Participatory Art as a Vector of Innovative Governance Reflexivity at the Heart of the Formalisation Process

Philippe Eynaud[1]
Sam Khebizi[2]

This research aims at questioning the formalisation process set up in a social innovation approach. Through a case study, we will demonstrate how developing a reflexive analysis with non-financial institutional partners allowed for significant progress in governance building in an association using artistic participatory practices as a mobilization tool for the populations on its territory.

Many surveys have demonstrated the capacity for associations to develop institutional logics promoting social innovation[3]. Yet, social innovation is a complex thing to achieve for associations. Indeed, to establish new processes, they must create new paths and follow isomorphic logics which can make them fall under the company-based model or the public service concession-based model[4]. In order to face this macro-social level of determination and maintain a specific innovation process, associations' collectives must agree locally on the nature of their project, their form of governance[5], and their shared vision of solidarity[6]. To do so, they need new categories and new concepts. According to Dandurand, social innovation "*often comes from citizen initiatives and, upstream or downstream, from outcomes resulting from research in social sciences and humanities, nay arts and literature*"[7]. And so, like technological innovation, social innovation can benefit from and develop thanks to cross-pollination between research, experimentation and in-field action. But if this interaction between researchers and practitioners in technological innovation is richly documented, it is not so much the case with social innovation. We will thus here question the institutional processes of innovation between an association and outside partners who have both the know-how and the experimentation in this field[8]. We will seek to understand the conditions for the emergence of innovation, as well as its feasibility and outcomes. There is a double level to this research. Firstly, it is a classic, qualitative analysis based on important documentation (such as minutes, surveys, emails, web site) and 20 semi-structured interviews with all stakeholders. Secondly, it is a dialogue between the director of the association and a researcher around the institutional process described hereafter to highlight its major stages and limits. A first draft was prepared by the researcher on data collected during the qualitative analysis approach. It was proof-read and commented on

---

[1] Lecturer and accredited research director, at IAE Paris, Pantheon Sorbonne University

[2] Director of Les Têtes de l'Art association

[3] Klein, J.-L., & Harrison, D. 2007. L'innovation sociale émergence et effets sur la transformation des sociétés http:/site.ebrary.com/id/10226263, February 13, 2012

[4] Laville, J.-L. 2013. L'association : sociologie et économie (Paris) : Pluriel

[5] Laville, J.-L, & Hoarau, C. 2010. La gouvernance des associations. Paris (diffusion) Cairn.info

[6] Klein, J.-L., Laville, J.-L, & Moulaert, F. 2014. L'innovation sociale. Toulouse : Eres éditions

[7] Dandurand, L. 2005. « Réflexion autour du concept d'innovation sociale, approche historique et comparative », Revue française d'administration publique, p. 382

[8] Consequently, we will not restrict ourselves only to academic partners.

by the director of the association. Following a discussion between him and the researcher, a second version was produced, which was read by two members of the Board of Directors. Their comments led to further discussion. The researcher conducted interviews with members of the Board of Directors, during which debates took place and a third version was written. This version is the final one.

From Participatory Art to Participatory Governance

"Les Têtes de l'Art" (TDA) association can be thus defined: *"Les Têtes de l'Art, an artistic mediation association created in 1996, is an interface giving technical guidance for artistic and collective participatory project management, with complementary activities of networking and pooling/sharing of resources. From the start, we have always meant to make art accessible to all, standing at the crossroads between culture, informal education and social economy. Our vision of culture is one of making "with" rather than "for" people, and our action can be divided into three types of transversal ones: a multidisciplinary approach, a trans-sector action, and one from the local to the international level."[9]*

We can see TDA's project at the crossroads between different worlds: informal education and culture, economy and solidarity, project management and networking, and the local and international dimensions. The association's ambitions are thus transversal. It must "*find a balance between representing and mobilizing the actors*"[10]. Which leads to the difficult question of how it solves the inherent contradictions of the project. How can collective action be coherent: "*Our originality lies in that our cultural mediation approach is dependent neither on the discipline itself, nor on the venue or type of audience. Times dedicated to exchanges and services – such as guidance, networking, our technical resource platform, our cultural project management cooperative – complete and contribute to project management and enable our members to be part of a project which is common and shared beyond their own, respective actions.*"[11]

As soon as 1996, the members of the association set out a project taking into account:
- the difficult reconciliation between the logics of territorial attractiveness through culture and that of proximity cultural action involving the residents;
- the necessary coordination of a myriad of micro-cultural organisations throughout the territory
- A hyper-density of cultural organisations in the city centre of Marseilles, which leads to poor visibility, legibility and, paradoxically enough... isolation. These organisations are both in cooperation and competition with each other.

TDA sees in the social economy sector an opportunity to bring together cultural actors despite their differences. This is one of the reasons why they seize the opportunity to work with the CRESS[12] on establishing bridges to provide guidance (and to valorise) collective approaches, and to ensure the legitimacy and sustainability of cultural, citizen

---

[9] Excerpt from a working document entitled « Enjeux et pratiques de l'ESS », presented by TDA's director before the CRESS Board of Directors (17.02.2014)
[10] Ibid
[11] Ibid
[12] Regional Chamber of Social and Solidarity Economy of the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur Region

action. In so doing, TDA benefits from numerous individual and collective "Dispositif Local d'Accompagnement" (DLA, a local support measure), on various aspects (budgetary and accounting management, project structuring, communication tools and data management, strategic and provisional job and skill management analysis…).

At the same time, the director follows a combined work/training scheme at the CNAM (National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts) in Paris[13]. This two year-training period gives him the opportunity to conduct an action research project under the direction of researcher Jean-François Draperi[14]. TDA's director tries to model some principles of his association, and include them in those of the social economy sector. Indeed, he can see that the cultural sector consider the governance mechanisms far too formal. From the start, he considers his Board of Directors is too complacent. There is a lack of balance of power, and it is a real hindrance. His training at the CNAM seems to be for him the place where he can get inspiration from conceptual and pragmatic tools to meet the demands of TDA's project. After this two year-period, he launches a process aiming at transforming the uses in his association.

Putting theory into practice, he lays the foundations of his association on 5 cross-sectorial approaches to foster real and active participation: Information – Share – Co-construction – Connect – Qualify.

Thus, a methodology takes shape with:
- Comprehensive information
- Debates
- Decision-making spaces
- Training spaces

This methodology will be implemented both on a formal way (Board of Directors, General Assembly) and on an informal one (festive events). As a founding director, TDA's director is facing the following question: "*I have been a founder of this association, I mean to play collective, but at the same time I would like to keep "control" of the evolution of the association. How can I go on with such a contradiction?*" (TDA's director) By giving greater powers to the Board of Directors, he finds he can sometimes disagree with them – e.g. when he suggests to include the Marseille office of SMartfr[15] in the association. The Board of Directors refuse and a consensus is only reached after several weeks' negotiations. Another clash arises when a loss-making financial year requires to take corrective action. The Board of Directors wish to reduce the wage bill. The director is against it and eventually succeeds. "*He definitely has a global vision of and analysis on the association's great development and strategic axes which, I think, no one else has in the association, because he has managed this organisation for 17 years. He still is the founder.*" (A member of TDA's Board of Directors)

---

[13] Management of social and cultural organisations – 1st level
[14] Lecturer at CNAM and chief editor of Recma
[15] SMart, Société Mutuelle pour artistes – mutual society for artists, was set up in 1998 in Belgium. It aims at giving guidance to performers, technicians and temporary workers who face the complex administrative realities of the artistic sector. Its French counterpart was created in 2008.

At the end of 2008, he starts working on participatory governance. He must overcome the cultural actors' reluctance. TDA's director: "*Our members and partners did not want to be part of it. They often said: Why did you ask for our opinion on figures or planned activities? It was no easy "trick" and they misunderstood our intentions. It took us 3 or 4 years to get there*". In order to convince them, he puts forward the following argument: the association has grown so that its needs have changed. According to TDA's director, it is high time to move from "*a complacent Board of Directors to a qualified one (...) the president, for example, was my wife. It could not go on like this. What rules could we find, which would give more power to the Board of Directors and, at the same time, recognise my specific role and my engagement?*" To do so, he pushes forward the creation of an artists' committee, in order to involve the artists in the governance. One must add that the association had about 10 member artists at its creation, but they are 120 in 2008 and some of them want to move forward.

TDA's director comments: "*Our social purpose was participatory art. How could we move forward without a participatory governance? Participatory art was our starting point. And we have a collective artistic participatory practice, i.e. we seek debates and confrontations between individuals. Participatory governance is a process which goes beyond statutory, legal frameworks, and intends to involve stakeholders in a common project in both vision and decision making processes. It leads to a collective project where each and everyone finds their place and personal development in the long run*".

A researcher, participating in a reflection workshop at TDA, says about the same thing. "*As far as I am concerned, I think the best possible framework is human rights. Because it is rational enough to legitimize these practices we awkwardly call participatory arts. If we agree on this reference, it is, I think, logical to conclude that participatory arts wrongly call themselves "participatory arts". They should rather put forward the deliberation capacity of the people (and not residents' participation) and assert the universality of the freedom of artistic expression.*"[16]

This is how TDA's artistic approach makes sense: "*A collective work is when, in fact, there is already a competence. Everyone knows... Everyone is an artist, so to speak. And so, in a collective, you know where you're going, there is a sort of charter. It is a collective. While, in participatory works, you are really free. Anyone can get involved, give something personal during a project they did not even know anything about.*" (Sébastien Zanello, artist)

Comparing One's Own Participatory Governance with That of Other Associations

In 2009, TDA set up an engineering platform for small size cultural associations located on the same territory. By developing this new pool of activity, TDA was looking for diversification but also for the development of new competences (qualification, debate, information, decision making) to make its own artistic project stronger. Two years later, TDA hears of a programme launched by La Claie[17] on the PACA Region to work with

---

[16] Notes on a workshop by Jean-Michel Lucas, aka Doc Kasimir Bisou, lecturer at Rennes 2 University

[17] La CLAIE (Coopération Locale et Appui aux Initiatives dans l'Economie sociale et solidaire – local cooperation and support to social economy initiatives) is an association

associations (of all sectors) on the issue of participatory governance. "*The project consisted in organising three working seminars with our Swedish partner, Basta social enterprise, which is a social and professional rehabilitation organisation for ex-drug addicts, and who, among other things, gives them a job.*" (A project manager at La Claie)

In its application form, TDA insists on both the work already done in this field, and their will to disseminate the results of the common work and collaboration with La Claie and other associations. "*We still have experiences we want to build and share, nonetheless we think we could put forward concrete initiatives which we have already tested. It is with this balance between what we can offer and what we expect from other experiences that we apply, because it is well in line with our current preoccupations and the spirit of your project (...) Besides, we have an engineering and mutualisation platform, which enables us to participate in a dissemination phase towards operators on our territory so that all can benefit from this project.*"[18]

Basta, one of the partners in the project which is a social enterprise, acts as a trigger for TDA team. "*We realised that, most of the time, people's opinions are solicited along the process, but nothing follows really after that. Basta's case is an exemplary one in this respect, because this cooperative works with populations who are a priori not rehabilitable. What I find fascinating is that these people working there have full access to all sorts of positions within their governance. Indeed, Basta's leaders are ex-drug addicts who have been employed.*" (TDA's director) As a result, Basta's example motivates even more TDA to go further in their process of building a participatory governance.

Meeting 9 associations with the same concern of improving their participatory approaches, even though they are not cultural organisations, will even further stimulate the team members at TDA. "*With La Claie, we are in an on-going formalisation process of our governance.*" (TDA's director) It is what the partner, La Claie, hopes for. "*And what I find interesting is that we are drafting a practical guide on participatory governance – a valorisation tool for the project and the 10 experimentations.*" (A project manager at La Claie) The whole approach is an incentive within TDA team. The salaried employees involve themselves more in operational decision making, as it usually is the case in cooperatives. As for strategic decision making, everyone contributes – the director, the Board of Directors and the employees. All this process takes place while, at the same time, the financial situation of the association deteriorates and endangers the consolidation policy for permanent staff. TDA are aware of the necessity to restore a financial balance to achieve their strategic objectives.

This does not stop TDA from enlarging the basis of their participatory governance. They consider involving stakeholders through an artists' committee, a users' committee who benefit from the material resource platform and, on a wider scale, they want to involve all members. The users' committee is difficult to mobilize. These members tend to act

---

(under the 1901 Law) which was created in 1995. Its social object is to give guidance to organisations within the social economy sector through various plans/tools (local support measures, micro-project funding, training, etc.). The association receives support and funding from the European Social Fund, the French State, the Caisse des Dépôts (Deposits and Consignments Fund), the Regional Council and local authorities.
[18] Excerpt from TDA's application form to La Claie

more like consumers of services and do not feel involved, even if they are many. Problems to reach a quorum regularly arise. Moreover, and in spite of a large number of artists who are members of TDA (about 180), the artists' committee does not find its place easily.

The collaboration with La Claie helped to speed up the elaboration of new statutes at TDA. This change is the result of a need of formalisation and clarification on how members are involved in the statutory life of the association.

Proposing One's Participatory Governance as a Model to Follow

In 2013, TDA was contacted by the European Cultural Foundation (ECF)[19] within its "Connecting Culture, Communities and Democracy" Networked Programme. The idea behind this programme is to reflect upon democratic communities inspired by artistic approaches on a European level. TDA is one of the 6 selected European organisations. It is no longer about participatory governance "guidance"– as it was the case with La Claie – but rather indeed "pushing for" directions for others. *"For us, the fact that ECF chose us is very important. They expect that WE carry out objectives. We said we wished that all stakeholders of TDA, as well as all cultural organisations on the territory be part of it on this theme. In so doing, the programme will be a basis for reflection on our relationship with the territory."* (TDA's director)

Then everything went on quickly – financial help to host and co-organise an international meeting in Marseilles: the IDEA CAMP[20]. In October 2014, TDA welcomes 50 project leaders coming from 23 countries. It gives the association the opportunity to gather together a great number of partners around its project, at last. ECF's programme stretches over a three year-period, which gives TDA time to valorise the activities launched at local level, after this meeting. Over 60 local organisations attend to collect information on this programme. After being recognised as a mediator by ECF, TDA strengthens its legitimacy at local level.

TDA is mature enough too to re-open debates on ideas around its project. In April 2013, they invite researchers (Jean Caune[21], Philippe Henri[22], Jean-Michel Lucas[23]) for a two

---

[19] The European Cultural Foundation (ECF) inspires and involves people in a shared vision of citizenship throughout Europe. It shares and connects knowledge between the European cultural sectors and engages in arts at every level in political decision making processes. Through its programmes, funds, publications and on line resources, it strives to have a concrete impact on European policies and cultural strategies. Every year, ECF Princess Margriet Award (€ 50,000) rewards artists and thinkers whose work bears testimony to culture's potential within an inclusive Europe. The IDEA CAMP is part of a programme called « Connecting Culture, Communities and Democracies », which is made of six European cultural operators, the Têtes de l'Art being the only French representative.
[20] The IDEA CAMP is part of the « NETWORKED PROGRAMME », a three year-initiative launched by ECF which aims at connecting a myriad of change-makers offering new perspectives on culture's role in democratic practices all over Europe.
[21] Professor emeritus at Stendhal University in Grenoble, whose work covers aesthetic practices as cultural mediation processes

day-debate on participatory arts with their different stakeholders (employees, Board of Directors, artists, residents, partners). In 2014, they organise a workshop with two other researchers, Claude Paquin and Geneviève Goutouly-Paquin, from Agency Tertius, on the following theme: "Beyond Participation - Towards a Relationship Policy". The purpose of this workshop is to further examine the issue of participation from the associations' perspective. *"We try to multiply action-research approaches. We draw a great benefit from this work with researchers..."* (TDA's director)

The whole effort eventually bears fruit in terms of participatory governance. In September 2014, meeting the member artists for a rentree session is an encouraging success. *"There were many people for this occasion: around 50 – many "old" members and many "new" ones. We have people who still find it meaningful to stay with us, and at the same time we do not "procrastinate" since we still attract new members (...) I proposed that the artists' committee should have a real budget and a role in our networking activities. This will be proportional with the number of members it has. I now expect them to be in charge."* (TDA's director)

As a conclusion, this research shows how the association's strength was to build its action on a specific artistic proposition – participatory art – *AND* on what Philippe Henri calls the second pillar. "*It is still usually set aside by the artistic realms themselves and public cultural policies (...) it is built on a more symmetrical relationship between arts professionals and non professionals and constantly tackles inter-culturality issues. It positions cultural action at the heart of the artistic project and does not consider it as a mere complement to a pre-existing artistic work*"[24].

This major idea is at the heart of TDA's innovation approach. Indeed, social innovation comes from the connection made between two issues – participatory art and its supportive cultural action. Reflexivity on and around this idea only strengthens this initial intuition. Interestingly enough, the three steps of the formalisation process we have described were not planned by TDA, but each of these steps made it possible for the next. When TDA's director chooses to be trained at the CNAM, he has no prior, well-defined purpose in mind but to develop his theoretical and technical competences in the field of associations. Yet he feels a need to structure his action by a knowledge of something larger than his initial field of activity – culture. This first collaboration with academics opens the way for a reflexivity which he never ceases to develop and expand. During the second step indeed, two TDA employees meet and share with other associations on experimentation approaches thanks to a stakeholder with a specific knowledge who acts as some sort of "match-maker" (La Claie). It is a crucial step because it allows for an open, permanent reflexivity approach to take shape within TDA – and this will have deep impacts on the practices in the association.

---

[22] Lecturer and accredited research director at the Theatre Department of Paris 8 University – Saint Denis

[23] Lecturer at Rennes 2 University – aka Doc Kasimir Bisou

[24] Henri P. (2011) « Démarches artistiques partagées # 1 : des processus culturels plus démocratiques ? » (under Creative Commons)
http://www.editions-attribut.fr/IMG/pdf/No56_Demarches_artistiques_partagees_1_-Philippe_Henry.pdf

The third step legitimises de facto the progress made so far by TDA, who can be seen as a promoter of ideas and an inspiring example for others. Inside TDA, the actors are confirmed in the efforts already made. As to outside actors, they find TDA's position reinforced as a cultural mediator at the local territory level.

We can see that the conditions for the process to emerge are essentially due to the project's nature and the convergence of two "problematics": culture and cultural policy. Its feasibility depends on the director's reflection and engagement on the one hand, and on his concern to develop TDA's transversal mission through dialogue and exchange on the other hand. This results in TDA's stronger legitimacy on two levels. Inside TDA, the choices made in governance methods have been formalised, tested and perpetuated (steps 1 and 2). Outside of TDA, there results a stronger relationship based on trust with the local actors – beneficiaries, partners or funders – and a greater influence network (step 3). *"I give praise for Sam's professionalism (...) The project is still evolving and is a mature one; the position is a mature one. In his relationship with institutions, there are few mistakes made (...) For us local authorities, technicians, elected officials (...), receiving a form from TDA is a pleasure." "In this neighbourhood, TDA is well established and recognised..."*
Without relinquishing its innovation process, TDA has succeeded in capitalising on its relationship with the actors from the territory.

We can conclude by giving a few facts on how this article has been "co-constructed" and the role it has played in TDA's reflexivity process.
Following a mid-term version, feedback from members of the Board of Directors have been three-fold. Firstly, details were given which contributed to improve the facts of the text's chronology and background. Then comments and changes were made to qualify both TDA's presentation and "success story". *"From the inside, you can better judge what really works and what does not work..."* (An employee at TDA). Lastly, analyses allowed for a richer reflection space. *"This text did not bring anything new to me, yet reading it enabled me to connect things together (...) Before that, there was no global narrative"* (An employee at TDA)... The interviews brought a "detail" to light: equipment made for the IDEA CAMP was used to improve the design of the venue for the last internal meeting. *"It had never been done before. We always did so for outside events, but never inside (...) Reading the article helped me to connect things together. It seemed obvious to me then"* (An employee at TDA). We thus see a stronger coherence between the first and second pillars as described by Philippe Henri. *"This will lead us to a fourth step, I think – and we will get there with researchers: we need to cross-fertilise skills and vision in order to move on"* (An employee at TDA).