1) professional organisations, (2) field associations, and (3) *Latvian Song Celebrations Society* in particular being the only one specified by the title [Cabinet of Ministers 2016]. This can be considered as

a positive example of participatory governance, though in the most important document regarding the Celebration – the Song and Dance Celebration Law – the NGO sector is still inconspicuous.

Regardless of the fact that the LSCS might eventually be considered as the leading NGO and equivalent partner in the maintenance of the SDC the organisation itself does not show a regular and stable financial activity. Paid employees guarantee the sustainability of the NGO sector as was concluded in the study *The Socioeconomic Impact of the Cultural NGOs in Latvia* [Research Centre of the LAC 2018]. The LSCS does not have employees, and its work is based only on the voluntary enthusiasm [LURSOFT 2019], that is again an endangerment of sustainability as the enthusiasm is a resource that tends to expire [Research Centre of the LAC 2018]. Similarly, the organisation does not show the consistency in fundraising. As can be observed in Figure 1, there are years where the amount of fundraised money is impressive (2012–2014), but as explained in the interview with the head of the board of the LSCS¹ this financial activity is due to a single project that is not directly connected to the LSCS basic activity in representation of the whole sector.

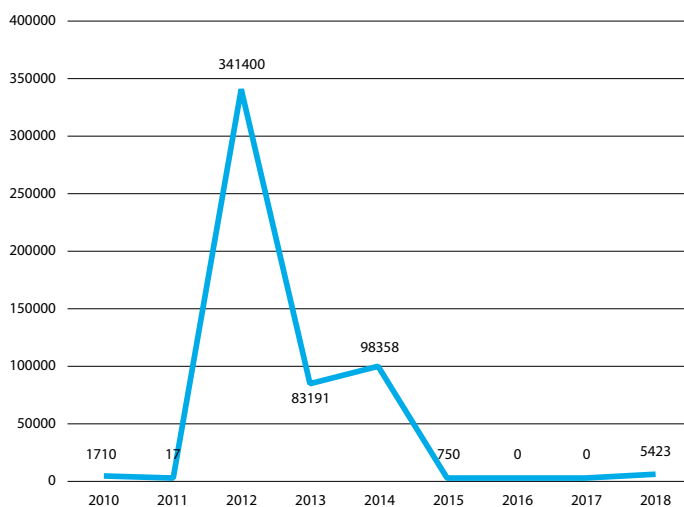


Figure 1. The income of the *Latvian Song Celebrations Society*, 2010–2018, euros. Source: LURSOFT database.

The results obtained through the interview with the head of the board, clarify the aims of the society: to take over the functions which the LNCC has no capacity to implement – organising the regional SDC and developing the collaboration between

¹ Head of the board of the Latvian Song Celebrations Society, choir conductor Ints Teterovskis, interviewed by Kristine Freiberga in Riga, Theatre House of the LAC “Zirgu pasts”, 12.11.2018. Interview time 1 h 10 min.

two ministries – Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Education and Science. In addition, the LSCS aims to enhance participatory governance, e.g. to democratize the selection of the repertoire and the chief-conductors and the chief-leaders: *This is the celebration of the song and the dance – it has already been encoded in its name – we shouldn't make this too complicated with those artistic conceptions' competitions and choosing the songs that only correspond to them – we should just celebrate and sing the songs that we like and that make us happy. Even in the Soviet times they were voting for the songs and elected the chief-conductors and chief-leaders, now it is done authoritatively by the artistic leader of the particular Celebration. We miss being the co-authors of the process and that is what we want to gain by the work in the LSCS* (I. Teterovskis). But as this is a specific aspect of the organisational process of the Celebration, it is to be examined in more detail in further research.

In the previous research the authors have concluded that the sustainability of the SDC is mainly formed by the active tradition maintenance process on an everyday basis in-between Celebrations that include diversifying the sources of funding, fostering the management activities of the artistic groups in that way putting more emphasis on the decentralization of the SDC process and entrusting more of financial and organisational responsibility to the individual participants and artistic groups rather than municipalities and the state. Otherwise the tradition might be endangered if the individual tradition bearers rely on the public support only and are not willing to invest their time, energy and resources in safeguarding the tradition. Establishing and involving more NGOs is a step towards the sustainability of this tradition [Tjarve, Zemite and Freiberga 2017, 2018] and this corresponds also to the conclusions of the research *Song and Dance Celebration in a Changing Social Environment* – the whole organisation of the SDC process should be evaluated from the point of view of modern public governance concepts, with special emphasis on the possibility of delegating state tasks to the third sector (NGOs) and implementing new forms of cooperation (e.g. public-private partnership). (..) It is recommended to evaluate the possibility of gradually transforming this system into a classic third sector, where public funding for amateur art is administered through competitions [Tisenhofs et al. 2008: 63]. As we can observe, this transformation takes place too slowly – even 12 years later there are just a few positive examples.

The views of participants and community members about the distribution of power and responsibilities among different stakeholders

Regardless the impressive number of the SDC community, the data show that 87% of the community admit they do not have a chance to impact the place and time of the SDC events, the choice of chief-conductors and chief-leaders, the programme

and repertoire¹ and the selection process of the artistic groups – basically they cannot impact the decision-making, the development of the tradition or the organising process of the SDC [Research Centre of the LAC 2014]. In 2014, soon after the XXV Nationwide Latvian Song and XV Dance Celebration the survey of the participants was conducted [Research Centre of the LAC 2014] with the goal to find out their attitude towards the tradition and several organisational aspects of the Celebration. In the question about who should take the responsibility of organising the next Celebration the Top 3 answers were the Ministry of Culture (35%), the Latvian National Centre for Culture (28%) and the Government (Cabinet of Ministers) (10%). This also corresponds to the conclusions in the previous research and amateur art participant survey from 2017 that the majority of participants in amateur art activities in Latvia do not support the need to co-finance their participation in amateur art activities. For the most part, it is perceived as an obligation of the state and municipalities (validating this statement with an argument of the Song and Dance Celebration being a national tradition that should be safeguarded by public authorities). The participants are not willing to pay for the central expenses, such as the rent of the rehearsal venue or the salary of the artistic leader [Tjarve, Zemite and Freiberga 2018]. Basically, this reveals that the majority of the SDC community is satisfied with the existing system where the public authorities have a dominating role in the governance of the SDC.

In the meantime, participants occasionally express their opinion and dissatisfaction with certain aspects of the SDC organisation. While preparing for the Nationwide SDC in 2018, community members expressed publicly (mainly in social media) their disapproval about several aspects of the management and decision making in regard to the SDC: costs and the process of the public procurement of the costumes; repertoire of the gala dance concert; the selection process of the repertoire etc. [Delfi.lv 2017]. On the one hand, it is a democratic process which is facilitated by easy access to social media and active networking of community through different media, while on the other hand it might be also a sign of a greater need to involve the community in decision making.

¹ Songs and the repertoire in general are chosen by the organisers, the Council of the Song and Dance Celebration and the Action Committee of the Nationwide Latvian Song and Dance Celebration, and main chief-conductors, which are highly educated and respected professionals. (..) Some of them lead the best and most recognized and awarded choirs in Latvia. On the contrary, absolute majority of more than 15,000 gala concert participants (amateurs) have completely different musical education, aesthetic taste and expectations. The professionals wish to raise the quality of the performance as high as possible, while for most of the amateurs socialisation, communication and emotional and spiritual fulfilment is more important, and giving highly professional performance is secondary [Treimane 2017].

Also, theoretical sources suggest that intangible cultural heritage is based on the bottom-up activities. The authors assume that although in general the SDC tradition maintenance is considered to be satisfactory and the organisational system at the moment works fine, for fostering the tradition and increasing the role of the community higher involvement of the tradition bearers would be recommended.

Conclusions and recommendations for future

As theoretical literature sources reveal, in the participatory governance model the protection and safeguarding, management and promotion of cultural heritage require effective multilevel governance and good cross-sectoral cooperation, involving all stakeholders, from public authorities and professionals to private actors, civil society organisations, NGOs and the voluntary sector [European Union 2018: 12]. The authority is granted to all the involved sides, emphasising that in this model the decisions are made by a collective, not by an individual [Sani et al. 2015]. Yet, participatory governance may also bring along risks. Even though the civic participation may lead to the stronger identification or comprehension about the heritage, without the public support the experiments may lead to even higher endangerment to the heritage itself. It is significant in case of endangered cultural heritage, but also where large-scale communities are involved, as the opinions between different stakeholders might vary greatly. Therefore, a tentative approach is necessary, combining top-down approach in setting the regulations and bottom-up approach in engaging the community members.

In the example of the SDC, a tradition that involves the largest intangible cultural heritage community in the country, the tradition is strictly regulated by the Song and Dance Celebration Law. The participatory governance is instituted horizontally by involving different state and municipal stakeholders, but excludes the direct vertical collaboration with the actual members of the SDC community and participants of the SDC. This implies that there are limited possibilities for the community – the actual tradition bearers – to become involved in the decision-making process regarding the Celebration. This also contradicts another law supporting the tradition – the Intangible Cultural Heritage Law – that delegates free rights to the community to participate in the organisational process or even to refuse to participate in the safeguarding measures implemented by public authorities.

A positive example of participatory governance is the activity of the Latvian Song Celebrations Society, an NGO that claims to become an umbrella-NGO in the amateur art field. This NGO is eventually becoming an equal partner in the SDC tradition maintenance process next to the public authorities. Despite its growing importance also in the official documentation [Cabinet of Ministers 2016; LNCC

2018], the Society itself does not show a regular and stable financial activity or employees – its work should be strengthened as it is currently based on a voluntary work of enthusiasts and strong personalities, and overall this does not correlate to sustainability. In recent years at least one strong player from the NGO sector is to be heard in the higher level of the organisers of the SDC process.

Although the surveys of the SDC participants show that the tradition maintenance is considered to be satisfactory and the organisational system at the moment is working fine, for fostering the tradition and increasing the role of the tradition bearers' stronger involvement and support for the bottom-up activities of the community would be recommended. This is also needed to develop a more democratic and sustainable approach to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, as recommended by the international standard setting instruments that introduce the concept of participatory governance. Moreover, occasionally dissatisfaction with authoritarian and top-down governance of the SDC emerges in public and social media, implicitly indicating the need for a more bottom-up approach and greater involvement of community members in the decision making. In addition, the principles of participatory governance should be incorporated in the Song and Dance Celebration Law to be in line with the more recent Law on Intangible Cultural Heritage. Taking into account the activities of the most powerful NGO Latvian Song Celebrations Society, the overall direction can be considered as positive, although there is still a need for improvements.

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