# Empowering strategic priority areas of cultural policy: empirical findings on cultural participation processes in Serbia

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## Abstract
**Background:** The background of this research encompasses contemporary cultural policy issues and their factors of influence, with a special focus on cultural participation processes. The sphere of culture provides the fundamental base for *reading and changing the paradigmatic paths* through the contents and acts of formal and informal stakeholders. Culture is deeply interlinked with other departments of the entire economy by connections with feedback loops. The impacts of culture on the socio-economic and natural environment, as the "fourth pillar" of sustainable development, are recognized on the international level by theory, expert groups, and practice.
**Purpose:** The purpose of this paper is to bring about a deeper understanding of participatory processes and their importance for strategic priority areas of cultural policy development.
**Study design/methodology/approach:** Our study design included institutional analysis, starting from the regulatory framework that reflects cultural policy and its strategic goals, by involving previous relevant theoretical research including the ICET model. Another objective of the paper is to answer a range of questions. What are participation processes' main characteristics and challenges in culture and cultural policy development? Is there a relationship between these challenges? How to achieve desirable cultural and institutional integrative transformations in order to accomplish the strategic priority areas of cultural policy? We bring the conclusions based on theoretic and empirical overview of new empirical research findings based on the survey conducted in 2022 for the need of EPICA research project
**Findings/conclusions:** The findings of this research lead us to recognition, conceptualization and understanding of the existing participatory processes in culture, towards inspiring the future modelling of more integrative strategic and systemic solutions to reflect desirable and harmonized development.
**Limitations/future research:** The limitations of research reflect future endeavour to contribute to reforming the field of culture (by formal and informal means) through more robust horizontal integration with other departments, to achieve sustainable and coherent effects through linking strategies, new forms of participation, decentralization, arm's length principle, and degrowth policy.

## Keywords
Participation in culture, radical innovations, ICET model, new systemic solutions, degrowth

## Introduction

Culture is the base of shared values, meanings, and senses regarding what we call everyday lifestyle. In its transitional and post-transitional context in Serbia, the cultural policy seeks a more robust horizontal integration with other inter-sectional, inter-departmental, and inter-governmental formal and informal institutional bodies in order to achieve more sustainable and coherent effects at micro and macro levels.

Starting from the main questions, in our research, we also want to examine the role of strategic management in culture (at both macro and micro levels) and integrative management approaches by proposing a strategic approach. We are interested in finding out if it is possible to bring transformative and radical changes for and from the sphere of culture. Does the cultural policy meet the real cultural needs of people? Can the participation in culture bring the empowerment of different stakeholders from public, private, civil sectors and other informal groups – as prerequisite for building up a higher quality of cultural ambient in Serbia? In institutional and non-institutional terms, what are strategic options for evolutionary and sustainable transitional markets and modelling alternative systemic policies?

By acknowledging the urgent need to rethink the future systemic transitions towards more sustainable markets and societies, the idea of this paper is to bring fresh views on the importance of transformative cultural role towards the evolutionary and sustainable transition markets, and also strategic options (such as linking and strategy of partnerships) in order to meet the need for more substantial cultural participation, by contributing to strategic developmental goals for the cultural department and beyond.

In this paper, we will offer a deeper understanding of processes that reflect and influence the state of culture in Serbia, focusing on strategic goals related to increasing participation in culture by offering the most suitable empowered participative governance as integrative management approaches. We intend to fill the gaps regarding the knowledge on participation in culture and participative governance models in Serbia and beyond and to discover all the relevant stakeholders as the agents of desired (future) cultural transformations.

Our research involves secondary and primary data that will be considered in order to bring about the integration of knowledge.

Regarding secondary data, we started from desk research by critically analysing cultural policy through the regulatory framework in Serbia by comparing it with the previously proposed relevant theory. Studying cultural policy is about the practical policy of state administrative bodies and other bodies that hold the political, legal and financial authority to make critical legislative and executive decisions in culture (Đukić, 2010). Thus, the content of the cultural policy analysis will include models, instruments and strategies (legislative framework and legislation) on which the authorities mentioned above (whose rights derive from formal political elections) conduct institutional, cultural policy. The subject of cultural management involves management phases related to cultural activities as a whole or in particular areas (performing, visual and other arts) through contributing to the achievement of cultural policy goals in a dynamic multi-sector (public-private-civil) context. By referring to previous theories on management in culture and cultural policy, we can apply its analytical methods and provide a deeper understanding of the current state to bring conclusions towards the future needed changes.

We involve the theories of evolutionary economics and sustainable transition markets as they are suitable for positioning future integrative cultural management and policy solutions through the concept of radical innovations (Köhler, et al., 2019; Rip & Kemp, 1998) as well as the ICET model (Haan & Van den Broek, 2010). Our background theories to be involved are degrowth and critical development studies (Kothari, Salleh, Escobar, Demaria, & Acosta, 2019; Latouche, 2009, Latouche, 2014; Kallis, 2011; Dengler & Seebacher, 2019; Munck, 2021; Castoriadis, 1997; Fotopoulos, 2010) – as most inspiring to understand the challenges and inspire future integrative management and policy options relevant for the field of culture, as well as for other overlapping lateral spheres of the economy (environment, energetic, social etc.) to bring the pluriverse into the system as a whole.

Regarding primary data, we rely on the EPICA project research survey, conducted in June and July 2022. The research survey aimed to examine objective characteristics and subjective components of participation in participatory processes in Serbia, relevant to the field of culture (primarily heritage, architecture and urban planning and contemporary arts, but as well other aspects where cultural participation contributed to

issues regarding common goods, public goods and sphere, beyond cultural, human capital and anthropocentrism, involving natural heritage and goods within environmental context). The research is based on a sample of 212 respondents. Respondents involved (experts and participants of participatory processes) in two main groups: *organisers* and *participants* in processes, who personally filled out an online questionnaire. The survey was conducted via the Internet – where respondents filled out the electronic questionnaire independently, on their own digital devices. The questionnaire used in the research was prepared on the open-source platform Lime Survey, installed on the IDN server. Respondents were recruited via e-mail and snowball sampling. The questionnaire was filled out from June 8 to July 14, 2022. In total, 212 respondents filled out the survey partially and 167 completely. The completed questionnaire represents the primary data relevant for a deeper understanding of:

- the actors (socio-demographic characteristic) and their perception in connection with the occurred effects, restrictions and the reasons for interruption of participatory processes in culture;
- the characteristics of the participative process from the point of view of their organisers and participants; as well as
- positive and negative experiences of participation in these processes.

In this paper, we devote our attention mostly to the b) characteristic of participative processes crossed with a) and c) survey data and analytically framed in the ICET model (Haan & Van den Broek, 2010).

## 1. Theoretical background and essential concepts

Radical innovations are assumed to emerge in niches where new entrants (pioneers, entrepreneurs) nurture the development of alternatives (Rip & Kemp, 1998). The radical innovations may break through more widely if landscape developments pressure the regime, leading to cracks, tensions, and windows of chance (Köhler et al., 2019). The authors explained how the interactions between niches and regimes occur on multiple dimensions and confrontations while navigating transitions. The critical role of social movements, alternatives, and social and cultural change is also recognized by Escobar (1992). Building a conceptual proposal in the light of sustainable transition markets and

technological change allows applying essential insights regarding the radical changes and innovations in development, management and policies. Radical innovations appear in the specific context that enables (previously acquired) knowledge to be launched (Rip & Kemp, 1998). They may endanger current activities and become rejected and unwanted since they replace or fundamentally modify existing paradigms (Rip & Kemp, 1998).

Furthermore, relying upon Rip and Kemp, "if governments or societies desire a new technology" or paradigm, "they must construct its artefacts and create a transition path toward it" (Rip & Remp, 1998). The sustainability transitions literature "recognised the importance of civil society and social movements" in transforming our production and consumption systems by building support for transition policies and providing protective spaces for innovation that have "less obvious effects on broader cultural values and beliefs" (Köhler et al., 2019). The importance of grassroots practices and bottom-up approaches are recognised as "the main allies in societal change" who are bringing attention "to justice, fairness" by creating "semiotic maps of the possible and desirable shifts" led by values is evident, emphasising that social movements, especially when they are engaged with industrial change, can focus attention to the needed cultural change (Köhler, et al., 2019). Many scholars argue on non-profit responsibility from a cultural perspective, whereby broader cultural changes at the level of international organizations have constructed non-profit entities as empowered and socially responsible actors (Lim, 2022). CSOs are essentially important for the public sphere and commons, as suppliers of social cohesion, promoters of active citizenship, and guardians of the common and greater good in society through their special characteristics and values (Egholm, Heyse, & Mourey, 2020).

Haan and Van den Broek (2010) proposed the ICET model to break down the problem of participation in culture. They made three differentiations:

1. the first, between receptive and active cultural participation (i.e. attending vs practising culture),
2. the second, between direct and digital participation, and
3. the third, between high arts and popular arts.

The third part of our paper focuses on the first

of three proposed differentiations based on empirical study analysis.

Moreover, the authors distinguished four important aspects shown in the **ICET** (as a navigation) model consisting: **I**nformation (its collection, processing, and dissemination related to culture), **C**ommunication and community (which is reflected through interaction with others related to cultural issues and participation in cultural networks), **E**xperience enjoyment and expression (enjoyment of cultural and artistic contents, performances, expressions, creation of various contents) and (material) **T**ransactions that take place on the culture market (purchase of tickets, works of art) are crucial to be deeply analysed (Haan & Van den Broek, 2010).

In such terms, we will bring the knowledge integration between the given theoretical crossing by starting from policy challenges and empirical data, which will be framed through the ICET model.

Other background theories presented in the following text are essential to understand the roots of the expansion of the cultural sphere in participation processes.

The critics of development included broad topics dependent on the historical momentum, from social, economic and later environmental and eco-feminist issues of unfair distribution, basic needs, poverty, education, environmental sustainability, governance, and access to education, sanitation, health, drinking water, and other fundamental human rights. Most of these issues are related to exogenous constraints to development given as a "universal proven path" for developing and underdeveloped countries to follow. The main point of such a development proposal is that it excludes many endogenous contexts such as specific cultural, social or environmental dynamics. The issue of development as a theory and practice to overcome poverty and inequality has not gone away as a vital global concern (Munck, 2021). The developmental paradigm brings the imbalances, instead of solving them (Kapoor, 2008); inequalities, exploitation by unifying cultural diversity, towards cultural homogenisation in the function of the same systemic order (contemporary capitalism) while constructing an object of knowledge and intervening to extend the state power by objectifying people and nature in the Third World (Castro, 2004; Rist, 2002; Kothari et al., 2019). From Escobar's point of view, "development was conceived not as a

cultural process, but instead as a system of more or less universally applicable technical interventions intended to deliver some 'badly needed' goods to a 'target' population". He pointed out that economic ideas are not universal truths, by offering a historical analytical path to show how mentioned ideas penetrate and constitute the "economist culture of modernity" (Castro, 2004).

The question today is whether and how theories and practices can meet and overcome these challenges. Munck explains previously mentioned challenges through the evolution of critical developmental studies (CDS) as a theoretical stream, from primarily critical studies (CS). Critique deals with modernity issues (Munck, 2021). Munck offers theoretic evolution from CS towards CDS to explain "what is wrong with the current social order and who are the agents for social change" by providing practical goals for social transformation, adding that "we need to find a new theory of imperialism if CDS is to find life and applications in practice" (Munck, 2021). Critical developmental insights relevant for the place of culture are given mainly through post-Marxist approaches on relation power-knowledge in terms of a critique of Eurocentric and mainstream discourses (Munck, 2021).

Through the feminist-degrowth point of view, degrowth addresses the issue necessary for the essence of all of us "as active, society-shaping citizens, rather than consumers", by putting as its core "autonomy and participatory, collective bottom-up decision-making processes", where the essence of "quality of life might lie in needs to be collectively re-evaluated with an emphasis on 'conviviality'" (Dengler & Seebacher, 2019). More recently published, *The Second Convivialist Manifesto* is against neoliberalism, productivism and populism. It values relations of cooperation that allow humans to compete without hubris and violence by taking care of one another and nature. It recognizes three main effects of conviviality through responses of social movements and groups towards the system, (1) in more developed countries social movements of young people respond to environmental issues; (2) in the decades of authoritarian regimes, social groups of young people are organised towards the systemic change; (3) in transition countries from post-authoritarian systems to developed countries, social groups of young people – migrate (International, 2020).

How to achieve practical, integrative management and policy alternatives beyond modernisation theory toward equitable development? Is this about degrowth in practice as the other side of the decolonisation of development and knowledge creation (Kocovic De Santo, 2021a)? Decolonising theories highlighted the impacts of ongoing colonisation and the related marginalisation from dominant culture, where dominant culture is understood to be aligned with neoliberal and colonial values (Poirier, Sethi, Haag, Hedges & Jamieson, 2022)

Degrowth is a political slogan with theoretical implications (Latouche, 2009). It refers to an "equitable and democratic transition to a smaller economy with less production and consumption" (Martínez-Alier, Pascual, Vivien, & Zaccai, 2010; Kallis, 2011; Simonis, 2010; Jackson, 2011). Degrowth holds layers of theoretical roots (cultural, economic, environmental, political and societal) that overlap and are usually considered trans-disciplinary knowledge integration that inspires future systemic inspirations. Its cultural roots are related to a radical critique of the development paradigm, where the economy is seen as an autonomous sphere that controls the production of meaning and sense, and it seeks the "decolonisation of the imaginary" that has to be led by the cultural sphere (Latouche, 2014). People are faced with processes of instrumentalization on a personal level by becoming objectified within rationality theory – as the means of a productivist-consumeristic mechanism. The mentioned processes function as a technocratic catastrophe that tends to commodify relations among humans and between humans and Nature (Martínez-Alier et al., 2010; Hausknost, 2017; Illich, 1973). Degrowth is also rooted in critical theories, branches and streams such as CS, CDS, decolonisation, and post-colonisation.

Degrowth holds a solid theoretical background in essential research on growth limits (Meadows, Meadows, Randers & Behrens, 1972; Ilich, 1973). Previous theories drew critical support on the paradigm of endless economic growth, which endangers the environment, society and culture as the essence of the times of the industrial era. In structural terms, degrowth refreshes the imperative of political changes through the re-conceptualisation of autonomy and critical visions that seek "democratisation of democracy" through direct democracy and participation in decision-making processes (Castoriadis, 1997; Fotopoulos, 2010; Ilich, 1973).

In the context of living nature, people, their interrelations, value creations and expressions, lead us to the necessity of reimagining development by positioning life in the centre of planning by presenting the concept of *life-centred development* (Kočović De Santo, 2021b). This process is about decolonising the contemporary meaning of sustainable development to mitigate all recognised obstacles. Relying on the previous, equilibrium is about balanced cultural and economic strategies, state projects, and hegemonic visions to support policies and politics for the society with higher ethical and virtue involvement. In relation to the previous, Mladjan and Marković (2021) deeply articulated a different approach – towards responsibility in consumption that can be an environmentally sustainable response to crises which enables the economies to overcome the crisis of confidence and reaffirms community ties. As an element of long-term orientation in consumption, generational responsibility is a cultural phenomenon dependent on solidarity within family and the wider community (Mladjan & Marković, 2021).

Cultural development implies the continuous progress of human activities and lives in culture, art, and other areas. The urgent need for re-conceptualisation of the development paradigm as integrative towards a gender, indigenous people, authentic culture, race, justice and equality, equity in terms of cultural participation, societal environmental, and economic, energetic issues is the strategic task to deal with in the future. These challenges have been recognised suitably integrated within degrowth (with permanent feedback from social movements practices) as a centrally important starting point for future research.

The future directions regarding the framework inspirations of the cultural policies will seek the totality of contemporary systemic structural challenges, where the (CDT) elaborated developmental directions came as a result of systemic logic of contemporary capitalism. Hall and Davis (2021) noted that critical social sciences should be able to name the *global economy* as *"capitalism"*; and instead of speaking about "*transforming the global economy*" as a necessary precondition for limiting climate change, they proposed the path that includes transforming, or even transcending, capitalism.

Moreover, approaching *the global economy* as *capitalism* allows us to analyse a specific mode of production, as well as the cultural, social, and ecological relations that come along with it (Hall & Davis, 2021). Many other authors who are dealing with contemporary capitalist challenges such as green gas reduction (GGR) acknowledged that the green gas emissions incensement resulted as structural capitalism issue (Hall & Davis, 2021; Markusson, Balta-Ozkan, Chilvers, Healey, Reiner & McLaren, 2020; Foster, Vaughan, Gough, Lorenzoni & Chilvers, 2020; Lamb, et al., 2020; Waller, et al., 2020), which has similar character in the sphere of culture, by the external pressures and the internal captured by the nature of capital (cultural and natural). This seeks new and more vivid interdisciplinary social and humanistic path, in order to deal with the capitalistic structural issues. In addition to political economics, analytical of focus on global markets and privatization, stronger interdisciplinary critical cultural focus is essential, such as conceptualization of neo-liberalism as a broad cultural ideology that has reshaped how we think about people and institutions in all areas of life, not just the economy (Lerch, Bromley, & Meyer, 2022). Two basic directions for understanding and answering the structural problems are relevant for this research: (1) structural problems that put pressure on all other spheres, essential for the functioning of life on the planet; (2) structural problems of capitalism that put pressure on the functioning of the sphere of culture. First, it is not enough to analyse cultural sphere as a "separated island", because it is always deeply interlinked with the total systemic order. Also, in seeking for the future solutions, they shall "fit well for all" the departments of total economy in terms of desirable political and socio-economic organization, seen as universal, then they are good enough for the sphere of culture as "*man-made part of environment*" – as contextually determined by the environment, and deeply rooted in all other departments. In such sense, Davis (2020) refreshes Bauman's method *for thinking in dark times* by exploring why Bauman sees the social media and as "a trap" in the crisis of liberal democracy as an instrument of political power, by pointing that the divorce of power from politics – understood as the emancipation of capital from the territorially-fixed controls of states – means that national politicians are no longer able to fulfil their traditional functions amidst the stupefying pace of

(technologically-enabled) change (Davis, 2020). Hereby fundamentalism is framed as a form of political practice aimed at the closing down of dialogue in favour of the apparently unquestionable and universal truths of a "decisionist" leader able to creep into everyday life, which is the field of culture (and also social media practises), where the liquid modern societies are saturated with multiple uncertainties (Davis, 2020).

The recent critique of the predominant articulation of cultural value through the economic lenses is given by many authors (Belfiore, 2020; Kisic & Tomka, 2021; Matejić, 2020). The value of the arts and of creative artefacts in terms of economic value, seeks for deeper comparative cultural political economy on questions of power. As Belfiore (2020) noticed, the questions on power has been so far, a largely neglected lens through which to dissect matters of 'value' (Belfiore, 2020). Discourses and practices of economic impact measurements, precarity and austerity measures in the cultural sector, the push for profit-friendly creative industries, privatisation of public resources and increased commodification of cultural experiences have all normalised capitalist logic within dominant cultural policies (Kisic & Tomka, 2021). Author Matejić argues on conception of 'living artistically', weather it (still) have a critical emancipator value, and how can it be formulated under the conditions of a global market economy, where every critical act, event and activity become appropriated (Matejić, 2020).

The principles of cultural economy contributed to shaping the idea that for culture, creative and cultural industries it is necessary to determine the value and price to construct specific markets through which the possibility of protection and their management will be realized, sustainable in time. Through the capitalism and the "cultural globalization" processes indigenous collectivist values by emphasising personal autonomy are under great reassure, where the ongoing exploitation of natural resources has unique harm implications for indigenous well-being (Poirier, Sethi, Haag, Hedges & Jamieson, 2022).

According to urban development and spatial planning vistas, *economic ideology of wild neo-liberalism*, brought such circumstances where the urban development is subject of various abuses, such as the misapplication of legal procedures, neglect of the public interest, and politicization of planning (Perić & Maruna, 2022; Peric, Maruna &

Nedovic-Budic, 2022). Furthermore, Maruna and Graovac (2021) explained the problems in the field of spatial development in Serbia, having in mind its post-transition and post-socialist context as follows: (a) urban plans serve as an instrument for the alienation of publicly owned land; (b) public policies are selectively considered in the decision-making process on spatial development; (c) formal planning procedures are insufficiently clear and have gaps in formulations, which creates space for ambiguous interpretations; (d) decision-making positions on strategic development priorities and issues of public interest are not clearly defined and (e) key issues on spatial development are resolved in the domain of political rather than professional decision-making (Maruna & Graovac, 2021). The authors also recognized the conflicts and coalitions, elucidation of the decision-making flows, by bringing the identification of power structures in the *tycoon-initiated urban development*, and politics-led planning process, where the megaprojects appear relevant for similar socio-spatial settings (Peric, Maruna, Nedovic-Budic, 2022).

Identically as with ecological economics and the tendency to value nature to produce "greener capitalism" (Hall & Davis, 2021), the pricing and trade in culture to produce a "more cultural capitalism" has led to dichotomies and intellectual divisions between those who seek to internalize externalities with a price and market mechanism in/from and for the culture, and those who are more or less sensitive on the current trends of cultural, spatial, social and natural commodification and expropriations, fully aware that the above mentioned dangerous processes directly contribute to the unbalanced and/or development crisis. *Or worse, they are empirically blind to the irreplaceability of nature* (Hall & Davis, 2021) and culture which are firmly interconnected, with the necessity of finding integrated management and policies "for all" - within the "planetary boundaries".

## 2. Cultural management and policy frameworks in Serbia

Public policies include a set of instruments and measures which influence the cultural management phases (creation, production, distribution, diffusion and access to goods and services that contain and transmit cultural expressions) (Mikić, 2015). The regulatory framework directly or indirectly affects cultural policy development and its general and specific

fields. In this part, we primarily refer to laws, by-laws and international ratifications, which functionally represent the most critical available legal acts to regulate the functioning system of every area of life in the country. The cultural policy system is based on the existence of two groups of laws and by-laws. The first group includes acts that regulate culture as a whole or part of it. The second contains acts that primarily regulate some other area of social life, laterally affecting the area of culture. It is necessary to start with the law on culture as an umbrella law and then analyse all the rules that closely regulate *fields of culture* (such as Law on Cultural Property, Law on Cinematography, Law on Issuing Publications, Law on Museum Activities, Law on Archives and Archival Activities, Law on Cultural Heritage, etc.) and *departmental operations* (public, private, civil department performance), which imply different laws to be analysed such as: laws related to economic activities Law on private entrepreneurs, the Law on Business Companies, the Regulation on Incentives for an Investor to Produce an Audiovisual Work in the Republic of Serbia; Law on Public Procurement, the Law on Endowments, Foundations and Funds, Law on Personal Income Tax, Law on Tax on Profit of Legal Entities, Law on Copyright and Related Rights, Law on Budget System etc., and other international legal norms that become binding for implementation upon ratification) depending on the participants of the cultural market (public, private, and civil sectors). This enables an analytical coverage to bring the distinction in the definition of cultural policy, which is the practical policy of *state administrative bodies* and *other bodies* (between actors in the fields of culture, as the bearers of cultural policy) that hold the political, legal and financial authority to make critical legislative and executive decisions in the field of culture (Đukić, 2010).

Laws and other regulations determine legal norms that establish standards and rules that regulate societal relations. They form the regulatory framework to implement public policies in documents such as strategies, programs, activity plans, etc. It is vital to adopt international acts as normative legal acts, which are primarily significant from the aspect of mandatory application by the signatory country (Rikalović, 2011) but also from the point of their universality towards all other lateral policies (such as cultural in terms of the total economy of the

country) That are strategically inter-linked towards the common goals.

The process of managing public policies is closely related to the regulatory framework because laws are legal-political instruments of cultural policy, representing one of several instruments based on which the practical public policies are implemented. They enable the harmonisation of cultural development with broader developmental paradigms, such as meeting sustainable development goals towards sustainability. Besides legal instruments, based on the S*trategy for Regulatory Reform and Improvement of the Public Policy Management System for the Period 2016-2020,* there are economic instruments (such as public investments, subsidies, direct financial grants, taxes etc.), organisational instruments (that refers to the formation of new ones and the abolition of existing institutions, change in organisational structure, change in the number of employees, etc.) and value-ideological instruments (such as information and educational campaigns, etc.).

The Republic of Serbia, through its strategic determination, treats culture as one of the critical factors in the development of society, i.e. culture as one of the national priorities, which contributes to the harmonious development of society in the Republic of Serbia, the quality of life of its citizens and the improvement of international relations. The previously mentioned, combined with the selected theoretical frameworks of research, provides the possibility for new reflections in fulfilling the general and special strategic goals of cultural policy development.

## 2.1. Strategic orientations in the culture of the Republic of Serbia relevant for cultural participation

According to the *Strategy of Cultural Development for Republic Serbia 2020-2029 draft*, adopted by the RS Assembly, principles of cultural policies development are based on the Constitution law (Constitution Law, 2022), international treaties, agreements and conventions signed by the Republic of Serbia, the Law on Culture, as well as domestic strategic documents. This strategy represents the basic cultural policy strategic document of the Republic of Serbia, which comprehensively determines the directions of action and methods of implementing the cultural policy as public policy in the field of culture. The strategy regulates the public interest in the field of culture in a planned and systematic

manner and determines the strategic priorities of cultural development in the ten years. Following Article 20 of the Law on Culture, the strategy contains the analytical framework of the current state of culture crossed with basic principles of cultural development in Serbia, which enables the formulation of strategic performance (directions, instruments, implementation, monitoring and control of the processes).

Based on Figure 1, principles of cultural policy development are built upon the regulatory framework (national and international laws, agreements and conventions) by reflecting Serbian culture and cultural identity (where the recognized dimensions of Serbian culture are Slavic, Byzantine, Balkan, heroic-freedom, enlightened-European, contact-open, democratic). The strategy relies on principles (commitment to the protection and care of national culture; protection of cultural rights of national minorities; improvement of mutual understanding and equal inclusion of vulnerable groups in cultural life; protection and evaluation of cultural heritage as a non-renewable and unique legacy; encouraging and promoting artistic creativity as a free expression of the human spirit; wide accessibility of culture and equal and active participation in cultural life; development of international cultural cooperation and contributing to the reputation of the country in the world; support for modern financing models and the understanding of culture as an economic potential in a feedback loop with the cultural policy (based on efficient and thoughtful legislative activity; responsible personnel policy; the autonomy of subjects in culture; the principle of active participation of citizens and the professional public in the decision-making process; transparent decision-making procedures; the principle of strategic management in culture, monitoring and evaluation; analysis, research and statistics in the field of culture; compliance with other sectors of state policy (Strategy of cultural development of RS draft).
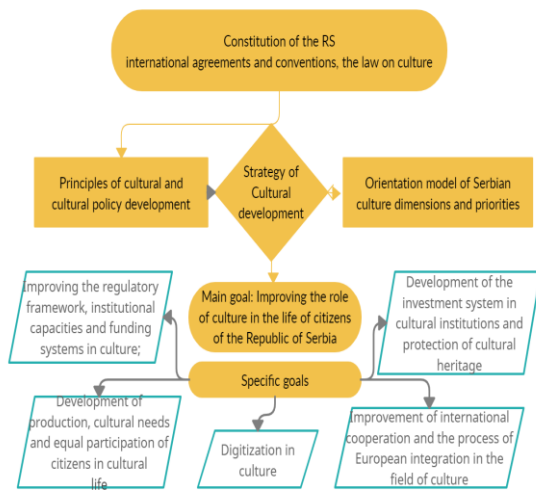
**Figure 1**  Strategic framework of cultural development in Serbia
**Source:** the authors' contribution based on the regulatory framework (Strategy of cultural development of RS draft, n.d.)

Everything stated previously reflects the *orientation model* of culture development strategy and cultural policy, with *priorities* (*development of human resources and infrastructure; European integration and international cooperation; encouraging the role of culture in the development of society* and *priority areas* (cultural heritage and contemporary art) through which cultural policy achieves its purpose, which should address the real needs of society and all participants in the cultural process (Strategy of cultural development of RS draft). Previously is covered by main and specific strategic goals. The strategic management approach in cultural policy development includes measures and activities aiming to create a stimulating environment for the action of all stakeholders in culture, including all the actors with their specific roles from different sectors (public, civil and private).

According to the ESSnet-CULTURE report (2012), cultural statistic structure depends on three different approaches consist cultural domains or fields of development. The approach is based on common standards and existing classifications, among which the economic one - NACE - predominates as it is the most commonly used. Compared with the previous LEG-Culture framework, the prominent new inclusions concern the domains of advertising and *arts and crafts, as well as the function of management and regulation* (ESSnet-CULTURE, 2012). The ESSnet-Culture framework for cultural statistics excluded some activities bearing in mind the primary criteria used for defining cultural activity

(artistic and cultural expressions and values) and the need for quality and availability of data. The exclusion is justified by the fact that the framework, besides its symbolic focus on the cultural field, has to be practical (measurable) and sufficiently useful for producing comparable European data. While there is a lack of harmonized data, it would be a challenge to develop a methodology for estimates on new subjects and define an EU quality aggregate. (ESSnet-CULTURE, 2012). In terms of the above mentioned classifications and their intersections, it is possible to conclude that the sphere of culture in a statistical sense consists of the *Cultural Domains (10)* (such as: Heritage, Archives, Libraries, Publishing, Performing Arts, Visual, Audiovisual and Multimedia, Architecture, Advertising, Handicrafts); *Cultural functions* (6) (Creation, Production/Publishing, Transmission/Trade, Preservation, Education, Management and Politics), which are reflected through all cultural activities in the department of culture, performed by participants in the cultural market regardless of (its profit/non-profit orientation); and *Cultural dimensions* (4) (Employment in the field of culture, Financial allocations in the field of culture (public), Consumption in the field of culture (private) and cultural practices) (ESSnet-CULTURE, 2012).
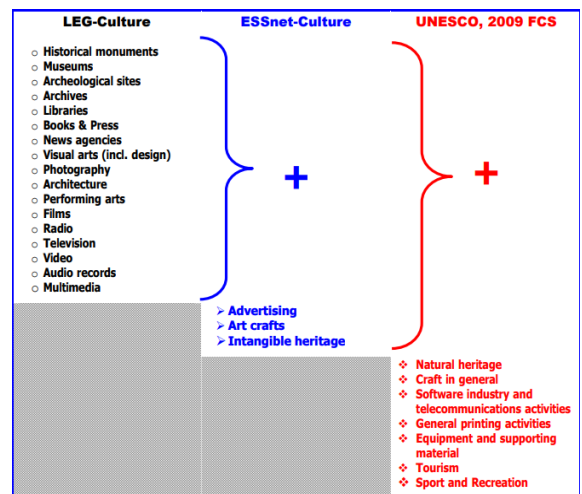


**Figure 2**  International statistics on the cultural structure
**Source:** Comparison of cultural domains ESSnet-CULTURE report, 2012, pp. 54

It is possible to conclude that the domains, functions and dimensions of culture given according to European statistical classifications are covered by the domestic cultural policy, but that further harmonisation is needed in the functional, cultural statistics field in Serbia.

## 2.2. Challenges in managing priority areas of cultural policy in Serbia

The current cultural policy context in Serbia is determined by the history of discontinuity between decentralisation and centralisation (from workers' self-management - a parastatal decentralized model, to the cultural policy of the Third Yugoslavia, which firmly centralized cultural policy again), as an actual ongoing process before the belated transition, transition in progress, and post-transition challenges reflected in each segment of society and the system as a whole. The modern post-transition context in Serbia defined itself as a country in *permanent crisis* (among others, it holds labels of: *country in a race to the bottom, developing country, country of the Global South and periphery,* (Kočović De Santo, 2021b)) that shares attributes with other "more developed" ones in terms of objective systemic uncertainties determined by neo-liberal institutional frameworks (Kočović De Santo, 2021a).

The period from 2000 to date has not brought support for the possibilities of creating genuinely desired democratic institutions, which would support cultural values and concepts that would involve political actions to become socially constructed again. It *de facto* brought a decade-long delay of transition (in comparison to the massive transition of socialist regimes that followed the fall of Berlin Wall) from one political system to another. Regarding the projected democratic cultural system of that time, the priorities included de-etatization, decentralisation, and pluralism of cultures, alternative financial resources, and harmonisation of legislation with the EU. (Dojčinović Đukić, 2003). We were in a position to learn from others' experiences, to mitigate the painful transition challenges which were not the Serbian transition context case, unfortunately. In Serbia, modern dynamics are highly dependent on political-party changes that have been frequent since the 2000s and do not necessarily reflect ideological differences. Until today, political changes have brought shortened discontinuities in cultural policy determined by political mandates.

In this part, we will further consider the current situation in the priority areas of cultural policy (cultural heritage and contemporary art), guided by legal-political, economic, organizational and value-ideological challenges.

Thus, participation in culture is recognised as individual well-being (micro level), representing the social capacity for innovation (macro level).

This is how individual cultural capital (in addition to personal satisfaction) creates capabilities for empowering the cultural sphere and beyond towards social and economic life through participation.

### 2.1.1. Current state of cultural heritage priority area in Serbia

The cultural heritage area required legal and political reforms, accompanied by special laws regulating the sub-sections. Sub-sections in this text refers to the different fields of protection of cultural goods and heritage (such as preservation and protection of archival materials, protection of immovable cultural heritage, protection of movable cultural heritage and museum activities, protection of intangible heritage, protection of old and rare library materials). Due to an inadequate legal framework, as well as insufficient financial resources, followed by structural problems primarily related to organisation, the lack of functional decentralisation and empowered institutional arrangements, as well as the lack of professional staff and skills for the digital era and the needs arising from it, value-ideological challenges and program policies at the micro level of cultural institutions are often missing, as directly dependent on the previously mentioned challenges. Actors in the field of cultural heritage are predominantly from the public sector, which on the one hand, is entirely logical due to the continuous need for capital-intensive allocations in the preservation and management of cultural heritage that shapes national identity.

In the case of the *archival sub-area*, challenges related to digitisation and networking in a unified data system have been answered to some extent by the legal framework. However, insufficient and mostly budgetary financial resources slow down the primary activities of the archives (restoration, infrastructure projects and digitisation). Mixed sources of monetary funds and partnership project management approaches to international financial sources are scarce in practice.

Regarding the protection of immovable cultural heritage, 14 institutes for the protection of cultural monuments operate in Serbia. The legislative framework for protecting immovable cultural goods has not changed for twenty years. In this field, at the beginning of the 2000s, fiscal decentralisation without adequate territorial decentralisation happened, where territorially scattered institutions became insufficiently

interconnected. Quasi decentralisation placed the fate of immovable cultural heritage directly dependent on the city budgets by now implying unequal treatment. The criterion of heritage importance loses in front of larger or smaller city budget funds. The rich archaeological heritage is deteriorating due to elaborate neglect. There are also new fields and inadequate care, especially those related to traditional construction in Serbia, which is disappearing, due to its delicate physical characteristics since it is built from natural materials. The rich archaeological heritage is deteriorating due to elaborate neglect; unexplored fields, especially those related to traditional construction, are disappearing, among other things, due to delicate physical characteristics because it is built from natural materials. Apart from the insufficient strategic connection with partnerships and forms of participatory governance, there is also a lack of more robust cooperation with the executive and judicial authorities to sanction and prevent risks due to inadequate or illegal treatment of immovable heritage.

*The protection of movable cultural heritage and museum activities* went through specific legal reforms, and multi-purpose centres also participated in this field. However, movable cultural heritage is faced with a similar diagnosis. Infrastructure investments are necessary because heritage collections are often located in inadequate spaces. Still, there is also a lack of staff and skills to manage activities in the protection field.

*The protection of intangible heritage* was roughly defined in 2010. Although intangible heritage was not legally recognised as a concept until then, the ratification led to the creation of new institutions, networks and coordination in terms of proclamations, registration, registry management, education, etc.

*In the sub-area of protection of old and rare library materials*, the conditions that libraries in the management of protection have to accomplish are more closely defined through secondary legal acts. However, the need is significantly greater for additional laboratories and expansion of the network through the increasing number of authorised libraries that will meet the requirements for performing protection and thereby relieve organisational challenges.

The challenges of *the cultural heritage of Kosovo* have reflected the consequences of domestic and international politics. The fact is that even in legal documents, the cultural heritage of Kosovo is generally recognised collectively, without a more profound mapping of the structure and types, even though it is the most valuable heritage at the national and world level. All management processes related to the protection management of Kosovo's cultural heritage are characterised by the state of "frozen conflict", from which the ad hoc approach in terms of cultural policy instruments arises.

We can conclude that challenges related to cultural heritage and its sub-areas become clearer with almost identical previously observed problems highly influenced by the transitional and post-transitional context. Additional specificities are determined by the nature and types of cultural heritage and associated activities, mainly focused on protection measures.

### 2.2.2. Current state of contemporary art priority area in Serbia

The contemporary art with the creative areas it covers requires developing a stable cultural system, which will be improved. Contemporary art includes artistic and cultural creativity in the fields of literature and publishing, musical arts, fine, applied, visual arts, design and architecture, theatre art, film art and other audio-visual creative activities, artistic dance (classical ballet, folk dance, contemporary dance ), digital creativity, multimedia, and other forms of performance of cultural programs and contents (musical, pantomime, circus, street art etc.).

Driven by the challenges (legal-political, economic, organisational, value-ideological), from which cultural policy instruments emerge, contemporary art is characterised by a generally insufficiently stimulating environment for artistic production, participation and empowerment of participants (both creators and audience – with a relatively low level) in participation in cultural life. Unlike the cultural heritage priority area, where the actors are predominantly from the public sector, the priority area of contemporary art is characterised by participants from all sectors (public, private, civil), depending on the sub-areas. In this sense, the organisations from the *literature, publishing and library-information* sub-area are predominantly from the private sector, with market-financed activities. At the same time, they can apply for support funds provided by the relevant Ministry. The Ministry also supports library activities, information systems, distribution and book loans, special press

releases and events such as book fairs. However, school libraries depend on the local government, making their position unequal and often unfavourable.

The *theatre and performing arts system* is highly centralised in the total number of professional (36) theatres distributed mainly in five cities: Belgrade, Novi Sad, Subotica, Niš and Kragujevac. In addition to the uneven territorial distribution, the performing arts lack technical equipment, additional capital investments, and often program policy. At the level of Serbia, participation in performing arts content is directly hindered by institutional centralisation.

*Artistic dance (classical ballet, folk dance, contemporary dance):* within the cultural institutions, there are five permanent artistic ensembles and a professional modern dance group of the BITEF dance company. Folk dancing is spread throughout the country and is covered by amateur associations. High school ballet education is concentrated in three cities in the country. There is a need to expand formal education in artistic dance and better regulation of labour rights.

In addition to several specialised institutions, mostly music schools, *musical creative activities* and organisation of musical events in the cities of Serbia are performed by civil society organisations, as well as multi-purpose centres for culture, which indicates the multi-sectoral presence of actors in the development of this sub-area. There are three symphonic orchestras, one of which is republican (Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra), one provincial (Vojvodina Symphony Orchestra in Novi Sad) and one, Niš Symphony Orchestra, was founded by a local government, while a more significant number of choirs founded by cities. Support is primarily needed in accompanying publishing activities, discography and publishing.

In the institutional sense, *visual arts* are exhibited and performed usually in gallery spaces (about 200 in the country). Still, there is a problem of missing space and disposal depots for art collections, while funds are lacking in almost every segment of the cultural management process. Since 2014, institutional support in financing visual art emerged, which is reflected in purchases and incentives for further production and creativity that improved participation in visual arts, which is far from satisfactory. Uncertain and dysfunctional financial sources frame the field of visual art, and the visual art market with accompanying professions (agents, managers, collectors) is not developed.

*Film and audio-visual art* represent an activity with a vital cultural component and economic potential. Audio-visual activities are an essential part of the creative and cultural industries that are rapidly developing today. The nature of these activities is such that the funds invested in production (dominantly public but also private) are returned multiple times: through taxes, spillover effects on cultural and other forms of tourism and the local economy, by attracting FDI, and generally favourable positioning of the state in the international cultural space. Legal harmonisation with the Constitution of the RS and EU frameworks, which refers to the Law on Cinematography, is needed. The Ministry provides support through co-financing of productions, festivals, colonies, etc. At the same time, professional tasks are delegated to the Film Centre of Serbia (development, promotion of cinematography, additional education, and funds for financing film production).

## 3. Empirical findings on cultural participation processes in Serbia

Indicators of culture at the individual and social levels help us understand cultural participation and practice, which is why our intense focus is on the empirical part of the research. Haan and Van den Broek (2010) gave a broader concept of cultural participation by the ICET model, including all activities connected to visits, habits and amateur practices by positing the research based on questions: *which activities to look for* and *where to look for them.*

Therefore, the empirical part of the research emphasises the objective and subjective characteristics of participation in culture in Serbia to bring a more profound understanding of what ways it is possible to achieve empowered participation and participatory governance to the desirable cultural (and beyond – sustainable transition markets) institutional and democratic changes.

### 3.1. General characteristic of participation processes in culture in Serbia

In the EPICA project survey, we discovered the participation process patterns from 1977 to 2022, with a particular focus on the last five years. Based on the observed sample, people participated in culture from the end of the 70s and during the 80s and 90s in a relatively small number of

participatory projects in culture, arts and architecture in Serbia. From the beginning of the 2000s, there was a noticeable sharp incensement in participation and participatory processes, which remained relatively the same until today.

The duration of participatory processes in Serbia is usually between 6 and 12 months. The sample included 139 organisers of participatory processes, i.e. 63% of the total sample, and 83 process participants (37% of the sample), shown in Figure 4. The most significant number of respondents is from Belgrade (90) and Novi Sad (25), which indicates the concentration of cultural participation, following the findings from the previous analytical part related to the developmental challenges of priority areas of culture.
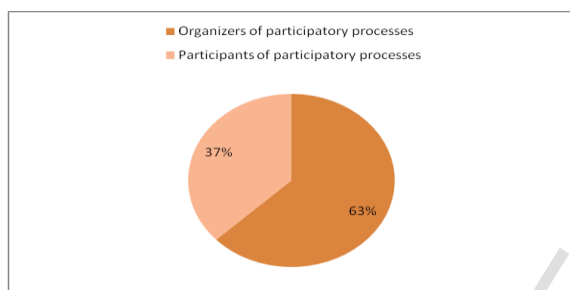
**Figure 4** Distribution of organisers and participants of the process
**Source:** the authors' contribution, based on EPICA 2022 survey

We used descriptive statistics to determine the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample. In figure 5, the gender distribution shows that 60% of the total respondents were female and 40% were male.
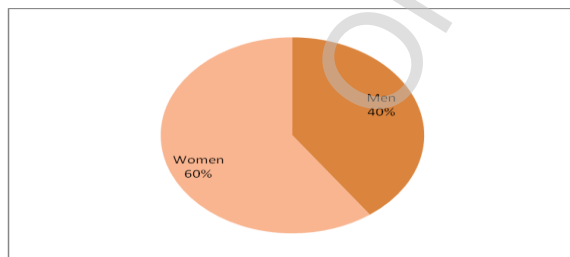
**Figure 5** Gender distributions of respondents
**Source:** the authors' contribution, based on EPICA 2022 survey

According to Figure 6, half of the respondents belong to the age category of middle-aged (35 to 49 years old) 51%, while 18% of them represent the group of younger (18 to 34 years old), and 31% the group of older respondents (over 50 years of age).
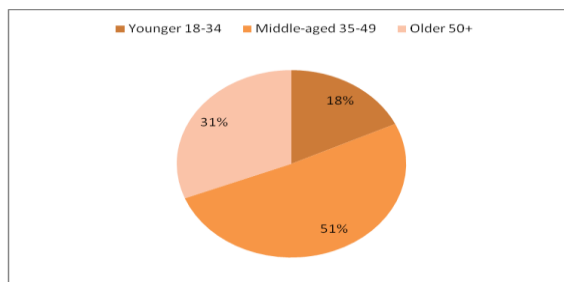
**Figure 6** Age distribution of respondents
**Source:** the authors' contribution, based on EPICA 2022 survey

According to Figure 7, the most significant part of the sample consists of highly educated respondents, of which 80% are university educated. More precisely, 32% have a university degree, while 58% of respondents have a postgraduate degree. 2% have a bachelor's degree, while 8% of the total sample has secondary school (2%) and high school education (6%).

However, when it comes to employment status, slightly more than half of the respondents (57%) are permanently employed, while (12%) are temporarily employed, 10% are independent artists, 7% are self-employed, 2% are unemployed, 3% are retired, and 2% of respondents are still studying.
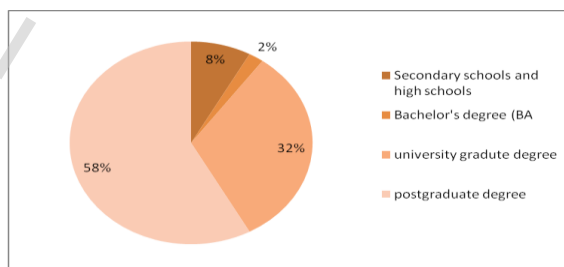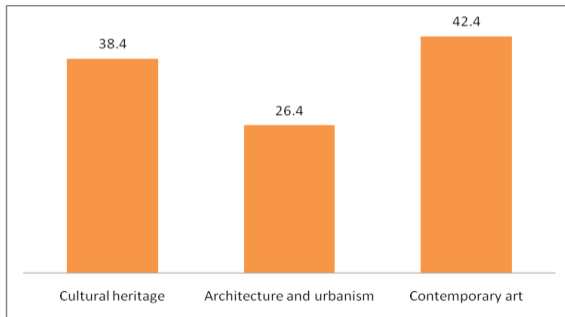
**Figure 7** Education degrees of the respondents
**Source:** the authors' contribution, based on EPICA 2022 survey

### 3.1.1. Active cultural participation – organisers of participation processes in Serbia

Participatory processes characteristics - from the point of view of their organisers, helped us learn more about the structure of participation within priority areas of cultural development, as shown in Figure 8.

**Figure 8** Structure of active participation in culture
**Source:** the authors' contribution, based on EPICA 2022 survey

We discovered participation in priority areas by investigating active cultural participation (organisers of participative processes and practising culture). The priority area of contemporary art was chosen in 42.4% of cases, the field of architecture and urban planning in 26.4% of cases, and the area of cultural heritage in 38.4% of cases. It should be taken into account that the data were obtained from a dedicated snowball sample, and the representation of the area is rather an expression of the availability of respondents than their real presence in participatory processes.

Respondents were asked to define the field where they implemented the participatory process more firmly. According to the answers, we can conclude that active participation contributes to the strategy's primary goal *of the cultural development draft (the Main goal: Improving the role of the culture in the life of the citizens of RS,* through answering mostly on specific goal *3. Development of production, cultural needs and equal participation of citizens in cultural life*, and partially on other goals, such as contribution to institutional capacities).

The responses are grouped, where the first group of answers meets the main strategic goal, by partially contributing to other specific purposes, such as *improving institutional capacities,* through work of *culture in a general sense* (such as contributing to the sections of cultural development strategy, city culture development plan, launching independent multi-purpose centres, democratization, building institutional capacities at local level; culture of memory, heritage, industrial heritage etc.). The second group of answers meets the third particular strategy goal by spreading the field of cultural actions and content to contribute to solving the issues with social and environmental implications and fundamental human rights (such as environmental and communal problems/solutions

through art, migrations and population movements by documenting violent, unannounced returns of migrants to the previous country; financial forensics, social economy; environment, urban and sustainable development: issues related to recycling, sustainable urban mobility, protection of natural assets, urban planning, climate change, community resilience to natural disasters, air quality, natural heritage and communal problems.

Participatory processes targeted the local community in 70% of cases, followed by children and young people, who were mentioned in 46% of cases as a target group, then public institutions and decision makers who were the object of the process in 40% of cases, and experts in 22%. Other social categories for which participatory processes were organized: women with 13%, the elderly population with 10%, ethnic minorities with 8%, and the sick and disabled as well as economically disadvantaged groups with 7% of cases each. Only rarely, processes targeted the LGBTQ population (4%), children without parental care (3%), single parents (2%), migrants (1%), and veterans (1%).

When it comes to the financial sources for financing participatory processes, it is interesting that international institutions and foundations are on the first place as a source (indicated in 47.2% of cases), although it is stated in the legal-regulatory documents of the cultural policy that international funds are not used sufficiently. State institutions are at the second place (by ministries, agencies, funds) (40.8% of cases), then local governments (30.4%), individuals (24%), local associations of citizens or foundations (21.6%), and finally the corporations and private firms (10.4%).

Correlation analyses were performed to examine the correlation between the amount of the planned budget for activities and the perception of positive and negative outcomes of the process. They indicated a negative relationship between the statement that the positive effects of the process were short-term concerning the amount of the budget ($\rho = .233$, $p < .05$). This means that a larger budget, from the organiser's point of view, led to longer-term positive outcomes of the process.

### 3.1.2. Receptive participation - participants in cultural participation processes in Serbia

Regarding the characteristics of participatory processes – the point of view of their participants

– Figure 9 shows the structure of receptive participation.
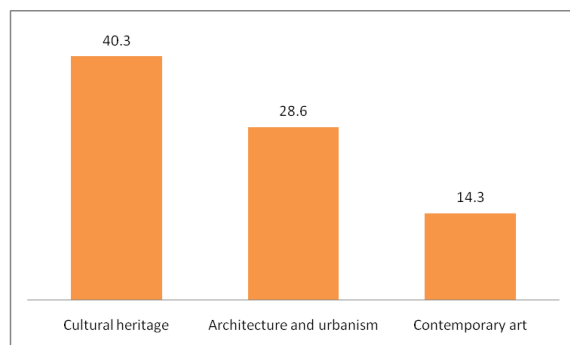


**Figure 9**  Structure of receptive participation in culture
**Source:** the authors' contribution, based on EPICA 2022 survey

Investigating receptive cultural participation (participants are attendants of participative processes in culture), the perception of the structure of participation, by priority areas, is different in comparisons of the survey results shown in Figure 8 and Figure 9. The priority area of cultural heritage was chosen in 40.3% of cases, slightly above the organisers' attitudes. Regarding architecture and urban planning, the situation is relatively the same. In contrast, the perception of participation in contemporary art as a participant (attendant/receptive participation) is chosen by 14.3%, compared to the attitudes of organisers (42.4%), indicating a significant difference in perception regarding the participation processes. As other answers related to participation, the respondents recognized that they participated in: cultural participation, education, empowerment of the local community, planning of cultural development, application of dramatic techniques and methodologies in the processing of mathematical material, applied theatre, impact of the project on social development, protection of biodiversity, civic activism, alternative tourism based on natural and cultural heritage.

From the views of participants, the primary target population that process was intended during the last five years, as follows: local community (61%), children and youth (22.1%), public institutions and decision-makers (19.5%), and the elderly (14.3%). Other recognized groups: women (10.4%), ethnic minorities (9.1%), sick and disabled people (9.1%), economically disadvantaged groups (9.1%), experts (6.5 %), migrants (6.5%), LGBTQ population (2.6%), single parents (1.3%) and, finally, children without parental care (1.3%); and others: homeless people, residents of rural areas, socially sensitive groups, convicted persons in penal institutions, as well as artists.

### 3.1.3. Perception of effects and limitations of participation processes in culture

A summary of the survey research is presented in Figure 10, which contains the main findings regarding the characteristics of participation processes in culture, contemporary art and architecture in Serbia.

Regarding the analysis of the *perception of the effects of participatory processes* by the respondents, the average grade on the eleven-point scale is 6.25, indicating that more than half of the respondents gave a score higher than 7. Also, when respondents were asked additional questions to evaluate the extent to which the participatory process led to the strengthening of solidarity, about 44% of the total respondents gave a score higher than 7. At the same time, the effectiveness of the participatory process in starting a public debate was rated relatively lower.

The second part of the survey questions referred to the *perception of limitations that the participants faced during the participation processes.* Respondents could give multiple answers. More than half of the respondents rated the public sector/institutions as not interested in cooperation (53.3%); as next limitation they recognised the lack of financial resources (52.8%). Almost half of them encountered a lack of motivation and willingness to participate among citizens (49.6%) and a lack of human resources (46.3%). A little over a third encountered inadequacy of needed conditions (problems with space, equipment, work materials, etc.) (36.2%) and the lack of a clear organisational structure (34.6%). A little less of them encountered problems in communication among participants (31.7%), the lack of time to implement activities within the process (30.5%), a lack of knowledge and skills of people who lead and organise (30.1%) and finally, they recognised poor interest in cooperation of organisations in the civil and private sector (26.4%).

Analysing the responses *related to understanding the reasons for the termination of participatory processes*, we can conclude that there is a high degree of congruence between the challenges of participatory processes and the development of priority areas in culture and contemporary art in terms of legislative, regulatory, economic, organisational and value-ideal aspects.

The results indicate that the organisers perceive the effects of participation processes more positively than the participants and generally evaluate their experiences in participation processes more positively. In the first place, organizers also evaluate better the effectiveness of the last (completed) participation process in relation to their initial expectations ($\chi 2$ [df, 1] = 23.321, p < .05, Cramer's V = .332, p < .05). Secondly, they believe (more than the participants) that the last participative process led to a strengthening of solidarity in the (local)

community ($\chi 2$ [df, 1] = 28.674, p < .01, Cramer's V = .368, p < .01). However, when it comes to restrictions, they perceive a lack of motivation and willingness to participate among citizens, more often in comparison to participants ($\chi 2$ [df, 1] = 4.505, p < .05, Cramer's V = .142, p < .05).

If the table or figure cannot be fitted into a single column, "section break continuous" (important!) should be used.



**Figure 10** EPICA findings on participation in culture, contemporary arts and architecture in Serbia
**Source:** the authors' contribution as a part of the survey results and conclusions conducted within the scientific project EPICA, entitled Empowering Participation in Culture and Architecture: Activating Public Resources for and with Community (2022), Funded by The Science fund of Republic Serbia (EPICA - Empowering Participation in Culture and Architecture: Activating Public Resources for and with Community, 2022)

## Conclusion

We can notice that the empirical results regarding the participation process in Serbia have a high degree of coincidence with the challenges (legislative, economic, organisational, and value-ideological) of the strategic development of the priority areas in culture.

The cultural practices and participation are essentially important not only as a strategic goal of cultural policy, but in their powerholder role - to bring the social transformations, which is in line with proposed theoretical background, and empirical part of the research that indicated many other spheres (except cultural heritage, contemporary art and architecture and urbanism)

and related challenges, enlighten by the work of culture, precisely cultural participation. This brought us to the De Haan and Van den Broek point on *opening cultural boundaries*. Moreover, in cultural policy reflections, we understand the importance of asking their questions regarding participation in culture, *which activities to look for* and *where to look for them* (Haan & Van den Broek, 2010), thereby justifying our research procedure to bring the knowledge integration by involving theoretical, legislative and regulatory starting points with empirical data. The above stated allowed us to understand better participatory reality (organisers and participants), information related to the process and communication through processes, expectations

and transactions (according to the ICET model).

This brings us to the most important conclusions:

First, this research enabled a deeper understanding of the domains, functions and cultural sphere in terms of cultural policy, strategy, and actors in the participation processes. Empirical research has proven that culture is a sphere through which the reflections on social, ecological and economic challenges inevitably appear by participation (creation and reception); thus, the culture becomes situated in sustainable development.

Secondly, cultural participation expands itself through cultural participation. The scope of cultural action is visible towards socially responsible issues, thus becoming engaged and more deeply connected with society. Participants in participatory processes are allies who operate from cultural market niches, institutionally and extra-institutionally. As such, they inevitably bring changes. The culture (with "allies from activism and third sector" (Köhler et al., 2019) becomes the "carrier of sustainable transition markets" started from the niche markets, providing the radical change in terms of development by the "functioning of alternative, informal, community-based markets that arise by collective contributions" (Boon, Edler & Robinson, 2020) led by the cultural force as control factor of the systemic imbalances, within the future decentralised and direct democratic system.

Thirdly, we pointed out that the challenges of strategic development of priority areas of culture (cultural heritage and contemporary art) are related to the challenges of participation processes, which reflects cultural participation. Therefore, it is necessary to look for new systemic solutions that will contribute to achieving cultural policy goals by covering all cultural domains and functions at the micro and macro level.

As the empirical study showed, partnerships in culture are the missing concept. Through the strategy of partnerships, new forms of empowered participatory governance could emerge to strengthen the cultural market and the sphere of culture as a whole, its actors, and cultural participation.

There are three scenarios about the perceived challenges that need to be strategically addressed:

(1) The future of culture as a whole political system: it requires reform. Regarding the legislative and regulatory framework, it is necessary to finish the started harmonisation. When it comes to the economic framework, it is essential to introduce the *arm's length principle*; for this to happen, the legislative and regulatory framework and institutional and organisational aspects must be developed in a coordinated manner toward the expedient decentralisation of the cultural system in every sense (administrative, fiscal, political), to delegation of power and decision-making at all levels to be ensured. Only when the previous elements are provided is it possible to develop value-ideological instruments for which there is an institutional basis and social feedback loop.

(2) Culture in a changed political system - change in political theories occurs through the political elections or the revolution. If the desired reform happens, it is the basis for any future political system.

(3) Status quo – the most unwanted scenario.

Our subsequent research will situate the strategic performance of cultural policy development more deeply in the interdisciplinary crossings between cultural political economy, GGR theories and degrowth theory – towards the post-capitalist inspirations.

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