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RESEARCH PUBLICATION

Norwegian Theatre – a blind spot on cultural policy’s participatory agenda?

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ABSTRACT

Audience participation is a concept discussed across the areas of cultural policy, cultural management, aesthetic theory, and artistic practice. The starting point of this article is an interest in how cultural policy affects artistic practices, and an attempt to make this link visible. To do this I focus on audience participation in the theatre, in particular the Norwegian project Bergen Citizens’ Theatre (Bergen Borgerscene). In recent cultural policy theory, considerable attention is given to the concept of a participatory agenda in policymaking. Based on examples of a participatory agenda evidenced in several European large-scale cultural programs and funding guidelines, I discuss whether Bergen Citizens’ Theatre is an articulation of a participatory agenda in the national cultural policy of Norway, or rather a participatory blind spot in current policies. I direct my attention to the professional theatre, as this is where I see the biggest challenges to implementing a participatory agenda.

Keywords

Participatory agenda | audience participation | cultural policy | performing arts | theatre | Bergen Citizens’ Theatre

INTRODUCTION

Audience participation is becoming more widespread in theatre. This is manifest in performance strategies labelled as participatory, co-creative, interactive and immersive. Similar participatory strategies are at work in museums and across different digital media. In the literature on participation, this development is explained as either a part of a general participatory turn in society (Jenkins 2014; Kelty et al. 2015), a participatory agenda in cultural policy. (Kortbek

et al. 2016; Virolainen 2016; Sørensen 2016; Tomka 2013). Increasingly, critical voices in art and theatre theory link the emergence of participatory strategies in art and theatre to neo-liberalism and event culture (Bishop 2012; Harvie 2013; Alston 2016). The meaning and value pinned on the concept of participation is not consistent across these discursive fields. Even within individual countries' cultural policies, interpretative plurality can lead to participation meaning different things.

In the first section of this article, I explore how what in cultural policy research is referred to as a 'participatory agenda' is implemented in different European culture and arts projects as well as in cultural policies. A special issue of *The Nordic Journal of Cultural Policy* focuses on participation. In several articles the authors understand this agenda to be particularly concerned with outreach and democratization:

The core national policy papers present "participation" as a strategy for attracting more visitors and addressing them in new ways that invite them not only to visit, but also to contribute, co-create and cooperate. The agenda revises previous cultural policies as a means of "democratization", to "transform" both individuals and societies. (Kortbek et al. 2016)

The authors' starting context is Danish cultural policy, but increased focus on participation is common to all the Nordic countries. However, the expectations towards artists and cultural institutions are formulated differently in these countries' national policies. European and Nordic policies and projects, and the challenges of democratizing cultural life through an emphasis on participation, forms a background for me to discuss how the participatory agenda plays out in Norwegian cultural policies. I exemplify through the study of the theatre project Bergen Borgerscene (henceforth referred to as Bergen Citizens' Theatre).

As I hope to demonstrate, participatory theatre has developed in an institutional and political context, where political and aesthetic rationale and motivations abound and compete. How do these competing rationales affect theatre-makers and institutions? The objective of this article is to uncover how an inconsistent participatory agenda in current national Norwegian cultural policy leaves a blind spot in relation to professional theatre institutions and projects such as Bergen Citizens' Theatre. As a theatre project choosing to work with participatory strategies, it grapples with a cultural policy that rhetorically emphasizes democratization and cultural participation, but does not incentivize it. Uncovering this paradox could potentially help this and similar projects position themselves in regards to the cultural political discourse.

Theoretically, I draw primarily on current literature about cultural policy and participation, using the concept of cultural policy paradigms as an overarching theoretical framework (Bonet and Négrier 2018a). I focus mainly on cultural policy as a context for the development of participatory theatre practices, in

effect foregrounding economic and political drivers for change in artistic practices. Obviously, in a less materialist perspective, there are other contexts and driving forces that can be argued to be more intrinsic to the development of participatory practices in performing arts, for instance avant-garde performance and applied theatre practices dating back a century.

A participatory agenda

With the term 'participatory agenda' I am implying that participation is conceptualized as part of a political or an aesthetic program of action. Policy makers, theorists, theatres, artists, and other agents in the cultural sphere, all take part in this conceptualization process. One of the reasons the concept may have gained such traction is that participation has a legitimating function across discourses, because it carries positive connotations of democratic ideals valued in our time. (Kelty et al. 2015: 475). Better access to and wider participation in culture is a priority in European cultural policy, as mentioned in the European Ministers of Culture (Council of the European Union) work plan on culture 2011-2014 (2010: C352-353; see also Tomka 2013). According to Sabine Saurugger (2010: 471) the concept of participatory democracy has developed gradually to become an important political norm within the EU since the 1990's. It has "imposed itself on an equal footing with representative democracy". However, participatory democracy is a norm that is interpreted differently among 'norm entrepreneurs' who choose different strategies in relation to it. Saurugger (2010: 489) writes that, "[T]hus the construction of the democratic standard – or the 'participatory imperative' – in the EU is a fact. The implementation, however, remains partial and leaves large room for maneuver for the actors concerned to play their roles." In other words, the interpretation and following implementation of participation in concrete policies varies among different actors, according to their interests and positions. This interpretative flexibility is one of three central lines of argument in this article.

A second argumentative strand is the legitimizing power embedded in the participation idiom. As information researcher Casper Hvenegaard Rasmussen (2015: 3) points out, audience participation is a 'buzzword' in the cultural-political discourse and is often mentioned as a solution to many of the problems facing cultural institutions, from libraries and theatres to museums. Such problems could for instance be problems of legitimacy stemming from decreasing audience numbers or lack of diversity, both in the audience population and in the artistic content presented. However, recurring issues in the discourse on audience participation relates not only to the perceived democratic potential of audience participation, but also to criticism towards the unrealistic expectations of participation to create agency, as well as community and civic responsibility among participants. Many projects labelled participatory theatre offer very limited agency to the audience, and function more as a legitimization of institutions or government bodies. (Jancovich 2011; Walmsley 2013). In the following discussion, I choose to bracket the discussion of the efficacy of participatory strategies as an instrument to solve societal

problems. I do this in order to direct my attention to how a ‘participatory agenda’ legitimizes, influences, and fosters ‘new’ artistic and institutional practices, but also creates new dilemmas for the artists and institutions – particularly in terms of aesthetic valuation and professionalism.

Consequently, my third interest is the effect a participatory agenda in cultural policy might have on established cultural hierarchies. My exploration of the challenges facing Bergen Citizens’ Theatre, that stem from ingrown institutional and cultural structures, is a way to questions such an effect. This theatre project is co-produced by The National Stage, Bergen, (henceforth DNS, the Norwegian abbreviation) recruiting selected members of a local community to perform as ‘themselves’ in a performance based on stories from their own lives. As in similar citizens’ theatre projects,¹ theatre work with non-professional performers is presented in a theatre contextualized as professional artistic work, and this feature distinguishes it from work squarely framed as amateur performance. Examples of state- and regional theatre institutions organizing activities for, and with non-professionals, are initiatives such as Kilden dialog in Kristiansand², Multi Norske³ and Den Mangfaldige scenen⁴ (Multi Norwegian and The stage for diversity) both affiliated with Det Norske Teatret (The Norwegian Theatre) in Oslo. These projects fall more clearly in the category of an outreach and competency development strategy than citizens’ theatre projects do, at least rhetorically. The point here is not to reinforce a hierarchy, but to explore how participatory practices like Bergen Citizens’ Theatre can exist within an institutional, artistic and cultural-political logic specific to the professional theatre field in which participatory practices are not the norm. I have chosen to look at this particular project because DNS is one of the four national theatre institutions (five counting the touring theatre, Riksteatret) in Norway. As Røyseng (2007: 89) points out, these institutions are central points of reference in the Norwegian theatre field in general. Furthermore, while Bergen Citizens’ Theatre, seemingly, is an asset to DNS, it does not have a clear place within the institution; something I propose is related to the cultural-political blind spot that I am exploring here.

Methodology

I take an interpretative research approach in my reading of policy documents, policy overviews, application guidelines as well as scholarly articles from different countries on cultural policy, audience building, and participation. This methodology is inspired by discourse analysis as unpacked by the professor of political science Frank Fischer (2003). I have looked for traces of a participatory agenda by assembling a number of different types of texts and policy examples as empirical material. By understanding theories about and policy on participa-

1. In Norway both the regional theatre Sogn og Fjordane teater and Det Norske Teatret have created performances that resemble Bergen Citizens’ Theatre’s projects in 2018.
2. <https://www.kilden.com/avdelinger/kilden-dialog/?lang=en> website accessed 1.11.2018
3. <http://multinorske.no/om-multinorske> website accessed 1.11.2018
4. <https://www.mangfaldige.no/> website accessed 1.11.2018

tion as a discourse, it is possible to inquire into how different stakeholders, such as policy makers, theatre institutions, and artists, interpret and act on this discourse, and what might keep them from embracing a participatory agenda.

In addition to the aforementioned empirical material, interviews with five strategically placed experts were conducted during the fall of 2018. Selected by virtue of their particular position in the Norwegian cultural field, they are easy to identify. Thus, with their explicit consent, the choice was made to not anonymize them. These informants are Jørgen Knudsen, currently the performing arts advisor in the Norwegian Arts Council; Åshild Andrea Brekke, previously a senior advisor on museum development in the Norwegian Arts Council, currently at the Agency for Cultural Affairs in the City of Oslo; and Ingrid Handeland, the general manager of the NGO Audiences Norway (Norsk Publikumsutvikling/NPU). For the study of Bergen Citizens’ Theatre, the empirical material consists of interviews with the director and producer Vibeke Flesland Havre, and the current artistic director of The National Stage, Bergen, Agnete Haaland, in addition to press material such as interviews and reviews. All informants have had the opportunity to approve quotes and references to their statements.

Theoretical concepts

The role assigned to audiences in the theatre has been an ever-changing one, both in the history of the theatre and in cultural politics. Cultural researchers Lluís Bonet and Emmanuel Négrier (2018b: 64-73) consider the political implications and different interpretations of the place of the audience, describing the four distinct cultural policy paradigms: the ‘paradigm of excellence’, the ‘paradigm of cultural democratization’, the ‘paradigm of creative economy’, and the ‘paradigm of cultural democracy’. These paradigms align historically with changing emphasis in European and Norwegian cultural political discourse and politics (Mangset and Hylland 2017; Røyseng 2007), but it is important to note that one paradigm does not replace another as in Kuhn’s theory of science. Rather, they partially overlap, and can exist simultaneously in the same policy program. In Norway, the paradigm of excellence and cultural democratization are visibly present in the aim of ‘reaching the whole population with theatre of high quality’, a central part of Norwegian cultural policy on theatre since 1935. (Røyseng 2007: 114; Mangset and Hylland 2017: 40-41) However, all these paradigms can be found in Norwegian cultural policy, and present different forms of justification for public support for the theatre. In the following, I will use them to contextualize and discuss the examples of policies, programs and projects that form the empirical base of this article.

I also rely on Nico Carpentier’s (2015) distinction between ‘access’ and ‘participation’. Carpentier’s self-confessed narrow political definition of participation is determined by the influence on decision-making. Accordingly, a participatory theatre audience involved in the production of performances, for instance as curators or artists, can be seen as a move towards a paradigm of cul-

tural democracy. A substantial focus in cultural policy revolves around participation in the form of ‘access’, and focuses on the audience as ‘users’ and ‘non-users’ of cultural institutions and activities. The underlying objective concerning participation in this interpretation is how to increase audience numbers, particularly among children and young people, minority groups, and the economically marginalized. Recruiting new user groups does not however imply a movement towards increased cultural democracy, but involving them in decision-making may, at least temporarily. Distinguishing between participation and access in my research is useful since, in cultural political discourse in particular, the two are often conflated.

There are two ideas germane to the discourse on participation that are also implicit in this article and thus should be acknowledged: First, the critique of the idea that traditional theatre audiences are passive, an active-passive dichotomy deconstructed by Jacques Rancière (2009) in the essay *The Emancipated Spectator*. Second, the assertion that the audience can be developed through schemes of active participation. This has been criticized as a paternalistic idea that views culture and arts as a civilizing force. (See for instance Walmsley in Bonet and Négrier 2018a; or Mangset and Hylland 2017) I will not reiterate these arguments, as this critique is broadly accepted as an important contribution to the discourse on audience and participation because it demonstrates the complexity of the concept of participation. The criticism points to the need to look at how audience participation actually figures in concrete projects and cultural policy, rather than generalizing its potential from totalizing and perhaps unrealistic concepts of participation. This article aims to fill such a need.

Before continuing, a note on translation and concepts: I have translated text passages in the Scandinavian languages to English, providing the original in the notes – apart from interview material, which has been approved by the informants. Translated English titles and names of reports, organizations, and projects are in parentheses at the first mention. In the Danish and Norwegian green and white papers and reports that I refer to, I translate ‘brugerinn-dragelse’ as ‘user involvement’, and ‘medvirkning’ as ‘participation’. In Danish and Norwegian, both terms are more specific than the more general English term ‘participation’. However, despite this, I have chosen to use the concept of ‘participation’, firstly because it is the blanket term used in the international discourse and, secondly, because the concepts’ rhetorical and political implications are contested, both from a cultural policy point of view and from an aesthetic-philosophical perspective. Consequently, the concept of participation is a productive discursive starting point for an analysis of both Norwegian cultural policy and theatre practices.

A PARTICIPATORY AGENDA, EXAMPLES FROM EUROPE

The EU working group experts report, *European Agenda for Culture. Work Plan for Culture 2011-2014* (OMC, 2012), place participation as one of the pri-

mary goals of European cultural policy. However, because of a lack of documentation, conducting a quantitative and comparative overview of manifestations of this participatory agenda in cultural and institutional practice is complicated. Nevertheless, there are descriptions of many projects in reports such as *Breaking the Fourth Wall: Proactive Audiences in the Performing Arts* (Bonet and Négrier 2018a), the two Danish ‘Reach Out Reports’, commissioned by the Danish Ministry of Culture. (Kulturministeriet 2008; 2012) There are, as well, many research papers that discuss participation and cultural policy: as mentioned earlier, the Nordic Journal of Cultural policy dedicated a special issue that focused on the participatory agenda (No. 01/2016). Green and white papers, along with guidelines that national Arts Councils and Ministries of Culture use to communicate with artists and institutions, reveal how a participatory agenda is sought to be implemented. The following body of examples shows how a participatory agenda figures in the cultural policy of several European countries and foregrounds some of the central issues in current cultural political research on participation. I will frame these examples within the conceptual paradigms of cultural excellence, cultural democratization, creative economy, and cultural democracy, as described in my introduction.

Competing notions of participation

In order to explore, document and investigate a number of participatory and co-creative strategies, the EU’s Creative Europe co-funded project platform, BeSpectACTive!, unites a relatively large number of partners⁵, such as theatre and art institutions and festivals together with academic and research institutions: “BeSpectACTive! is a European project based on audience development, involving some of the most innovative European organizations working on active spectatorship in contemporary performing arts. Its members are European festivals, theatres, universities and a research center.”⁶ This quote presents the project on its website. The project has four ‘intervention strategies’: “creative residencies to produce performing arts co-productions, participatory programming among different groups of spectators, the organization of a theatre festival for young people by young people, and a web platform for specific interactive performances”. (Bonet and Négrier 2018b: 67) Common threads here are the understanding of the audience as stakeholders and placing a large emphasis on engaging them actively in decision-making – what Bonet and Négrier call ‘proactive participation’. Bonet and Négrier (Ibid. 65) who are responsible for the research dimension of the project also describe BeSpectACTive! as action research. By emphasizing ‘active spectatorship’ and ‘pro-

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5. Cultural organisations LIFT Festival (UK), Kulturno Drustvo B-51 (Slovenia), Capotrave / Kilowatt Festival (Italy), Tanec Praha (Czech republic), Bakelit Multi Art Center (Hungary), York Theatre Royal (UK), Radu Stanca (Romania) and Domino Udruge (Kroatia). 3 research centers – Universitat de Barcelona (Spain), Université de Montpellier (France) and Fondazione Fitzcarraldo (Italy)
 6. <http://www.bespectactive.eu/> accessed 2.11.2018. The text has since been slightly updated.

active participation' as central to BeSpectACTive!, Bonet and Négrier (Ibid. 69-70) seem to place the intentions of the platform in the paradigm of cultural democracy – while, at the same time, self-reflexively questioning the capacity of the project, partner institutions, and political strategies to impose participation and the ideals of a single paradigm on audiences and artists. Discrepancies described between intention and actions are, however, not unique to this project.

The Aarhus 2017 – European Capital of Culture is another example of competing notions of what a participatory agenda should entail. According to the cultural researchers Leila Jancovich and Louise Ejgod Hansen (2018: 3), Aarhus 2017, in the years leading up to 2017, aimed to be a catalyst for regional cultural, social, and economic development, strategically implementing participatory strategies both in project development and planning. These were also the aims in the cultural events themselves. The researchers point to tensions stemming from the attempt to balance many different goals, finding that the motivation for many of the cultural organizations taking part was, in many cases, “necessity rather than personal choice”. This originated from the need both to “address the changing patterns of cultural participation (...) but also, for those in receipt of subsidy, the increasing need to justify public investment”. (Ibid. 6) The researchers also point out that the understanding of participation varied greatly between the organizations and stakeholders, from an audience-building quantitative approach on the one hand to participatory decision-making on the other hand. This seems to have shifted over time, from the latter approach being more important in the planning process, to a ‘redefinition’ towards a more reception-oriented understanding in the implementation phase of the project. (Ibid. 7-8) Importantly, they conclude that the needs of the cultural sector at times was at odds with the needs of the community actors. (Ibid. 12) What both Bonet and Négrier and Jancovich and Hansen point out is that participation is a strong legitimation for cultural agents, but that overlapping and competing cultural paradigms embedded in the sector complicates the implementation of a participatory agenda and creates tension among stakeholders.

Yet, another Danish example, demonstrates how policy-makers in the Danish Ministry of Culture, could set the agenda and stimulate practice through earmarking funds. The Danish Ministry of Culture funded ‘Reach Out’, a program for audience involvement (brugerinndragelse) and innovation, supporting 17 projects that involve over 70 Danish institutions (Kulturministeriet 2012: 6). Launching the program was an overview of 29 projects that exemplified different Danish cultural institutions’ practices of participatory projects and audience research projects. Entitled *Reach Out – Inspiration til brugerinndragelse og innovation i kulturens verden* (Reach Out – Inspiration for User Involvement and Innovation in the World of Culture) (Kulturministeriet 2008) the motivation was to inspire Danish cultural institutions and agents that are interested in engaging in audience participation/user-involvement and user-driven innovation in the cultural sector. Three reasons pertaining to the importance of user involvement are highlighted: attracting new groups of users, the

wish to exploit an experience-economic potential, and to develop the quality of the artistic product or cultural competency. (Ibid. 9) The project was managed by Center for Kultur- og Oplevelsesøkonomi (Center for Culture- and Experience Economy) which wrote the report *Reach Out Inspirationskatalog. Naviger I Brugerinndragelse og Brugerdrevet Innovation* (Reach Out Inspiration Catalogue. Navigate in User-Involvement and User-driven Innovation) (Kulturministeriet 2012). Here, they sum up experiences and recommendations from the project. The Reach Out-reports showcase different types of projects that, with social, economic and quality-oriented aims, are coherent with both the paradigm of excellence, cultural democratization, creative economy, and the paradigm of cultural democracy. As such, they display how malleable the concept of participation is in cultural policy.

Prescriptive participation

Both BeSpectACTtive!, Aarhus 2017, and Reach Out are large-scale programs made possible by EU, national/state, and regional money, in different combinations. Establishing partnerships and funding opportunities that interested organizations can join or apply to is just one way of stimulating creation of participatory projects. A more general strategy to implement a participatory agenda is through different countries' ministries of culture or arts councils' communication with institutions and artists – through official policy documents such as green or white papers. However, more direct than both these approaches would be funding requirements that include expectations of participatory strategies on the part of institutions or artists, strategies they must implement in order to secure funding for their artistic projects. Such approaches vary among countries. In Norway, for instance, dialogue is formalized in annual grant letters to institutions, as well as in guidelines and funding application forms. The requirement to focus on audiences in funding applications ranges from the requirement to describe how one plans to communicate or market a project on the one hand, to requiring artists to describe a participatory element in their projects in a separate section of the application forms on the other hand. In Flemish arts grants, the latter was implemented with the so-called participation decree. The Flemish participation decree places involvement of the target group and a process-based approach on the same level as the artistic result. It requires "explicit focus on making art accessible and actively involving various audiences in art".⁷

While the Flemish participation decree articulates a clear participatory agenda representing a 'cultural democracy' paradigm, most other guidelines I have looked at encourage the applicants to consider target groups, relevance,

7. <https://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/belgium.php?aid=52> accessed 31.10.2018 Participation is one of several 'functions' that the subsidy types, project subsidy, operating subsidy and subsidy for art institutions, should have in the Flemish grant schemes, and it is as important as the other four explicit functions development, production, presentation, and reflection. See visualization: https://prezi.com/n_f7fhbykqjn/the-arts-flemish-parliament-act/ accessed 12.11.2018

engagement of the audience, and access, without specifically mentioning participatory strategies. Both the Danish guidelines for ‘Statens kunstfond’ (National Arts Fund) project funding for performing arts projects for children, young people and adults⁸; the British Arts Council’s general guidelines⁹; and the Swedish Arts Council¹⁰ ask applicants to consider and state how the artist or company plan to work with audience development. They focus respectively on relevance, public engagement, and equality and diversity issues.

What do expectations and requirements to work on audience development, diversity questions, and access for marginalized groups entail for independent artists, performing arts companies and theatres? Because the type of funding schemes whose guidelines I describe above are primarily project-based, most artists and theatre companies do not have resources to work consistently on marketing or audience-building. Small institutions face a similar challenge as resources are often tied to production and competition for attention is fierce. Furthermore, the issues at stake here, for instance those concerning diversity and social marginalization, are deep-rooted systemic issues that have persisted over decades. The expectations that artists and cultural institutions should be responsible for fixing social problems is under fire in art and theatre theory, criticized as stemming from neo-liberalist politics (Bishop 2012; Harvie 2013; Alston 2016). Such criticism is reiterated and elaborated upon in cultural policy research. (Sørensen 2016; Bonet and Négrier 2018a) When artists and theatres are required to formulate a concrete social agenda, participatory work may legitimate an artistic practice. Participatory strategies can arguably engage directly with audiences, giving them a greater agency, strengthening civic responsibility and a feeling of community, while also representing artistic innovation. Thus, even when participation and co-creation is not mentioned as explicitly as in the Flemish grant scheme, the language of grant schemes and application forms can have a prescriptive aesthetic function, particularly when funding is scarce.

As Kawashima (2006:60) points out: “[P]rojects name themselves according to the availability of funds”. When many artists and companies respond to a rhetoric that emphasizes participation or when they adapt to specific requirements, this has consequences over time. As Bonét and Négrier (2018a: 20) point out: “...the simple fact of having to comply with a policy-driven program helps to spread the new strategy and to change habits of artistic mediation”. In other words, cultural policies affect artists and institutions on many levels. Indirectly, by adopting the rhetoric and argumentation found in green and white papers, or official reports. Tailoring projects to fit funding requirements

8. Danish guidelines: <https://www.kunst.dk/kunststoette/puljestamside/tilskud/tilskud-til-scenekunst-for-boern-unge-og-voksne/> accessed 22.08.2018

9. See pages 31-36 in https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/How_to_apply_guidance_under15k_Project_Grants_24052018_0.pdf accessed online 22.08.2018.

10. Swedish guidelines: http://www.kulturradet.se/Documents/Onlineblanketter/A161_V07_arb_matrl.pdf accessed 31.10.2018

and specific programs is a more direct response. The success of an artist or a company in regard to funding can correlate with the ability to translate cultural political aims into a project that also delivers on criteria that more integral to the arts discourse, for instance ideals like artistic quality, criticality, and formal experimentation.

One example is the well-documented emergence of participatory immersive theatre in the UK (see for instance Alston 2016; Frieze 2016; Machon 2013). This development coincided with British cultural policy increasingly focusing on furthering cultural participation (Kawashima 2006). However, participation has become a label applied to projects with varying audience agency. It is not a given consequence that participatory strategies shifts theatre towards a paradigm of cultural democracy. They may just as well represent an aesthetic and formal agenda, rather than a political one.

Above, I have endeavored to show how cultural policies may influence and support growth of participatory practices in performing arts, implementing a participatory agenda through large-scale projects and the requirements and expectations embedded in funding schemes. The prescriptive aspect of cultural policies can potentially have significant aesthetic consequences if enough artists and institutions shift towards participatory strategies to legitimate their work. In the following chapter, I discuss what is at stake for a Norwegian theatre project that aesthetically and politically represents a discourse on participation that is largely missing from Norwegian cultural policy in regard to professional theatre.

BERGEN CITIZENS' THEATRE IN AN INCONSISTENT PARTICIPATORY AGENDA

In Norway, there are several historical examples of theatre institutions and artists who, in the politically engaged theatre and art of the 1960-70's, took an interest in working more closely with people in their local communities. The avant-garde art collective, Group 66, in Bergen hosted happenings that, inspired by Danish situationists Jens Jørgen Thorsen's and Jørgen Nash's coritus concept, involved the audience in performative actions. (Arntzen 2011) The report *Thalias utpost eller lokalsamfunnets spel?: norsk regionalteaterpolitikk 1970-93* (Thalias outpost. Norwegian regional theatre politics 1970-93: Arnestad et al. 1995) describes how the, then, newly established regional theatres in the 1970's, such as Teatret Vårt in Molde and Hålogaland teater in Tromsø, followed a collective organizational model and were meant to collaborate with local amateur theatre groups alongside the regular productions. Theatre workshops (teaterverksteder) established in several places in Norway in the 1980's took a more direct participatory approach, intending to further individual cultural activity by hiring professional artists to work with amateurs. This rise of alternative production models was possible through the cultural-political focus on regional development of arts and culture's infrastructure and cultural democracy. However, the 1990's saw an aesthetic return to work that

closed around itself, a streamlining of organizational models, and an increased focus on professionalism as a criteria for state funding. (Arnestad et al. 1995)

Bergen Citizens' Theatre is an ongoing project that shares some affinities with these historical precursors although, aesthetically, it is not a question of an unbroken tradition, but rather a discontinuous one (Watson 2017). The initial cultural political context for this project was the emphasis that Cultural Minister (2009-2012) Anniken Huitfeldt placed on audience-building, diversity, and inclusion. This emphasis is expressed in policy documents such as the white paper *Kultur, inkludering og deltaking* (Culture, inclusion, and participation, Kulturdepartementet, 2011) and the Norwegian Official report '*Kulturutredningen, 2014*' (Kulturdepartementet 2013).

Bergen Citizens' Theatre was originally initiated by Bergen International Festival (Festspillene i Bergen) which was inspired by the 'Bürgerbühne'¹¹ established by Staatsschauspiel Dresden, as well as by Danish counterparts in Århus¹² (2014-2016) and Ålborg theatre¹³ (2013–), all based on the involvement of local citizens. "Citizens of all ages perform in professional performances in different casts: as representatives of social groups, as interpreters of dramatic characters, as experts of the everyday, or as the role of themselves." (My translation, Hintz 2014: 58) While community theatre traditionally has involved an outreach-model, in which the theatre work has taken place in local communities, citizens' theatre has a centralized, representational logic that brings chosen citizens out of their communities and onto the public theatre stage.

Initially named The People's Festival Stage (Folkets festspillscene), Bergen Citizens' Theatre was co-produced and performed at The National Stage, Bergen (DNS), one of the four national theatre institutions¹⁴ in Norway. Led by the theatre-maker and actor Vibeke Flesland Havre, the first two productions, *Det var en gang et menneske* (Once upon a human being, 2015) and *En plass i solen* (A place in the sun, 2016), were an audience success and received mostly favorable reviews and positive media attention. However, because Bergen International Festival is primarily a programming rather than a producing festival, it pulled out its funding after producing the two first performances. Flesland Havre then renamed the project Bergen Citizens' Theatre and took on the financial responsibility, while continuing the artistic direction of the project as before. She also continued the collaboration with DNS, and in 2017 the third production, *Lykkeliv* (*Happy life*), premiered with a cast of young people between the age of 16-20. The production was re-staged as part of the theatre's autumn season in 2018. DNS is continuing to co-produce the next production of Bergen Citizens' Theatre with a new premiere in May 2019, during the Bergen International festival. This time the theatre will hire Flesland Havre as a director, and the project will

11. <https://www.staatsschauspiel-dresden.de/buergerbuehne/>

12. <https://www.aarhusteatet.dk/om-teatret/at-borger/>

13. <https://aalborgteater.dk/borgerscenen/>

14. The others are The Norwegian Theatre, The National Theatre and The Norwegian Opera and Ballet

take place on the same footing as the other performances. Even though DNS is investing more resources and taking increasing responsibility concerning production and marketing, the project is not fully institutionally implemented as a part of the regular activities of DNS: Flesland Havre remains artistically and financially responsible for the production.

This vaguely defined institutional ownership sets it apart from other citizen theatres, for example the City theatre of Aalborg in Denmark that has had annual citizen theatre projects since the theatre season 2013/2014. The even larger and longer running citizen theatre in Dresden produces five repertory performances per season, and organizes many theatre clubs. (Basteri 2016: 79-80) Artistic director of DNS, Agnete Haaland, describes the co-productions as additions to the regular program, stressing that she sees the primary responsibility of the theatre to produce performances with their ensemble of professional actors. "The project is a way of including new groups in the theatre. But, it is a touchy balance, as we receive funding to produce professional theatre. Although it could be artistically and politically possible to shift production towards greater participation, what would the actors do?" (Berg and Haaland 2018) This point is reflected in the fact that all the productions have been staged on the small stage of DNS, with a very limited audience space, and without the full resources of projects initiated by the theatre itself. In other words, the project's position has been somewhat marginalized within the institution. Haaland says that there has not been any resistance internally in the institution, adding that there might have been, had it replaced something else. When the leadership of DNS apparently views the project as being in potential conflict with the mission of the theatre, it is problematic to read the project as a part of an institutional development that shifts towards cultural democracy.

Bergen Citizens' Theatre also faces marginalization within the cultural hierarchy of arts funding. In addition to the co-production with DNS, *Lykkeliv* was funded primarily by regional, municipal, and private funding bodies. Applications to the Norwegian Arts Council project funding, which arguably is the most prestigious and substantial funding for independent performing arts production, have been turned down. In Flesland Havre's opinion, the reason was that the Arts Council did not define the project as art. "As soon as there are non-actors on stage, people think it is amateur theatre, but it is an aesthetic choice. I am interested in the raw and unpolished, the vulnerable and genuine that they can present". (Berg and Flesland Havre 2018) Performing arts consultant Jørgen Knudsen in the Arts Council, states that there are no clear principles against involving amateurs through participatory or co-creative theatre practices, but the artistic motivation to do so must be made clear. In addition, amateur-theatre projects are not passed on to the committees that evaluate applications and award grants. (Berg and Knudsen 2018)

In projects that involve a high degree of audience participation, the focus shifts from product to process in a way that can affect how we understand artistic quality. In a paradigm of cultural excellence, artistic quality is a central legiti-

mating factor for traditional high-art institutions – which the institutions, audiences, critics, artists and politicians variably uphold. Citizen theatre projects lean heavily on the authenticity of the non-professional performers, the ‘dramatic’ effect stemming from the fact that the performers tell their own stories without acting. Nevertheless, projects like Bergen Citizens’ Theatre have a professional director, dramaturg, scriptwriter, set and costume design, music and lighting. Flesland Havre is involved in the project from start to finish, leading the storytelling workshops, selecting performers, developing a script, and instructing the performers. In medias’ coverage of the projects’ performances much emphasis has been placed on the professional framework, reflecting Flesland Havre’s central role as a driving force in the project, but also what is valued in the cultural hierarchy. Foregrounding the artistic and professional dimension of a project like Bergen Citizens’ Theatre is a way of stressing that the performance is, indeed, art. The challenge is to convince the audience, critics, funding bodies, and the institution of the same.

A value system that builds on a distinction between professional and amateur artistic expression is a challenge for participatory and co-creative practices, as one of their primary artistic features is blurring these boundaries. Bergen Citizens’ Theatre’s participatory strategies to involve a non-professional cast seems to weaken its artistic legitimacy inside the institution and in regards to the Arts Council and the interviews suggest that this could be due to a paradigm of cultural excellence at the basis of both DNS’ and the funding structure’s approach to the project.

Between the intrinsic and the instrumental

Bergen Citizens’ Theatre’s stated aims are audience building, social inclusion, and artistic innovation, but how do these interplay? Although she appreciates the artistic dimension in the project, artistic director Agnete Haaland acknowledges that the original motivation behind the collaboration was to reach new audience groups through the participation of the non-professional actors, thus creating interest in DNS among the participants and their network. Seeing the project as a way to promote access to the theatre connects it to the cultural political paradigm of cultural democratization. Flesland Havre does not have a problem with this type of institutional motivation, even though she experiences that many artist colleagues consider audience development a commercialization.

If I create a performance, I want as many people as possible to experience it. This project challenges the existing audience’s idea of what theatre is and what theatre can be. At the same time new audiences have the chance to experience the magic of the theatre. These are performances that make you feel a sense of belonging, you can relate to them; it is about you. (*Berg and Flesland Havre 2018*)

Flesland Havre also points out that some citizen theatre projects are created to promote social inclusion. She is conscious of this dimension in her own work,

but her interest lies in the artistic project. Neither Flesland Havre or Haaland mention resources that have been allocated to follow up the social inclusion aims of the project. Haaland admits that the theatre has not been good enough at following up the meeting points the project has given the theatre. This leaves the impression of a rather uncertain outcome for these two aims.

However, participatory theatre projects are not only a response to a participatory agenda in cultural policy; many artists would probably strongly distance themselves from instrumental goals like audience-building and social inclusion, highlighting instead participatory strategies as intrinsic to an aesthetic discourse. As in all art, participatory theatre thematically and formally reflects broader cultural, political and social turns and, not least, artistic development. It would be both cynical and reductive to wholly ignore artistic motivations that artists such as Flesland Havre might have to explore participatory strategies of theatre-making. Bergen Citizens' Theatre's claims to artistic innovation reference a revitalized tradition of documentary and verbatim theatre that sources its material from interviews, local histories, and official documents, and in contemporary theatre what is often referred to as 'reality theatre' – emphasizing biographical, personal histories. (Byrdal Jørgensen 2014: 65-66)

A well-known exponent of this trend is the internationally successful German theatre company Rimini Protokoll. In a long string of performances, they have replaced actors with ordinary people from different population groups or professions, casting them as so-called 'experts of the everyday', not as amateur actors. (Dreyse and Malzacher 2008: 9) As such, the performances do not depend on the performers' ability to successfully represent a fictional or real character, but on authenticity, presence, and possible audience identification. A democratic participation that promotes social inclusion, community building and other instrumental goals is not Rimini Protokoll's own agenda, as opposed to Bergen Citizens' Theatre. The latter's aesthetic strategies center around the participants' stories, and the innovation lies primarily in introducing the reality-producing participants in a theatre context that traditionally produces symbolic representation. However, this is no longer particularly innovative outside of the specific institutional context of DNS. Rimini Protokoll's consistent focus is on pushing the boundaries of the theatrical form, and as such, the company places itself more narrowly in an aesthetic discourse and tradition. (Berg 2018) As a consequence, they have secured an artistic legitimacy that Bergen Citizens' Theatre seem to struggle with attaining.

Participatory projects as Bergen Citizens' Theatre can be affected on different levels by the lack of conceptual consistency surrounding 'participation' in cultural policy, in competing cultural political paradigms, and in a polarized arts discourse. With its triangulated goal the project has garnered media and audience attention for its way of including new participants, and giving way to new voices – by building on individual stories. These positive qualities have given a certain status and capital, both morally, politically and aesthetically, both for the artists behind the project and DNS. However, the very same features pigeon-

hole the project as an amateur production with uncertain artistic quality. While the project is intended to reach out to new audiences and take social responsibility, it is also seen as a project to the side of both the theatre's and the Arts Council's core agendas. The Arts Council, Ministry of Culture, regional funding bodies, local audiences, critics, and employees at the theatre, are all likely to operate with different, perhaps conflicting, agendas and value criteria. Participatory strategies activate expectations from very diverse stakeholders and while features of the project can be strategically downplayed, or emphasized to fit into both changing cultural political agendas and passing trends in the arts discourse, this requires a balancing act that, in the case of Bergen Citizens' theatre, seems only partially successful. Lack of substantial support required to balance and fulfill their ambitious aims seems to result in a quite precarious position, particularly in terms of funding and institutional embeddedness.

Participatory agenda in Norwegian cultural policy

Bergen Citizens' Theatre has, as outlined above, several European counterparts. Together, they can be understood as artistic and institutional response to a set of specific problems in the cultural sector. In Norway, as in other European countries, there is increasing concern about dwindling audience attendance, aging audiences, lack of diversity in the existing audience, dependency on public funding, and the need for cultural institutions to address these challenges to their legitimacy. (Mangset and Hylland 2017; Tepfers et al. 2018; Kulturdepartementet 2013) There is a general and long-standing formulation of cultural participation in specific policy areas such as the voluntary sector and the children and youth sector – where participation is emphasized most strongly. The Norwegian cultural policy researchers Haugsevje, Hylland and Stavrum (2016: 80) write: “The value of cultural participation seems nearly indisputable, and this pertains particularly to participation among children and young people”. In the national cultural policy documents I have examined, audience participation is not a consistently defined concept in descriptions and goals for institutional practices in the professional arts and culture, neither in artistic, organizational, or marketing strategies. An exception is the museum sector, in which participation has been on the agenda of the Norwegian Arts Council (formerly ABM-utvikling) ever since a pilot project addressed this issue in its report, subtitled *Participation in the archive, library and museum sector*. (Brekke 2010) Its findings were highlighted in the white paper *Culture, inclusion and participation*, mentioned earlier. (Kulturdepartementet 2011) Furthermore, the Ministry of Culture commissioned the report *Fremtidens kultur i et brukerperspektiv*, (Culture of the future in a user perspective) (Tepfers et al. 2018) that, among other topics, addresses the participation of ‘users’ in the voluntary sector and in digital media. Both BeSpectACTive! and ReachOut are referenced, but the report finds that participation is a blind spot for the Norwegian cultural field.

Nevertheless, the focus on audience development, i.e. participation understood as access, has been strong. The previous Norwegian government funded the organization Audience Development Norway, and the message to the theatre

institutions has quite consistently stressed the importance of increasing the income side. (Røyseng 2007; Kleppe 2018) Even though the recent white paper *Kulturens kraft – Kulturpolitikk for framtida* (The power of culture – A culture policy for the future) (Kulturdepartementet 2018) strongly emphasizes the role of culture and art in democratic societies a participatory agenda is not apparent outside of the aforementioned sectors. In my view, a generalized and noncommittal political rhetoric on cultural participation directly informs the challenging position of Bergen Citizens’ Theatre.

I propose four different explanations to what I perceive as an inconsistent policy on participation in the performing arts and in national cultural policy in Norway. They relate to autonomy, arms-length principle, economy and funding structures, and institutional organizational models and goals. As Rasmussen (2015: 98) points out, user involvement can find legitimacy among different cultural-political actors because different forms of legitimation overlap in the participatory agenda. He continues: “This is probably the reason that involvement of users has become so popular in cultural institutions as well as in the overarching cultural policy”. (My translation) In contrast, among cultural institutions and in cultural policy in Norway, legitimations for arts and culture seem to compete in such a way that emphasis on innovation, social inclusion or audience-building threatens artistic legitimacy. In the cultural discourse in Norway, artistic autonomy has a stronger position than instrumental and commercial considerations. (Kleppe 2018; Røyseng 2007) In a comparative study of Norway, England, and the Netherlands, Norwegian cultural researcher Bård Kleppe found the following:

Paradoxically, in the social democratic country of Norway, autonomy and individualism seem to be much more emphasized by policymakers than social responsibility and cultural democracy. In the liberal country of England, the birthplace of the arm’s length principle, cultural policy focuses on social responsibility and local community at the expense of artistic autonomy. In the Netherlands, the general welfare policy has headed in a liberal direction, while the theater’s autonomy has decreased in favor of increased political influence. (Kleppe 2018: 388)

The experts interviewed in researching this article confirm this, as well as other research – which shows that, in Norway, state subsidization of theatre is considered a prerequisite for artistic freedom and autonomy, and that artistic autonomy has traditionally been understood as a freedom from commercial considerations. (Røyseng 2007) The emphasis in Norwegian cultural policy is on artistic quality, and on meeting economic targets. Only very general goals regarding children and young people, social inclusion and diversity¹⁵ are

15. The current government moved away from the explicit targets related to cultural democracy (like diversity and inclusion) in their annual letters to the theatre institutions when taking over in 2013. However, the newly published White Paper on Culture, *Kulturmeldingen 2018* (Meld. St. 8, 2018-2019) has a strong emphasis on Arts and Culture as a prerequisite for free speech and democracy. This however, does not necessarily amount to a participatory agenda.

included in the grant agreement to state-subsidized theatres, and there is no follow up on fulfillment of such goals. (Kleppe 2018) Subsequently, Bergen Citizens' Theatre, being a side project for DNS, mirrors an ongoing cultural political prioritization.

It is in children and youth-culture sectors, where artistic autonomy traditionally is less emphasized, that participatory projects are the most prevalent. For instance, participatory programming and young curators' projects explored by partners in *Be SpectACTive!* has counterparts in projects targeted towards children and young people in Norway. Music festivals like *MiniØya*¹⁶ and *Ultimafestivalen*¹⁷ have invited kids from their target group to co-curate parts of their program; and so has the *BlÅkk* hip-hop festival¹⁸ in Drammen. The latter is municipally run, but wholly programmed by young people. Participatory strategies such as audience co-creation and interaction are also flourishing in theatre works targeted towards this audience group. (Nagel 2018) Participatory projects geared toward a young audience can claim to educate future audiences and cultural workers without being accused of paternalism as pedagogical aims are widely expected and accepted in art that is aimed at young audiences. In other parts of the arts sector however, there is a mistrust in pedagogy along with other instrumental goals.

A lack of expectations and incentives influencing artists and institutions to explore participatory practices can also stem from the strong tradition of the arms-length principle in Norwegian cultural politics. According to current the Arts Council's Jørgen Knudsen, and DNS Director, Agnete Haaland, neither the Arts Council nor the national theatre institutions have received political signals encouraging a focus on audience participation, a fact that the Ministry of Culture confirm.¹⁹ Knudsen and Haaland both link this to the arms-length principle. An explicit instruction to work with participatory strategies is, particularly by liberal and conservative politicians and critics, considered an intervention into the artistic freedom to program independently of political whims. The few examples of political involvement in artistic priorities have been controversial in the past, for instance the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the Norwegian Constitution in 2014, and the 'Year of Diversity' (*Mangfoldsåret*) in 2008. (Mangset and Hylland 2017: 290-291) Without policies or programs that incentivize participatory strategies, realization of such projects is currently largely dependent on the interests in the practice field itself.

Aside from aesthetic motivations, one reason to turn towards participatory projects is economy. Many theatres and independent companies have challenging

16. <https://minioya.no/english/>

17. <https://www.ultima.no/article/barnas-ultima-dag-10-september>

18. <https://www.drammen.kommune.no/natur-kultur-idrett-og-fritid/natur-kultur-idrett-og-fritid/neon-aktivitetshus/neon-arrangerer/>

19. E-mail correspondence with Øystein Baardsgaard, senior advisor in the Norwegian Ministry of Culture, 14.09.2018

working conditions, often subsisting from project to project in a highly competitive sector. Both Harvie (2013) and Alston (2016), who write from a predominantly British context, explore scarcity of funding as one of several forces behind a participatory turn in performing arts. 'Delegating performance' and production tasks to volunteers and non-professional is not only a question of form, it potentially saves money on actors' wages. Furthermore, participatory theatre projects often take place using the city or empty commercial spaces as a backdrop, negotiating free rent and sponsorships from private businesses. However, Alston (2016: 121,201) and Harvie (2013: 156-157) worry that philanthropy and commercial collaborations may undermine public infrastructure and funding for the theatre. In Norway, the economic crisis of 2008 did not challenge legitimacy for cultural spending. While significant budget cuts affected institutions and artists in very many European countries, the Stoltenberg II – government (2005-2013) set the target goal of 1% of the annual fiscal budget to be dedicated to culture, a goal that would increase public spending. Consequently, the majority of funding for the arts still comes from the state, although the current government established an incentive for private sponsorship in 2014²⁰. Overall, Norwegian theatre institutions and independent companies and artists have good access to funding with 'no strings attached'. In this situation, there is less economic pressure on the institutions and artists to save money by finding new ways to produce theatre, for example by relying on a new relationship with audiences, or by serving special interest groups or private business. Bergen Citizens' Theatre seems to reflect this: since it has not replaced other activities at DNS, it does not read as a money-saving project for the theatre.

The relative absence of participatory strategies in Norwegian theatres is not only a question of what cultural policies *emphasize on*. It also is a question of what theatres and artists understand as their main objective, and of what organizational and production models are in place, as the interview with DNS Director Agnete Haaland reveals. In an article on audience-building in Norway the director of Audiences Norway, Ingrid Handeland, points out that 'producing cultural institutions' in Norway, for instance theatres, are primarily product-oriented rather than audience-oriented. (Handeland 2018: 134) Theatre institutions predominantly follow a traditional production-reception model, centered on the artistic work. Independent artists and companies rely on project funding which is also a product-oriented funding structure. Genuinely participatory work however is often process-oriented, and challenges the template of eight-week long, daily rehearsals, a run of performances and, in some cases, a tour. This product-orientation is part of theatres' legitimation in Norway; keeping up a steady rate of productions is an essential factor in the dialogue with the funding partners, whether they are the Arts Council or the Ministry of Culture. Co-producing a project like Bergen Citizens' Theatre does not challenge this product-oriented model, and it represents an opportunity for

20. <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/kud/tilskudd/om-kulturdepartementets-tilskuddsordninger/Gift-Reinforcement-Program-for-Museums/id751745/>

DNS to capitalize rhetorically on some of the central parts of the participatory agenda, such as audience building, democratization, and diversity – while, at the same time, staying true to its recognized objectives and retaining its place in the cultural hierarchy. This is possible because Bergen Citizens' Theatre represents marginal financial risk: the project does not incur salaries for the performers and covers some of its costs with independent funding.

Furthermore, the project is framed within an aesthetic turn towards participation and reality theatre that has been established within an institutional, professional setting. Also, because it seems to downplay its audience-building and social inclusion goals, it does not radically challenge the ideals of artistic autonomy, arms-length distance, or the paradigm of cultural excellence that otherwise dominate Norwegian cultural policy and art discourse. For Bergen Citizens' Theatre and Vibeke Flesland Havre, the cultural political situation seems uncertain. Although the institutional connection with a national theatre institution gives the project a stronger economy, more visibility, and status in some parts of the cultural field, these advantages remain only as long as they do not come in conflict with the stated goals of the institution.

A BLIND SPOT ON THE PARTICIPATORY AGENDA?

With Bergen Citizens' Theatre, The National Stage seems to be able to negotiate the different cultural political paradigms of excellence, cultural democratization, and cultural economy – as described by Bonet and Négrier (2018a; 2018b), without having to fundamentally change the institutions' modus operandi. While we have seen that participation is a flexible concept, traditional, hierarchically organized theatres – which focus on autonomous art production, output, and quality – do not align well with a paradigm of cultural democracy. As Brekke (2018) points out, institutional change towards a stronger focus on social practice only happens when the head of a museum is invested in change, and is able to affect the organization culture and its core values. As Kelty et al (2015: 480) similarly point out: “The key point is that participation goals and tasks are inherently connected to the organizational structure of the entities involved”. As I have argued, DNS has a limited institutional investment in audience participation, thus Bergen Citizens' Theatre does not represent institutional change. That would imply a radical shift for a large state-funded theatre like DNS, which employs a large number of professional actors and is rigged at every level to produce more or less traditional plays. Instead of challenging the status quo audience participation in this case risks functioning as a legitimizing rhetorical tool that preserves things as they are.

Bergen Citizens' Theatre is a project that aims to fulfill several objectives associated with a participatory agenda, namely audience development, social inclusion, and artistic development. In other words, the project seeks legitimation that is both instrumental and artistic. Bergen Citizens' Theatre has to negotiate an institutional logic that places traditional artistic quality above a

focus on participation and process. Paradoxically, on the one hand it leans on an organizational model based on expertise and professionalism, and on a production model grounded in the paradigm of cultural excellence. Whereas, on the other hand, it challenges this through the participation of non-professional performers. However, as neither the existing cultural policies nor funding programs incentivize or support integration of a project like Bergen Citizens' Theatre into the institution, this project has indeed landed in a blind spot in cultural policy. Nevertheless, some Norwegian regional theatres have smaller ensembles, and a larger degree of regional funding that may entail a more diverse set of priorities, and likewise affect artistic programming.

Advocating for increased audience participation in Norwegian theatre is not the aim of this article, as I do not see audience participation as necessarily more democratic or aesthetically innovative than other ways of relating to the audience. Rather, the point is to explore what I see as a discrepancy between rhetoric and practice in Norwegian cultural policy that is reflected in this case study. To this end, I have described characteristics of the participatory agenda, pointing towards a blind spot for participatory theatre strategies in Norwegian cultural policy, in spite of a rhetorical abundance of cultural participation and democratic ideals. In Norwegian cultural policy, the pendulum swings between an emphasis on cultural democratization and cultural excellence, with a gradually increasing focus on creative economy. Due to emphasis on artistic autonomy, arm's length distance, and a strong economy, the participatory agenda's focus on diversity, access, outreach, and democracy – reflected in the examples like the Reach Out reports – has as of yet not been directional in either the artistic or the cultural-political discourse in Norway. Although Bergen Citizens' Theatre is not the only theatre project employing participatory strategies, this has not been a noticeable trend – apart from theatre that targets children and young people. Rather than referring to the democratizing tenets of the participatory agenda, and brandishing its participatory banner, Norwegian theatre and dance is more likely to more subtly include audience participation referencing likely referencing international art and theatre practices related to concepts such as social and relational art, a performative and post-dramatic turn in the theatre, and a generally more politically oriented art and theatre discourse. Other influences are co-creative, immersive and interactive practices that the Norwegian theatre community and audience are exposed to by international guest performances by companies like for instance German Rimini Protokoll, Danish Fix & Foxy, or British Gob Squad, albeit with varying participatory potential in terms of audience agency.

Audience participation has a legitimizing function, but when related to the instrumental aspects of the participatory agenda, conserving mechanisms of the cultural hierarchy that the cultural policies in Norway seem to reinforce, participation also has an aesthetically delegitimizing aspect. The production terms that artists operate under affect the aesthetics, the quality, and the politics of participatory strategies. Thus, increasing pressure on legitimizing public spending on the arts could change things in the coming years. While I have

focused on Bergen Citizens' Theatre, a broader research among performing artists working both outside and inside of the institutions could answer to what extent Norwegian artists are interested in expanding their relationship with the audience through projects employing participatory strategies. Future research may be able to determine if a general participatory culture is challenging the traditional institutional logic, and if a participatory agenda affects the cultural political paradigm in a way that changes Norwegian cultural policies and, subsequently, fosters changed artistic practices.

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