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RETHINKING PARTICIPATION IN THE AARHUS AS EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE 2017-PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the relationship between cultural participation and regional development with reference to the European Capital of Culture in 2017. From the bidding stage Aarhus 2017 claimed it put "participation" at the heart of its strategic plans, through consultation at roadshows and exhibitions. In addition it aspired to use culture as a catalyst for development not only in the city of Aarhus but across the region of Central Denmark. This paper therefore examines how participation is defined and implemented to address regional development in the Aarhus 2017 process through textual analysis of documentation from Aarhus 2017 and delivery partners as well as over 20 interviews with managers and participants involved in a range of 2017 projects. The paper argues against the common prioritisation of urban and professional cultural institutions and makes the case for decentralised cultural provision, that supports both amateurs and professionals through a regional networked structure.

KEY WORDS
Creative cities and regions, participation, regional development, European Capitals of Culture, festivalisation

Introduction

It has been claimed that we are experiencing a "festivalisation of culture" (Bennett, Woodward, & Taylor, 2014) whereby a thriving events industry has developed to address both changing patterns of cultural participation but also a growing policy interest in using culture to support local and regional development. Major events such as the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) claim to "operate on a scale that offers unprecedented opportunities for acting as a catalyst for city change" (Palmer Rae Associates, 2004). But meanings of "development" and "cultural participation" in such events have been shown to shift according to both physical context and political objectives. The boosterist claims of their transformative impact have also been challenged.

This paper therefore argues that there is a need to understand what kind of development is being advanced by whom and for whom in order to challenge pervasive thinking. It adopts an empirical approach to examine the relationship between culture and development in one case study of the ECoC in Aarhus in 2017. Aarhus 2017 was chosen due to its aspiration to have a region-wide impact across Central Jutland, Denmark. The paper examines the various approaches to and tensions within the agendas of "development" and "cultural participation", in line with what Leys defines as a move from development theory (which he characterised as largely top down national policy driven agenda) to development studies, which allows for a greater understanding of context and for other voices to be heard (Leys, 1996).

The paper begins with an examination of theories of both regional development and participation which will underpin the analysis of what change is implied by ECoC. It then examines the processes employed and the people involved in decision making, in Aarhus 2017, to consider the implications for both the development of cultural participation and the host region. In so doing it aims to challenge existing theory and practice in this field and develop new understandings of the relationship between participation and development.

Regional development and participation

Global shifts in economics, populations and cultures has led to a growing academic and policy interest in theories to understand and strategies to support regional development at both a local and national

scale. This is most often characterized by an economic focus, with regional competitiveness rather than collaboration seen as a mechanism to stimulate growth (Gordon, 2011). It is claimed that such an approach may provide benefits in helping a locale brand itself by identifying their "niche" strengths. Culture and the events industry have played a significant role in this, in part as a result of the wide scale adoption by policy makers, of the theoretical framework provided by the creative cities and creative class discourses (Landry & Bianchini, 1995) (Florida R. , 2002). The former focuses on a creative approach to urban planning as a condition for urban development and the latter on the agglomeration effect created by attracting a critical mass of creative individuals. But what they share is an approach which centralises rather than distributes assumed development benefits and creates competition not collaboration between cities. ECoC, where cities bid to be named capital of culture in the hope that this will provide transformational change for the host, provides an example of this approach.

But the economic growth model, built on regional competition, has been argued to reinforce social inequalities both within the place and across a wider region or nation (Pratt, 2011) (Peck, 2005). Indeed, Richard Florida has himself acknowledged growing evidence to support these criticisms (Florida R. , 2017). The city or metro region approach, which Aarhus has adopted, attempts to address this by giving cities greater responsibility for spreading the benefits between city and hinterland more strategically (Parr, 2005). But, when still based on an economic growth model, it has been criticised for weakening local power and decision making, where the city takes the strategic lead over smaller municipalities, often with uneven distribution of resources (Turok, 2009). Furthermore, there is no evidence that such approaches reduce depopulation of small towns and rural areas as cities continue to expand at their expense. There has therefore been recognition of the different interests at play and the need to consider not only the economic drivers of growth but also what might make smaller places socially and culturally sustainable.

One such approach has been through building "adaptive capacity" or resilience among citizens rather than the top down approach to economic development (Pike, Dawley, & Tomaney, 2010). This has commonly adopted approaches from social learning (Collins & Ison, 2006) where citizens develop an understanding of their own local needs through interaction and action between one another, or public participation which assumes the need for citizens to be actively engaged in decision making about the development processes which affect their lives (Brodie, Cowling, & Nissen, 2009). In both cases it is through the sharing between professionals and participants that development takes place.

But it may be argued that both theories fail to define how the transfer of power, between the professional or expert and the participant, takes place in these processes. It is not enough for participants to be involved in activity or decision making but they must also set the agenda and have the fiscal ability to implement change in order for power to shift (Jancovich, 2017). Instead it is claimed that participatory development has too often been used as part of a neo-liberal trend that sees a reduction of state responsibility for development and places responsibility for it on already under resourced communities (Davoudi & Madanipour, 2015) (Mohan & Stokke, 2000). The social aspect to development it is therefore argued cannot ignore the economic if existing inequalities are to be addressed.

ECoC has developed in parallel to many of these discourses from early iterations that celebrated existing cultural cities (Athens in 1995 and Florence in 1986) to a refocus on its potential for economic development with Glasgow in 1990 to an increased interest in the social aspects since the millennium, including citizen involvement in the planning stages of such programmes. By so doing it is claimed that hosting can simultaneously contribute to the cultural, social and economic development of the designate city or region (Palmer Rae Associates, 2004) and each were core components of the bid for Aarhus 2017, which was constructed not only involving all 19 of the municipalities in Central Jutland but also the citizens themselves in activities that distributed decision making on the programme content within their own communities (Davies 2011). This paper focuses on the participatory processes within Aarhus 2017 not to provide evidence of its contribution to development, nor make the case for culture, but rather through deep analysis of one case, to

understand the way these tensions are played out in practice. It takes a thematic approach to answer the following research questions:

- How is Aarhus 2017 understood by key agents to be a catalyst for regional development?
- How is participation conceptualised by different delivery agents and what are the approaches, issues and challenges employed?
- How is Aarhus 2017 embedded in the strategies of the municipalities in order to ensure longer term impacts?

Methodology

This paper examines the role of participatory processes and approaches in the development phase of Aarhus 2017 between 2013-2016 where the focus was on strategic development, testing and capacity building, rather than just delivery. This is in keeping with the theory above that participatory processes should involve citizens not only in decision making but in agenda setting.
The core data of this analysis is 20 interviews or focus groups conducted with managers and public participants involved in a range of 2017 projects. The projects selected were identified from the full list of Aarhus 2017-projects as defined in the EU monitoring papers (2016) based on those which articulated a focus on participation. The participatory projects that are included in this project are based in either villages, cities outside Aarhus or in more marginalized areas within Aarhus. They are thus not a representative sample of Aarhus 2017 projects but are deliberately chosen as examples of participatory projects working with regional development to rebalance power between centre and periphery.
This is contextualized by textual analysis of documentation from Aarhus 2017 and delivery partners as well as both qualitative and quantitative research on the municipal and regional politicians' attitude towards Aarhus 2017. This include interviews with chairs of the cultural committees in four municipalities outside Aarhus in autumn 2017 as well as a regional survey distributed to all municipal politicians in the region in December 2017.

The selected projects were all carried out by agents in the region, and thus not by the Aarhus 2017 Foundation, established in 2012 as a result of the designation as ECoC as the delivery agent for the year. As such they support the aim of giving space to alternative processes and voices than those commonly represented in policy evaluations. The cases selected cover both traditional cultural institutions with very little prior experience of participatory cultural projects, cultural institutions with a long track record on this and agents that would not normally be considered cultural institutions as follows:

- The Democracy Baton – a project which aims to explore how libraries could function as relevant and engaging democratic platforms, and enhance democratic participation among young people, by having at co-created activities in the 18 participating regional libraries (Hesselberg, Stephensen and Hansen 2017). Project management and local librarians were interviewed in 6 locations.
- The Participatory Museum – a consortium of 8 museums aimed to rethink the way their service operates. A key project has been the user-generated development of the permanent exhibition in the local history museum in the habour town Grenå (http://www.aarhus2017.dk/en/calendar/four-ways-to-approach-norddjurs/9425/). Three museum management and staff was interviewed.
- Rethink the Village – a strategic project including villages across the region combining the development of locally generated cultural activities with network and gatherings across the region demonstrating the qualities of rural life and debating the development hereof (http://www.aarhus2017.dk/en/calendar/experience-the-village/8413/). Project agents and citizen participants were interviewed in 3 villages.
- RECcORD – a knowledge exchange and development project in which staff from a variety of culture houses (defined as community centres, art centres etc. that involve at least some

amateur or voluntary activities) participated in staff exchange and functioned as citizen researchers in order to reflect on participatory practices. (Eriksson, Reestorff and Stage 2017). Managers and volunteers from participating Culture Houses were interviewed from 3 locations.

- Eutopia – as part of the regeneration of Gellerup, the largest social housing estate in Denmark, new cultural opportunities for local producers were provided, as well as the large scale multicultural event Eutopia in the Aarhus 2017-programme (http://www.aarhus2017.dk/en/programme/full-moon-events/eutopia-2017/). Management and citizen participants were interviewed.
- Institute for X and Gellerup Film Project – a mentorship programme for new creatives defined as the "growth layer" for the region were included in the OFF Track 2017-programme. Management and citizen participants were interviewed.
- Carte Blanche Theatre, a professional theatre in Viborg facilitated and staged the Pop-Up Kulturhus in the Old City Hall in June 2017 combining a variety of activities including the presentation of the archive of the two year long Art of Listening aiming at new interactions and dialogues between citizens (http://www.cblanche.dk/en/pop-up-kulturhus/). Management was interviewed.
- Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium/Odin Teatret, a professional theatre working with community engagement since 1989 creating Festive Weeks based on the artistic principle of the barter in which all participants contribute on equal terms (Kuhlmann, et al 2016). Management, staff and citizen participants were interviewed.

This paper does not aim to provide an in depth analysis of these projects nor a systematic typology of the 2017 programme, rather it demonstrates the variety of approaches within the programme and the different agents taking part in the negotiation of the values, including professional artists, cultural intermediaries and public participants.

Aarhus 2017 as a catalyst for regional development

The Central Denmark region, of which Aarhus is a part was only constructed as a region in 2007 and while the city has a growing young and highly educated population, some of the 19 municipalities that make up the wider region, are struggling with declining population and employment, especially in the Western part of the region. As such many of those interviewed for this research said the region offers a microcosm of the global trend of depopulation from countryside to city. One person argued that

"in Denmark, we have emptied the countryside and concentrated the population more and more in cities. In Norway, they kept all the smaller cultural cities…but to keep them they had to make infrastructure, which is [transport] and [culture]" (Volunteer from Culture House).

In Denmark statutory provision of culture includes libraries and music schools. By involving all 19 municipalities in the bid for Aarhus 2017 the aim was, in line with the city region approach, to use anticipated benefits of ECoC as a catalyst for the development of the whole region and address lack of investment in other cultural infrastructure (Davies, 2011). Aarhus as the second largest city in Denmark already had a developed cultural infrastructure, including flag ship institutions such as ARoS Art Museum, Danish National Opera, Den Gamle By, Aarhus Symphony Orchestra alongside culture houses within residential communities. The eight larger municipalities in the region (above 50.000 inhabitants with one central town) typically have an infrastructure including one or more museums and a professional, partly state-funded theatre combining professional and an amateur led cultural house. The smaller municipalities typically rely on the neighboring towns for professional cultural provision and focus themselves on amateur cultural supply.

Among those interviewed for this research, there were differences of opinion about the value of Aarhus 2017 as a regional programme. While some cultural agents interviewed from Aarhus questioned the regional approach, as diluting the programme and the impact of the event, those in the

regions were more strongly supportive of it. On closer investigation this difference also corresponded with those who talked more about ECoC as an event to showcase the professional arts and a catalyst for cultural development and those for whom it was seen as a catalyst for social and economic development. This clearly demonstrates the different interests at play within such an initiative between those in the cultural sector and those working in regional development. But what they shared was a commitment to the belief that ECoC did provide opportunities for development in one form or another and a vehicle to "rethink" the relationship between culture and society which became the theme for the programme.   However, this paper argues that balancing so many different goals may exacerbate the problem of obscuring the power relationships at play within these different agendas.

Those interviewed from cultural institutions said there was an absolute need to "rethink" irrespective of ECoC, in order to address the changing patterns of cultural participation suggested in the literature above but also, for those in receipt of subsidy, the increasing need to justify public investment. Necessity, rather than personal choice was therefore the driver for many cultural organisations to adopt the regional development approach. Initiatives such as the Democracy Baton and Participatory Museum were therefore underway before Aarhus 2017 came on the scene. As such Aarhus 2017 was "a catalyst for a lot of initiatives [if not actually] facilitating it" (Culture House manager). It was acknowledged by one person that "the advantage of that should be that it generates freedom within each community, within each municipality to develop your own methods and your own take on this project" (Local project manager, Rethink the Village). This clearly fits with the claims for local power over agenda setting and decision making, referenced above, but significantly one person argued that the pressure of a regional strategic context could do things that local actions alone could not. This was also seen as essential if Aarhus 2017 was to be a catalyst to ensure long term investment rather than a short term event.

The rethink theme was also seen as "branding for new ways of thinking, for taking new risks" (Library staff, Democracy Baton) which several of the organisers said was helpful in persuading politicians and staff members to try new approaches. But most agreed that unless the desire for change was there across the whole organisation and indeed for some the whole of the cultural sector, it was unlikely that this change would outlive the programme. This was demonstrated through the interim evaluation of the libraries project. Where library managers and staff bought into the idea behind their project it was felt that the lessons learned were embedded long term. But where those given the task of delivery saw it as imposed on them it became "a project they have had and then it's passed on and it's more or less out of their heads" (Library staff, Democracy Baton) and in some cases staff at the participating libraries were outwardly resistant.

Similarly there were criticisms that the Aarhus 2017 Foundation had not lived up to and invested as much in facilitating cultural change as originally intended. Several claimed that their approach was "very traditional…. I don't think [they] are rethinking themselves" (Staff from Participatory Museum) and "when different people came into the leadership and things happened and somehow they forgot about [communities]" (Project manager from Gellerup). As a result the ambitious regional development claims of the Aarhus 2017 are called into question. A key tension for a participatory approach to development therefore is how to find the balance between distributing power and decision making and taking a strategic lead.

While there were questions about the Foundation's contribution however there're was a strong sense that the region wide collaborations, that many of the projects were part of, would not have happened without Aarhus 2017. While villages in Denmark already have a network where they come together to explore shared problems, the Rethink the Village initiative was said to provide investment to allow them to try out some new approaches locally, including participatory budgeting, and share their learning regionally. Similarly, the RECcORD project provided an opportunity for the existing Culture House movement in Denmark to not only reexamine its own role but open a wider discourse with culture houses across Europe. Work with new artists and marginal communities were also seen as only made possible through new investment from Aarhus 2017. Institute for X, who acted as mentors

for "the growth layer" said that "you've never had grassroots actors actually distribute money before" (Project manager, Institut for X).

From the community participants spoken to there was also a powerful sense of pride in the project and "being part of something so big" (Community participant Rethink the Village), rather than just their normal everyday local activities. Young immigrant performers in Gellerup said they had "never had anything like this before" and citizens in Rethink the Village, said it "helps us to become visible on the map" and promote the value of living in villages. For many of those interviewed it was these regional networks which were likely to be the greatest contribution to regional development of Aarhus 2017, providing a vehicle for shared learning and for lobbying for further investment. There were concerns however about the sustainability of such initiatives without greater buy in at a strategic level from the Foundation. Far from increasing investment in the regions, it was also felt that a cultural development focus, encouraging growth through tourism and inward investment rather than participation of local citizens, could become a further drain on money for outlying areas. The following section therefore considers how participation was conceptualised in the programme in order to examine how citizens were involved.

How is participation conceptualised by different delivery agents and what are the approaches, issues and challenges employed?

As a part of the development of the bid for Aarhus 2017, research was conducted on patterns of cultural consumption across the Central Denmark Region (Epinion November 2011). This showed that even though participation generally was high, there were clear differences in rates of participation between different types of activity. In addition, participation rates are significantly lower in specific groups, such as in rural areas and among ethnic minorities (Rasmussen, 2015). This led to a tension, evident in all the grey literature examined for this research, between an approach to participation based on decision making and the more traditional approach within the cultural sector to defining participation in terms of reception of cultural activity (Bollo, Dal Pozzolo, Di Federico, & Gordon, 2012)

In the official application the focus on decision making is most evident with a call

> "to involve the whole community... to change habits and strategies...to rethink definitions of culture, quality, communication, accessibility and our cultural institutions. Our definition of "culture" must be widened, and new strategies of inclusion, outreach are needed desperately." (Davies 2011 pg 91)

It is estimated that approximately 8000 people were involved in devising the programme through consultations, roadshows and exhibitions. But as described in Hansen and Laursen (2015) the transition from the bidding phase (2007-2012) to the delivery phase (2013-2017) caused radical organisational changes including a total change in the management team, a shift from a primary focus on project development towards programming, and a corresponding redefinition of participation, from participation in decision making to participation in cultural activities.

This is demonstrated by the KPIs in the strategic plan which are about audience and volunteer numbers. In addition, culture was said to have been redefined from "everything we do together" where the process of engagement, rather than the cultural product was most important to the accusation that the Foundation and the professional arts sector were "hijacking the cultural concept" (Library staff from Democracy Baton) and caring more about the advancing their art forms and attracting "world class culture" (Rasmussen, 2015) than advancing the region. As a result according to Eriksson and Stephensen (2016).

> "Compared to the much grander ambitions of the application, these new aims and objectives of Aarhus 2017 are obviously more modest — not least on the rhetorical level — than the

ones originally envisioned. And to the regret of some they are, of course, also much more ordinary or less ambitious." (Eriksson & Stephensen, 2016)

It may therefore be argued that the process of managing an ECoC, with multiple development objectives, limits its potential. But it is significant to note that the Foundation delivered only approximately 20% of the programme, the rest being delivered by agents in the city and the region. This decentralised programme structure means that although the participatory decision making approach may have been de-prioritised by the Foundation it still took place within the projects. However, within the projects examined for this research there was also limited shared understanding of either the meaning or purpose of participation. There were some approaches that focused on audience development for existing arts provision, some that talked more about increasing civic participation and others that wanted to use participatory decision making to rethink how the cultural institutions operated.

Significantly where participation in planning or decision making was employed there was most evidence of enthusiasm for the benefits. It was also said to be a catalyst to other forms of participation in a way that other forms were not, as it was described as an important tool to improve communication between institutions and public. While words like art and culture were a barrier to participation reframing conversations around generating "ideas for making life ... exciting" (Public participant, Rethink the Village) took away people's hesitation about getting involved. Involving people early enough in the process was also seen as essential. In the case of the Democracy Baton it was said that that the project suffered from being "created in a librarian's head" (Library staff, Democracy Baton). Had it been devised with the community rather than for them, it was felt both the process and the outcomes would have been more effective. This is in line with theories on participatory processes above which state that you need to involve people at agenda setting not just at the delivery end.

In terms of who participated most projects acknowledged there was a tension of working with existing groups, such as community associations in Rethink the Village or school parties in the Democracy Baton and the idea that the "best benefit is it's attracting other people than the usual" (Public participant, Rethink the Village). Many of those interviewed acknowledged that they engaged "ones you would call users" (Library staff, Democracy Baton) or "people who had a lot of resources" (Project manager, Rethink the Village). While working with existing users may provide valuable learning about the user experience, it is hard to see how this achieves the aim of reducing social inequalities. Many acknowledged that reaching those previously unengaged was very time consuming and the strategy of working with users and existing groups was borne out of a need to provide the quantitative evidence of who takes part, to justify public investment. As a result, it was claimed that in some instances "the focus has been too much on the numbers and not on the content or trying to do some new activities" (Library staff, Democracy Baton). The desire to see increased percentage gains for cultural institutions is therefore argued to be counter-productive both to the process of engaging new people and to encouraging cultural change.

Where projects focused less on numbers there was good evidence of reaching new people. In Rethink the Village, participatory budgeting sometimes involved people going door to door, to engage people. Because people were asked for ideas to make things happen with the money to make them possible "we saw new faces and younger faces" (Public participant, Rethink the Village) than were normally involved in community associations and committees. While some argued that such processes were only feasible on very local initiatives others argued that this personal approach could be done in other ways, by any institution by just getting outside their four walls and talking to people on the street. In the Gellerup Film project, the facilitator spent time in the area getting to know people. For him, originally coming from the neighbourhood was key to his way in, and he argued it could never be as effective where a professional was brought in from outside of the community. But in other cases, professionals worked with local advocates who, by working as go betweens, quickly reached people that the facilitator could not have reached alone. This may be argued to be a more effective way of addressing the inequalities both socially and culturally in a place.

There was a clear sense from the cultural institutions interviewed that a shared process between professionals and community was the most effective mechanism for maintaining change through these processes. Problems arose where delivery was devolved to participants without any structure of support. In the Democracy Baton, where young people were left to their own devices, to deliver activities in the library they were generally less effective than where the young people came up with the ideas but were then mentored through delivery: "the magic happens if you go with them and if you support them" (Library staff, Democracy Baton). Similarly, in the Gellerup Film Project, the aim was to use long term mentoring to provide opportunities to not only find, but support the development of new cultural actors from more diverse communities. There were concerns, among professionals, about the dangers of de-professionalising sectors through participatory processes, where too much power was devolved to participants. For some of the artists interviewed it challenged the role of their creative vision in pushing people's boundaries and librarians questioned the trend in employing project managers to replace their specialism.

However, some public participants or those working in the more community based structures felt that the professional protectionism of the cultural sector was one of the greatest barriers to change and risk to the sustainability of learning from Aarhus 2017. There was also some evidence from those interviewed that the greatest barriers to change existed among those who defined themselves strongly with the professional identify of either librarian or artist.

The need for professional cultural leadership was challenged by some in the Culture House movement, which has been built on volunteering and amateurism for many years. Its strength was seen to be "local anchoring, local connections and ownership" (Culture House volunteer). Similarly, some of the people involved in Rethink the Village argued that village structures already existed to offer the support without the need for professional or artistic intervention. Institut for X felt their strength was in "keeping this undefined space….for people themselves to create content...people doing things without asking permissions, you know that's the biggest success" (Public participant, Institute for X). Lack of investment, rather than lack of professionalism were therefore argued to be the only limit to their activities. In the case of Odin Theatre, they described the process of "cultural exchange" between themselves as artists and the community within which they were working but said they preferred not to think about a divide between professionals and participants but rather to see everyone engaged in a process as bringing different competencies. However, many felt that the power relationships between professionals and amateurs remained problematic. There are thus a number of dilemmas embedded in participatory processes. A key element in this is that neither the term "participation" nor the term "culture" has a fixed meaning. Based on the rethinking theme developed in the bidding process of Aarhus 2017, a variety of different agents has been involved in participatory projects in which these negotiations are at stake. This means that the power relations and the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion are embedded both at a programme and project level in Aarhus 2017. How these negotiations are dealt with are key to the nature of any regional development. Furthermore, to determine the longer term impact of such approaches, it is necessary to look at the embedding of such approaches in policy strategies, which are considered in the next section.

How is Aarhus 2017 embedded in policy strategies in order to ensure longer term impacts?

Most of those interviewed from the projects, hoped that Aarhus 2017 would help make the case for local cultural provision, rather than centralising provision, as the original bid document acknowledged that most people "rarely visit culture outside their home town" (Davis 2011 pg. 90). The Libraries, Museums and Culture Houses, all saw their projects as pilots to rethink the range of activities they provided and by so doing help make the case for longer term investment. But there were also concerns that the more institutions expanded their role the more they were "treading on each other's toes" (said by both Library staff, Democracy Baton and Culture House volunteer) and becoming more similar.

Outside of the Aarhus 2017 initiative some places were experiencing the merger of libraries and culture houses, or museums and archives. Some saw this as a good thing, increasing collaboration and encouraging users to cross over between activities. Staff at Carte Blanche argued that in terms of product "the blending of arts forms" meant links between different structures was inevitable and multi-use spaces helped facilitate this. But for others there were concerns that the centralisation or merger of services was further reducing local provision in areas that were already under resourced. The Culture Houses in particular, historically run by volunteers, felt under threat. Many saw the absorption of their role by the municipalities who were creating new structures, with professional management and in some cases professional arts programmes. The local smaller culture houses, Institut for X and Gellerup all felt that "as soon as the municipality start investing in a big place, then they lose funding for the small places because the big places means that they're visible" (Public participant, RECcORD).

But significantly centralised spaces were said to attract less diverse audiences and did not allow local people to define the cultural offer for themselves, which is at odds both with Aarhus 2017's aspiration to rethink culture and the aims to reduce inequalities. One library acknowledged that although they had increased their overall numbers since they had centralised services and moved from their old building on an estate to a glossy new one in the heart of the shopping area

> "we used to have the young immigrants come in to hang out, they don't come anymore, it is just students doing their homework or parents with kids on a shopping break" (Library staff, Democracy Baton).

There was a widely-held perception that Aarhus 2017 had become too much about protecting the existing infrastructure, and "the big institutions making the case for why they should be invested in [rather than] any dialogue about whether funding should be redistributed to different types of organisations" (Culture House volunteer). As one person said

> "when I came to [this area] there was both a movie cinema and a theatre, and all kinds of different things…all of a sudden I realised there was 7000 people living here, more than 50% under 18 [and the cinema and theatre have gone] and there's only one youth centre. The balance is totally off" (Project manager, Gellerup Film Project)

Part of the problem was seen, by some interviewees, to be the fact that placing participation at the heart of Aarhus 2017 was driven more by the ECoC agenda than any national agenda in Denmark and as such it was uncertain whether this approach would be maintained beyond 2017. Each municipality had put money into Aarhus 2017 to make it a regional initiative and as a result politicians were active in ensuring that there was a return on their investment, locally. There was also some evidence of municipalities making more money available through participatory budgeting in response to their experiences with Rethink the Village. There was some support to maintain the regional networks that had been developed through many of the initiatives. This was seen to provide a mechanism to share learning and build capacity at a local level and between small organisations.

But is still too early to conclude anything about the longer-term impact of Aarhus 2017 on the regional development of the Central Denmark Region. However, it is possible to look at the political level and see how being part of Aarhus 2017 has changed the role of culture in regional development. A first indication that the role of culture has changed on a political level can be found in a survey distributed to all municipal politicians in the region by rethinkIMPACTS 2017 in December 2017. Of those who responded 43% of the politicians said that Aarhus 2017 has strengthened the role of culture in their own municipality and 57% stated that Aarhus 2017 has strengthened the cultural collaboration between the municipalities in the region. This is in line with the metro region way of thinking, one that is clearly strong among the politicians in the region. But the survey also indicates some scepticism towards the idea that the whole region will benefit from Aarhus 2017. Asked in a multiple-choice question which areas will benefit from Aarhus 2017 87% answered Aarhus City, 54% the other larger cities, and only 35% smaller cities and 26% the rural areas in the region. This clearly

indicates that there is a political understanding of the urban-rural tension and a feeling that this is not be addressed enough within the ECoC framework.

In supplementary interviews in four municipalities outside Aarhus participatory processes, defined as citizen engagement and public ownership and not as audience development in cultural institutions, were mentioned as important to ensure a better regional balance. But it was also recognized that this was prioritised more from the neo-liberal aspect of encouraging citizens to taken on responsibilities, previously of the state, because of lack of public funding.

Conclusion

This research has examined the claims of ECoC as a vehicle for regional development in cultural, social and economic terms, through an empirical study of the case of Aarhus. Its concern is not to measure the impact in any of these areas, but to understand the way that these concepts are articulated by a range of different actors in the process. By so doing it has challenged the notion that these multiple aims are complementary and rather suggests that they are at times in conflict with one another; the needs of the cultural sector for example at times being at odds with the needs of community actors. This supports the claims from existing theory that research needs to take a closer look at whose voices are heard in development processes. The 2017 programme has given the chance for new agents to be included and for established institutions to develop their approach towards a more participatory one. But despite the ambitions for both regional and cultural development laid out in the Aarhus 2017 bid it is clear from the interviews that many of the agendas articulated both by ECoC and Aarhus were either at odds with or not followed through by delivery agents.

Participation, in particular, was not high on the political agenda prior to Aarhus 2017 and its meaning shifted throughout the processes in response to both personnel at the Foundation and local self-definition within projects. So, while the decentralised structure of Aarhus 2017 provided a catalyst to allow experimental projects to happen and there is some evidence of development in the thinking both about culture and the region, this bespoke approach may also have a limiting effect on the strategic development potential for the whole region.

However new region wide collaborations developed as part of Aarhus 2017, have given both visibility and support to smaller regional institutions and have the potential to create the critical mass, or agglomeration effect talked of in the creative cities literature, at a more local level, with local infrastructure. But for this momentum to be maintained ongoing investment is required, rather than reliance on voluntary actors to meet the needs of their communities. But there is a lack of evidence of thinking, at a political level, about redistribution of investment across the region with municipalities stating that they aimed to recoup their investment rather than redress inequalities. Furthermore, while the evidence clearly suggests that culture has the greatest potential when it is delivered locally, rather than centralised, there are concerns that the ECoC could equally provide a vehicle to enhance the growth of the city of Aarhus, at the expense of the rest of the region.

While this paper does not suggest that a cultural initiative can affect what are global changes in depopulating of rural areas or growth of cities, despite ECoC's claims for its development potential, neither should the centralisation of culture through capitals of culture reinforce these trends. From the enthusiasm different agents have shown in their individual projects, perhaps Aarhus 2017's greatest contribution is in raising expectations in the region. The challenge is how to realise them post 2017. At the end of 2017 all municipalities in the region agreed on a continued collaboration in the years after the ECoC, which could be seen as a first step to ensure that culture will be a central element in regional development also in the years to come. But the approach to this is still being negotiated and the inherent dilemmas still needs to be addressed.

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