EQUAL ACCESS OR EMPOWERMENT? UNDERSTANDING YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS THROUGH TWO SWEDISH CASE STUDIES

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KEYWORDS

ABSTRACT

THE CONCEPT OF CULTURAL PARTICIPATION IS SELDOM DEFINED IN POLICY BUT CARRIES A POSITIVE CONNOTATION. THE AIM OF THIS ARTICLE IS TO UNDERSTAND HOW PARTICIPATION IS MADE MEANINGFUL BY POLICY STAKEHOLDERS, EXEMPLIFIED BY A SWEDISH MUNICIPALITY, WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION DIRECTED TOWARDS TWO CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS WORKING TO ENHANCE YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION. THE ANALYSIS CONSIDERED LEVELS OF INTEREST IN PARTICIPATION, FROM THE POLICY LEVEL, MANAGERIAL LEVEL AND CIVIL SERVANT LEVEL. THE ANALYSIS FOUND THE MEANING OF PARTICIPATION SHIFTED FROM A FOCUS ON EQUAL ACCESS TO EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE AS A MARGINALISED GROUP, MIRRORING THEORIES OF A SHIFT FROM A CULTURAL DEMOCRATISATION PARADIGM TO A CULTURAL DEMOCRACY PARADIGM IN CULTURAL POLICY. THE CIVIL SERVANTS SHARED AN UNDERSTANDING THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO DISTRIBUTE POWER FROM ADULTS TO YOUNG PEOPLE, BUT THE OVERLAP OF THE TWO PARADIGMS IN THE GOAL OF ACHIEVING PARTICIPATION RESULTED IN TENSIONS AND PARADOXES REGARDING THE ISSUE OF NEGOTIATING POWER.

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Introduction

There is a consensus among researchers that 'participation' has gained great importance in cultural policy (Bonet & Négrier, 2018; Eriksson & Løhmann Stephensen, 2015; Eriksson, 2016). Participation has been on the cultural policy agenda since the 1990s, but the concept arrived in the discourse on cultural democracy of the 1970s (Bonet & Négrier, 2018; Duelund, 2008). Today's understanding of participation is theorised as grounded in the development of digital technologies that have produced a questioning of the previous hierarchal model of production and consumption of culture (Bonet & Négrier, 2018).

The Nordic countries have supported the idea of culture being brought to the citizen via the state, the regions or the municipalities, rather than the market, and this is conceptualised as the Nordic cultural policy model (Duelund, 2008). This model aims to facilitate beneficial conditions for artists to operate and create ground-breaking work of high quality, as well as to maintain opportunities for citizens to partake in a broad panoply of cultural goods (Johannisson, 2018; Mangset et. al., 2008). The latest Swedish cultural policy goals were formulated in 2009, with special attention directed towards the participation of, and right of access to, culture for children and young people (Prop. 2009/10: 3). Although the concept of participation remains elusive in the policy document, it has (like the equally elusive concept of culture) a positive connotation. Participation in culture is good, which is why it is a matter of concern for policy (c.f. Belfiore & Bennett, 2007).

This study is part of a wider research project that seeks to understand the effects of the discourse on the benefits of culture for society in (local) cultural policy. As policymakers have ambitions for the role of culture in society, it is important to understand how participation is constructed and legitimised, and what activities are made meaningful as a result. The specific aim of the article is to analyse meaning-making of cultural participation, primarily through the empirical example of two Swedish cultural institutions in the city of Gothenburg, Sweden. Both these case studies, a library and a cultural venue, focus on young people's participation. The study asks: How is participation conceptualised, and made sense of, in cultural policy and by important stakeholders working to implement the cultural policy goals? What requirements are understood as necessary to achieve cultural participation among young people?

The article argues that the examples illustrate a change in emphasis regarding cultural policy paradigms: from cultural democratisation to cultural democracy. This is conceptualised through the shift of meaning of participation in the material, from access to empowerment. This shift in emphasis is predominantly set in motion 'from below', i.e. from the cultural institutions. Power is made sense of as a resource that can and should be redistributed (in this case, from adults to young people) through questioning cultural norms. However, the overlap of the two paradigms in cultural policy results in paradoxes when attempting to ensure access *and* empowerment through the distribution of power.

Previous research

'Participation' as a concept tends to elude definition. In general, it can be interpreted sociologically, as in taking part/shared identities, or politically, as in co-deciding/influence (Eriksson, 2016; McNeish, 1999). As such, it carries strong connotations of democracy and power (Pateman, 1970). Researchers have attempted to create models of 'more or less' participation, such as Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation, in which citizen power is positioned on the top rung. In an interesting model of distinction, Carpentier (2016) argues for the distinction between access, interaction and participation, where access requires the presence of participants, interaction requires socio-communicative relationships and participation relates to power dynamics and co-deciding.

Participation is often interpreted as a merit good but can be a source of conflict. In her paper on developmental studies, White (1996) argues that genuine participatory processes will challenge power relations if they are designed to be transformative not only for the recipient but also for the initiator or implementer of the process. Cooke and Kothari (2001) even point to how participation may be a veil for new forms of domination and power exertion.

The emergence of participation in policy changes how cultural spaces are legitimised. Simon (2010: 2) defines a participatory cultural institution as a place where "visitors create, share, and connect with each other around content (...) Connect means that visitors socialise with other people –staff and visitors – who share their particular interest." Libraries are interesting exam-

ples of this change. The phrase "from collection to connection" conceptualises the changed understanding of the library users from borrowers to active participants (Jochumsen et. al., 2012). The original purpose of the library was to provide citizens with access to information and (highbrow) literature to ensure their participation in a democratic society (Hvenegaard Rasmussen, 2016). As information technology has evolved, the question of the legitimacy of libraries has arisen. To stay relevant, libraries have retained their role as knowledge institutions but have also strived to become spaces of active participation, dialogue and co-creation (Jochumsen et al., 2012). These ambitions are mirrored in other cultural spaces such as museums (Kawashima, 2006) and arts institutions (Bishop, 2012).

Participation and young people

The cultural rights of children and young people are mentioned as "especially important" in the Swedish national cultural policy goals (prop 2009/10: 3). Survey data shows that through their visits to cultural institutions and creative activities, Swedish adolescents participate more frequently in culture than adults (Kulturfakta, 2017: 5).

In an international context, research on young people's cultural participation explores the potential of ameliorating young people's supposed detachment from politics by having them participate in different art forms (Elliott 2016; Selwood, 1997; Zobl & Huber, 2016), while others challenge the perception of young people as politically detached (de Roeper & Savelsberg, 2009). A study on Danish students' understandings and experiences of participation showed that young people understand participation in ways that blur dualities of "personal and political, private and public, power and identity" (Eriksson 2016: 171). This complexity necessitates more studies on participatory processes involving young people (Yüksek & Carpentier, 2018).

Empirical examples have explored young people's perspectives on cultural value (Gibson & Edwards, 2016; Manchester & Pett, 2015) and argue that young people are often directed in how they 'should' participate (Gibson & Edwards, 2016: 202). Allowing young people to voice their understanding of cultural value challenges normative definitions of participation and of culture. Cultural institutions are pressured to validate their work through normative understandings of high-quality and high-visibility projects from funding agents, despite proof that young people, especially those who are least experienced and confident regarding culture and the arts, are not attracted by such arrangements (Gibson & Edwards, 2016; Rimmer, 2009).

Research on participation among children and young people in general, not only cultural participation, has explored the benefits and pitfalls of participation, and has explored ways to make participation meaningful (Gallagher, 2008; Johansson & Hultgren, 2015; McNeish, 1999). Ladders of participation have been constructed with children and young people in mind (Hart, 1999; Shier, 2001). In this endeavour, adults can play facilitating roles, but both adults and young people may have to overcome "preconceived attitudes" to achieve participation (McNeish, 1999: 199). Gallagher (2008) discusses the need to understand how children may contest, refuse, redirect or even exploit participatory techniques. He questions an understanding of power as domination, instead, power can be understood as a productive part of social life.

In contrast to some of the existing research on the cultural participation of young people, this study focuses on the meaning-making of participation of cultural policy stakeholders, not the experiences of children and young people participating in culture.

Theoretical position: paradigms of cultural policy

This study rests on a constructivist basis, meaning it seeks to understand the effects of discourse. The discourse underpinning cultural policy today, in Sweden and internationally, is that culture is a positive force in society (Belfiore & Bennett, 2007; Bishop, 2012; Kawashima, 2006). From the Aristotelian notion of catharsis to the present-day focus on arts and culture as a way to alleviate social exclusion, states have often legitimised spending on culture through arguments based on the resulting positive effects[1].

However, the focus of understanding in regard to what kind of positive aspects arts and culture can add to societies has evolved over time. Researchers describe this evolution in terms of paradigmatic changes in cultural policy (Bonet and Négrier,

2018; Duelund, 2008; Evrard, 1997; Skot-Hansen, 2005). In this study, the paradigms of cultural democratisation and cultural democracy are of importance.

Duelund (2008) argues that cultural policy in the Nordic countries emerged in the post-World War II period as part of the expansion of the welfare state. The political and cultural education of the people became a matter of national interest. This was the dawn of *the democratisation of culture paradigm*. The paradigm rests on an enlightenment discourse of culture's ability to provide insight, knowledge and reflection (Skot-Hansen, 2005). The role of the state in this paradigm is to provide equal access to cultural goods through the dissemination of major cultural works. The role of the audience or users of culture in this paradigm is passive (Bonet & Négrier, 2018; Evrard, 1997). An equal level of attendance in culture from a perspective of socio-demographics would be a sign of the success of this model[2].

The cultural democracy paradigm emerged in the 1970s as a reaction to the previous paradigm of cultural democratisation. This paradigm furthered a broader concept of culture than the fine arts to encompass amateur activities and popular forms of culture (Duelund, 2008). The paradigm rests on a rationale of the empowerment potential in culture, conceptualised as the promotion of self-expression, identity and self-worth of communities and marginalised social groups (Skot-Hansen, 2005). The role of the state in this paradigm is to ensure equality of opportunities in culture and also to ensure a variation of cultural goods to respect a diversity of tastes. The role of the audience or user of culture in this paradigm is active, as they exercise free choice as consumer-citizens (Evrard, 1997. According to Duelund (2008), this paradigm has never produced large cultural policy changes in the Nordic countries.

Bonet and Négrier (2018) stress the cumulative nature of the paradigms: they overlap. There is a complementarity as well as a tension between them. Skot-Hansen (2005) argues that the participatory turn in cultural policy is an echo of the cultural democratic vision in the 1970s of culture as a strategy for achieving social benefits, such as social cohesion, empowerment, identity and well-being (Skot-Hansen, 2005). This overlap of paradigms, as well as a social ambition of cultural policy, is visible in the material for this study.

Material and methodology

Gothenburg is the second largest municipality in Sweden, with approximately 500k inhabitants. It is known for its ambitious cultural policy regarding the idea of culture as a vehicle for equality. It was the first municipality in the country to implement cultural planning, a programme aimed at linking culture to other policy areas in the city, such as social policy and city development (Johannisson, 2006). As such, it forms an interesting case for study, especially since the local cultural policy perspective tends to be neglected in research (Ekholm & Lindström Sol 2019).

The study focuses on institutions governed by the city that target young people. The cultural policy goals, formulated in 2014, identify children and young people as an important target group for participation.

The material consists of the Cultural Programme of Gothenburg city[3,] and interviews with key policy actors in the city regarding the policy goal of achieving the cultural participation of young people. These actors are one politician, managers, and civil servants, all of whom represent the articulation and practices of policy. Thus, the study adheres to a broad concept of policy as the discursive acts of agents, rather than a narrow conception of policy as written documents or legislation (Wedel et. al., 2006). Inspired by the model of interest in participation by White (1996), analysis was performed with the focus on outlining understandings and practices of participation in the material on three different top-down levels; policy level, administrative/ managerial level and civil servant level, in order to understand how policy goals are interpreted and what activities are made meaningful in relation to that interpretation.

The data presented below highlight two institutions within the Gothenburg Cultural Affairs Administration, which were chosen for analysis as they aim to further cultural participation among young people in the city. These are 1. Frilagret, a youth cultural venue, and 2. The youth section of the public library, Dynamo.

Case study 1: Frilagret

In 2010, the City Executive Board gave the Cultural Affairs Administration the assignment to investigate the possibility of opening a cultural venue for youth in the central parts of the city. Two years later, the doors opened to Frilagret. The aim of the venue is three-fold: to be a space for young people's (defined as everyone between 13 and thirty) creative events (and thereby give them a voice), to lower the threshold for culture, and to develop the organisation in dialogue with young people. The age span effectively including adults was chosen with the argument that contemporary adolescence, as a period of life where you have little power in society, expands well into the late twenties. The venue has a café, a black box, a scene for performing and a workshop. In 2016, Frilagret hosted 580 events, of which the lion's share were initiated and co-created with and by the target group.

Since the start, Frilagret has employed young 'ambassadors' with the function of maintaining a dialogue with young people in the city. Frilagret also uses social media and its website to reach its target group. Today, three ambassadors are employed part-time. Frilagret also employs five hosts, two technicians, two persons in charge of communication, three persons responsible for the programme, and one person in charge of the café. The venue is open Monday to Saturday and stays open at night during late cultural arrangements.

Case study 2: Dynamo

Figure 2. Dynamo. Image reproduced with permission from the artist Frida Ulvegren)

The city library in Gothenburg opened in 1967 and is a popular cultural resource for the inhabitants of the city. As part of an endeavour to play an equalising and democratic role, the library not only provides spaces for information and literature but also spaces for play and recreation, especially when targeting children and young people.

The youth section of the library, Dynamo, has existed since 2009 and was initially run by one librarian. The core mission of Dynamo is to promote reading to the target group of young people between 13 and 25 years of age, but it also offers a safe space for young people where they can arrange cultural events that reflect their interests. Dynamo was provided with new, larger premises after a renovation in 2014 and three more staff were employed, one librarian and two educators, who also work part-time in the children's section. The need to employ educators is motivated by the ambition of encouraging young people's participation and co-creation. Dynamo has space for literature and for studying/reading, but also a café, a games area and creative spaces, i.e. "less traditional spaces in a library" where different activities take place (Interview Librarian at Dynamo). Dynamo informs about and advertises their events on social media targeting young people in the city.

The analysis of the interviews was carried out in the form of qualitative thematic analysis with the aim of identifying themes in the data regarding young people's participation as a policy goal. A theme is interpreted as latent assumptions or conceptualisations

that inform meaning-making processes (Braun and Clarke 2006). The aim of the analysis is not to evaluate the institutions' ability to achieve 'true' participation. Rather than finding the young people's 'true voice' and assessing the institutions in relation to it, the analysis attempts to understand the institutions' meaning-making of young people's cultural participation and the kinds of activities that arise as a response.

Analysis

The cultural policy level

The Cultural Programme of Gothenburg city positions children and young people as a group with the right to influence the cultural offering and the development of the city. They should be "given opportunities to fully participate in cultural and artistic activities" (Cultural Programme 2014: 13).

Adults are positioned as "intermediaries" that provide infrastructure for initiatives. Culture is described as a means to an end (social cohesion, trust, identity, enhancing democracy, social development, social and cultural capital), and an end in itself: as a human right. Consequently, cultural participation is given a simultaneously instrumental and intrinsic meaning.

The chair of the Cultural Affairs Committee speaks of the "immeasurable value of culture", pertaining to a discourse of culture as an end in itself and a merit good (c.f. Belfiore & Bennett, 2007). As culture is a basic right to be provided to citizens, the task of policy is to ensure equality in its provision and equal possibilities for access to culture. One means of ensuring this is to construct culture as a public good rather than a consumer good and to emphasise the lowering of thresholds to culture. Participation is constructed as a prerequisite for equality. Non-participation in publicly funded culture is then an equality problem and in the long run, a sign of democratic deficiency (Evrard, 1997; Stevenson et. al., 2017).

Because the cultural policy level stresses the outcome of equality as a result of cultural participation, this level is firmly rooted in the cultural democratisation paradigm (Bonet & Négrier, 2018). Young people are constructed as subjects willing to exercise influence and take initiative if adults provide them with the means for creativity, especially a designated space (Ekholm & Lindström Sol, 2019). Participation is imagined as desirable as it is linked to the legitimacy of the democratic system and public funding of arts and culture.

The managerial level

The managers of the library adhere to the cultural democratisation paradigm by stressing the importance of equal access; contributing to greater equality in the city and of targeting and reaching the 'non-user' of the library. "Everyone should feel like they belong to this space, that we have something for them" (Library manager 1).

Participation means having a user perspective on the activities in the library space, and to accommodate new user behaviours. To make the activities of the library "fitting" (Library manager 2), users must be allowed to influence activities. Library activities should not invite the users as passive audiences but as "active learners and participants" (Library manager 2). The understanding of the library as a knowledge institution is thus intact, but the understanding of the (young) user of the library has changed from a passive to an active subject. Active participation means visitors act in the library room (Carpentier, 2016).

The current and former managers of Frilagret confirm the cultural policy level understanding of young people's cultural participation as an important vehicle for ensuring equality in access; however, they also construct participation as letting young people influence the definition of culture and the structure of the organisation. The employed, young ambassadors are a result of this meaning of participation. Dialogue between young people and adults is the method used for guaranteeing influence: "Only they can answer the question – Why should we go to this place?" (former manager 2, Frilagret). The cultural democratisation goal is visible in the way Frilagret managers stress the importance of offering a space for all and accepting the responsibility to "reach all" (former manager 1). The goal of 'lowering thresholds' to Frilagret is achieved by offering a café space where young people can "just hang out" (Frilagret manager).

Participation is also desirable as it provides 'a voice' for young people, and thereby builds a better society. The value for the

organisation in including young people is constructed as a transfer of knowledge – from young people to adults (c.f. White, 1996). To provide a space where that kind of knowledge is taken seriously becomes the raison d'être of the organisation, i.e. empowerment of a marginalised group through participation (Skot-Hansen, 2005). As such, the paradigm of cultural democracy appears in more emphasis on the managerial level than the cultural policy level, with an overlap of the cultural democratisation paradigm made meaningful through data extracts of 'lowering thresholds'.

The civil servant level

The staff of both institutions express a wish to empower young people by 'giving up' space and power. Thus, they share an understanding of power as a resource that can be redistributed from adults to young people (Gallagher, 2008). If equality in access is a prominent theme regarding the participation of the other levels of analysis, empowerment or power is emphasised as meaningful among respondents working directly with young people.

The analysis of this level has focussed on the perceived meaning of 'giving up power', and understandings of how power can be transferred/distributed in favour of young participants. In the material, I have analytically outlined five meaningful strategies for transferring power to reach the goals of empowerment. The strategies all relate to challenging norms (c.f. Manchester & Pett, 2015; McNeish, 1999). The strategies are to challenge ideas of 1. The cultural space, 2. Value and quality, 3. The creative young subject, 4. The adult role, and 5. The cultural event. These strategies are not mutually exclusive; issues belonging to one may overlap with another, such as the interdependency of questioning adults' and young persons' roles.

Challenging normative notions of the cultural space

Young people and adults may not define culture in the same terms (Eriksson, 2015, Manchester & Pett, 2015). Frilagret has expanded the definition of 'the cultural space' to include debates on social issues such as LGBTQ rights, thus accepting a wider notion of 'culture' than that exemplified by local and national cultural policy such as the arts and cultural heritage (2009/10:3).

To be differently defined by different young individuals or groups of young people – a scene for hip hop or as a scene for poetry, for example – is understood as a sign of having succeeded in being a diverse space. Flexibility with the definitions of the space allows for the transformation of the room according to young people's wishes. At times, an event put on by a young person exposes the limits of the room. The staff find it positive, as it gives them the opportunity to think about how to connect to other spaces in the city and to rethink their own space. Adults cannot control the definition of the space if the space is to be for young people.

Dynamo has less opportunity to be flexible about the definition of their space, as it is part of the library with a mission to promote reading. But as they are given freedom to change the space within certain limits, the staff have included places for play and 'just hanging' that are not directly related to reading. This has been questioned by management but not challenged, as these places were added because of young people's wishes. The Dynamo staff stress the relationship between them and young people as a prerequisite for the co-creation and expression of wants, wishes and needs: "What makes our space relevant is related to how we build relations to the young people. That is, getting to know them, on an individual basis" (Librarian 1). An activity can often be initiated loosely by the staff and changed while underway as young people engage in unforeseen ways or because they protest at the premises of participating (c.f. White, 1996).

Thus, the institutions let young people define the space – spatially and symbolically – through trust. The adults strive to achieve a relationship with young individuals by trusting their ability to change the room and the activities in ways that are relevant to them. However, both institutions express spatial limitations which impact on the kind of culture that can be envisioned in the room.

Challenging normative notions of value and quality

The roots of public cultural policy emerge from an enlightenment idea that 'good culture' (often interpreted as the fine arts) can educate and refine the people (Skot-Hansen, 2005). This paradigm underpinned the arms-length system of independent art councils and art experts controlling state subsidies on the basis of a criterion of artistic quality (Bonet and Négrier, 2018). To

be relevant to young people, the staff of Frilagret and Dynamo have abandoned the normative idea of quality as pertaining to the professional artist, or to the finished cultural product, as well as the idea that the value of cultural institutions is to guarantee normative ideas of artistic quality. In terms of attaining goals, both institutions are successful in the sense of attracting young people in sufficient numbers that they are experiencing problems making room for all. Frilagret is in a position where they must select events, especially on popular Saturdays, to maintain a reasonable working environment. Their criteria of selection lie in diversity regarding age, gender, postal code and artistic expression.

> Well, according to ourselves, we've succeeded in…We have ten events from ten different city districts, and
> that's quality to us (…) to create variation, is quality to us (Civil servant, Frilagret).

To challenge normative notions about value has also been related to a refusal of the idea of the legitimation of the spaces in improving young people's skills. The staff of both venues agree that their value to the city is not educational (c.f. Gibson & Edwards, 2016; Rimmer, 2009); rather, they give young people a space that is theirs and by extension a place in society where they matter.

Challenging normative ideas of the creative young subject

Adults tend to define participation morally, as being "active, reflective and self-regulating" (Gibson & Edwards, 2016; Johansson and Hultgren, 2015: 123). When working with the political goal of increasing young people's cultural participation, Dynamo has struggled to make sense of a 'romanticised' idea of the young person as a producer of cultural events. When Dynamo reopened after the renovation of the library in 2014, they advertised themselves as space where young people could organise creative events, but struggled to attract participants. The staff relate this to a problem of a general understanding of young people as a homogenous group with similar interests.

> I mean, there are very few people who have this kind of impulse, to organise a concert or a poetry reading,
> they are a minority. And, if you are supposed to reach all young people in the city, you need to think differently
> (Librarian, Dynamo).

Dynamo's solution was to organise 'traditional' cultural events related to literature, such as authors' nights where the audience is passive, to organising reading and writing circles initiated by the staff and attracting young people interested in literature and creative writing. Dynamo also hosts events produced and initiated by young people, a type of participation that is not as popular as the types that are initiated by adults. The staff of Dynamo have noticed that different types of events attract different types of young people, and that the young people who organise their own events have been visiting Dynamo for a long time, forging relationships with the staff, before they express a wish to produce their cultural content in the space (c.f. Shier, 2001). The staff do not understand these ways of participating in a hierarchal way if young people do not (c.f. McNeish, 1999).

Where the staff of Frilagret speaks more about changing adults' ideas of the creative young person, such as politicians and others not working in the space, Dynamo speaks more about encouraging change in the young person's image of what they can do in the space, through a relation-creating process. This relation-creating process has not only created trust and participatory activities but also situations the staff of Dynamo are struggling to handle:

> They have so much trust in you, sometimes tears fall, they speak about their situation at home, their stress, their
> anxiety. Some have been rejected by the immigration board, their parents are pressuring them too hard…and
> so on. We…we can't handle these issues, apart from being a fellow human, so we sometimes call the social
> services (Librarian Dynamo).

The staff, guided by policy and directions to create a space for young people's creative activities, are left with home-made solutions when the trust they have built causes confessions of pain and sorrow. There are, at the time of writing, no official guidelines to help them in those situations.

Challenging the normative adult role

The staff at Dynamo and Frilagret wish to challenge the norm of being in charge as an adult. A part of challenging one's role is to find appropriate titles that do not imply adult superiority.

> It's pretty important to call myself a 'coordinator' rather than a 'producer' to try to coordinate these young
> initiatives that we receive, to give support and be in the background (staff Frilagret).

To use an appropriate professional title allows for greater honesty regarding one's role, to 'give away space' and resist any wish to take credit for the productions done by young people, especially in relation to other adults who are not familiar with how things are done at Frilagret. The staff also wish to challenge other adults to 'take a step back' in a room designated for young people (c.f. Gallagher, 2008). Frilagret is sometimes contacted by adults who work with young people, such as teachers or leaders of youth institutions, who wish to organise events. The staff remind these adults that Frilagret is for events organised with and by young people, not for adults' events for young people.

> Many times, you speak to them and you say 'Yes, we understand, but this is how we work. It's great that you wish
> to organise events here, it's great that you work with young people, but why am I talking to you and not to them?'

Even when reminding other adults of the aims of Frilagret, they experience difficulties in changing the norm of adult control and have on a few occasions refused events where young people were never allowed to take control.

The educators and librarians of Dynamo speak of themselves as expanding their role to be 'general mediators of culture' to align better with the aim of offering a safe space for young people where everyone is welcome. Their roles as librarians and educators are more traditional and well-known in relation to Frilagret, and thus they have struggled with the young people's perception of them as mediators of knowledge, often confusing them with teachers. The time for creating relationships with the young people has allowed the staff to break from the expectation of more traditional hierarchal relations between adults and young people in the space (McNeish, 1999). A way of breaking the expectation is to engage in the activities on the same terms as young people.

> We present the activity, but we are also part of its execution, we write and participate on the same terms as
> the young people. That's when you have equality in the activity(...) that's when you feel Wow, I also get to
> be creative, self-fulfilled, I get to fulfil myself at the same time as young people are fulfilling themselves, that's
> when you have this... magic spark, when you achieve equality (Educator, Dynamo).

Thus, Dynamo has worked with young people's understanding of the role of adults, whereas Frilagret speaks of working to change adults' perceptions of the adult role. This is an example of how interests are formed and shaped by the project and not constructed in a vacuum (White, 1996).

Challenging the norms of the cultural event

A common trait of both institutions is that young organisers are the target group, and the success of an event is not measured by whether it attracts an audience or not. The young person may receive support for audience work if they wish. At Frilagret, the challenge arises from the coordinators having a background in culture and thus acknowledging norms surrounding cultural creation, which they need to question.

> We do things differently to how things are done in society, and in relation to what is a tradition within culture,
> and these norms and habits regarding how things are normally done – We risk repeating them, even though
> we've stated that we want to do things differently (Staff Frilagret).

Frilagret's strategy to avoid falling back into old habits is to remind each other of their aims and 'forgive themselves' should it still happen.

The staff at Dynamo struggle to expand the notion of the cultural event as something more than a stage production. For them, it can be a young person wishing to express themselves regarding a book they've read, to have their thoughts listened to and replied to by other young people. Dynamo strives to consider interaction as a kind of creation.

> We see it as...that everything you put into a work or into culture...either you come up with something yourself or you lift someone else, it's still creation. It doesn't have to be a material creation, I mean. It can be, but it could also be intellectual creation (Librarian Dynamo).

This understanding of creation through interaction or consumption aligns with the understanding of the breakdown of a hierarchal model of consumer-producer of culture (Boner & Négrier, 2018).

These five norm-challenging strategies are constructed as vital for the institutions to achieve a situation in which power can be transferred from adults to young people. These aspirations mirror the cultural democracy aims of empowering young people in the city by providing them with space where they impact on content, organisation form, aims and central concepts such as culture and value (Boner & Négrier, 2018; Skot-Hansen, 2005). As such, the institutions strive to become a means to empowerment, as they understand empowerment – not necessarily culture – as an end in itself.

As previously stated, Frilagret and Dynamo work to challenge the idea of young people as a homogenous group with similar interests. Both institutions also find that young people unaccustomed to culture suffer from the imperative of being creative in the self-reliant way constructed as desirable in policy and translated into practice by the institutions. The organisations apply strategies for strong or weak support in relation to the experience and needs of the individual, which actualises the risk of falling into normative roles of 'adult – active' and 'young person – passive'. For example, the aim of having all cultural events controlled and produced by young people at Frilagret is abandoned in relation to certain groups, such as newly arrived young refugees, or young people who are differently abled. They may engage in events at Frilagret or Dynamo represented by a civil society association led by an adult to ensure their inclusion. The aim is then to achieve collaboration or co-production with the association to lower the thresholds for young people with certain needs.

Dynamo arranges events that are not the result of young people's explicit wishes but are organised on the basis of an understanding of young people's rights and needs, such as political debates and information before the national election. In these events, Dynamo strives to have a young person participating as a moderator or speaker.

The two institutions have different prerequisites regarding young people's influence in that Dynamo is part of the larger organisation of the city library. That gives them a lesser opportunity to form ways for young people to affect the structure of the organisation. But even though Frilagret technically has a better opportunity to let young people affect the structure of the organisation, and not only the content of the cultural events, the staff express concern about whether they are achieving that kind of leverage. The dialogue process by and with young ambassadors is their way to ascertain that young people's opinions have an effect on the structure of Frilagret as an organisation.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was is to explore meaning-making processes of young people's cultural participation in local policy. The study analysed three levels of top-down interests in participation in the city of Gothenburg, Sweden; the cultural policy level, the managerial level, and the civil servant level (c.f. White, 1996). Two cases, a youth section of the city library and a youth cultural venue, were chosen for analysis as they represent municipal institutions aiming at increasing young people's cultural participation.

The analysis found that the emphasis on equal access to culture at the policy level shifts to an empowerment emphasis at the civil servant level. Empowerment is understood as giving young people, as a marginalised group in the city, a voice through culture (Skot-Hansen, 2005). Participation means active interaction in the space but also co-deciding, and influence over the institutions (Carpentier, 2016). This is considered as a sign of a transition in cultural policy where the emphasis is shifting from a paradigm of cultural democratisation to a paradigm of cultural democracy. The former focuses on equality in the dissemination of quality culture to the people, while the latter focuses on the empowerment of marginalised groups through culture and diversity

in expression (Bonet & Négrier, 2018; Evrard, 1997; Skot-Hansen, 2005).

The analysis found an understanding of power in the material as a resource that can and needs to be redistributed from adults to young people. Meaningful ways of facilitating the redistribution of power entailed challenging cultural norms regarding 1. The cultural space, 2. Value and quality, 3. The creative young subject, 4. The adult role, and 5. The cultural event.

The first case study, Frilagret, highlights the definition of quality as something pertaining to the relation-making process, rather than the finished product, and the importance of letting young people define their prerequisites for participation by not only controlling their own activities but also by influencing the definition of concepts such as culture, in order for the venue to be relevant. Even with such an ambition, the staff of the venue struggle not to let normative notions of the cultural event 'take over'.

The second case, Dynamo, highlights the importance of dealing with a naïve understanding of the participatory young subject as a self-reliant, ready-to-produce individual. The staff understand participation to be defined by young people in relation to their sense of trust in adults in the space. Creating activities for the self-reliant subject risked irrelevancy and failure regarding the cultural democratisation goal of lowering thresholds to culture and 'being for everyone'. To avoid this, both institutions formulated their goals to accommodate the need to seize control over activities in cases where young people were unaccustomed to culture, and to take a more traditional adult role of functioning as active support. Thus, the study highlights interesting paradoxes regarding the overlap of the cultural democratisation paradigm and the cultural democracy paradigm regarding issues of power.

In sum, the analysis found the construction of participation in the data as a *relation-creating process with the purpose of distributing power* – in this case, from adults to young people. This understanding of participation comes with requirements for material and human resources, most notably the ability to challenge norms and spaces that allow for flexibility, and a plethora of cultural activities for young people to influence the room, the activities and the organisation. The questioning of some normative notions surrounding culture and adult-young person relationships is fraught with risks, such as emotional hurt when forming attachments, but is also made meaningful as it creates opportunities for distributing power and achieving empowerment.

Discussion

The study highlights interesting understandings of what is meant by power and how it operates: as something it is possible to negotiate and to distribute through participatory activities. This understanding is contested by writers such as Cooke & Cothari (2001) and Arnstein (1969) who stress the risk of participatory practices reinforcing rather than challenging power relations. From a Foucauldian perspective, another understanding of power as enabling, ambivalent and dynamic can give new perspectives on relations between adults and young people in culture (Gallagher, 2008). Power, rather than a force of domination, is according to this theory, a form of shifting relations; a way of acting to make things happen or to make some things seem impossible.

This is interesting in relation to the ideal of the self-reliant, producing young person visible on the policy level. This kind of participation may be popular because it is easy to measure; complexity is not (c.f. Rimmer, 2009). If we understand participation as a form of relation, then only young people who fully control the process of the cultural event are active participants in culture. Civil servants do not agree with this understanding and fear it serves nominal goals.

The overlap and coexistence of cultural policy paradigms create paradoxes as they are grounded on different understandings of power and different understandings of the subjectivity of young people. In one paradigm, culture is to be given, and in the other, culture is to be negotiated. In one, participants are active through interaction, while in the other, participants are active by seizing power through influence and co-decision (Carpentier, 2016). Wanting to empower through negotiating and questioning norms requires a kind of young subject who is self-reliant and who agrees to act in accordance with the understanding that power can be taken/negotiated. When the ambition is to be a space for all, this strategy fails or is restrained. Here, adults are sometimes presented with young subjects who, for different reasons, can't or won't seize the power offered.

However, the material shows many cases in which unexpected acts of resistance, confrontations, and situations in which young people do not behave according to plan, are taken as a sign the institutions need to change and adapt, not to change the young person themselves. This speaks of a less fixed understanding of power than 'simply' a commodity to be negotiated, but also an acknowledgement of "multiple shifting relations of power" (Gallagher, 2008: 14).

Endnotes

1   Belfiore and Bennett (2007) also trace the negative and autonomous traditions, where state involvement in culture rests on notions of the detrimental effects of culture (seen in policies towards censorship) and of art for art's sake as a democratic principle.

2   However, numbers show how attendance to culture continues to correlate to social variables such as education level and income (Kulturfakta 2017; Stevenson et. al 2017).

3   The cultural program can be found online: http://www.goteborgkonst.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/City-of-Gothenburg-Cultural-programme.pdf (retrieved 2018-09-20).

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