“Participation”

The new cultural policy and communication agenda

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ABSTRACT

In this opening article we investigate the participatory agenda in Nordic cultural policies from a critical perspective and then introduce the articles that make up this thematic issue. In different ways, all the articles examine the effects of the shift towards participation in national cultural policies and how it is translated at regional, local and institutional policy levels. The articles raise concerns about the relationship between democracy and public culture and how it is influenced by the participatory agenda. What stands out is a perception of the participatory agenda itself as an “entangled” policy composed of different, more or less correlated means within a widened, liberal policy field that accommodates paradoxes and therefore also interventions. The central question in this introduction is how the agenda can be directed towards a “democratizing of democracy” (Agamben et al. 2010) from the perspective of a “radical” democracy as suggested by Chantal Mouffe (2013) and Jacques Rancière (2015 [2010]).

INTRODUCTION: “THE PARTICIPATORY AGENDA” IN CULTURAL POLICIES

The shift in cultural policies and institutions towards users and their active involvement in terms of “participation” has now been going on for almost a decade in Nordic, as well as European welfare societies under the heading of “outreach”.¹ However, there has been a lack of systematic examination of these policies in Nordic cultural policy research, although research on more specific aspects, such as the use of social media for interaction and learning issues is booming (Drotner et al. 2011; Rudloff 2014; Drotner & Schröder 2013). The call for papers for this thematic issue on the participatory agenda in the Nordic countries invited articles that challenge the assumptions and visions of the participatory agenda and/or critical address the way it is implemented at various levels.

¹. In Denmark initiated by the program Reach Out! Inspiration til brugerinddragelse og innovation i kulturens verden, Ministry of Culture, Denmark 2008. At EU-level The European Agenda for Culture, in particular the now ended Work plan for Culture 2012–2014 (2012).
governmental levels and in and across various types of institutions and forms of communication. The idea of guest editing such an issue arose while planning the international conference “Participate! Cultural Transformation and the Participatory Agenda” at SDU, University of Southern Denmark (2015). Several of the articles stem from this conference.

This editorial introduction presents the participatory agenda, taking its outset in Danish national cultural policies, and poses two interrelated questions: 1) To what extent does the participatory agenda under the heading of outreach constitute a break with or continuation of former cultural policies 2) To what extent does this agenda offer a democratic benefit and open up new possibilities in public culture and institutions? The exploration of the first question is rather short and based on recent Nordic policy research. The second question is influenced by the call for a “democratizing of democracy” from a group of political philosophers with an interest in cultural politics (cf. Agamben et al. 2010). We do not aim to answer the question straightforwardly, but to suggest a theoretical framework from which to engage with it. We draw on the concept of a “radical democracy” as put forward by Belgian Chantal Mouffe (2013) and French Jacques Rancière (2015 [2010]). We also refer to international scholars within cultural theory, art history and museology who argue in favour of a post-critical, “anticipatory” intellectual and institutional practice (Bishop 2013; Rogoff & Schneider 2008; Sternfeld 2013).

‘PARTICIPATION’: CONTINUITY OR BREAK IN CULTURAL POLICY AND CULTURAL POLICY RESEARCH?

In 2008, the “Reach out” programme, which placed users and their participation in public culture and institutions on the agenda in Denmark, initiated a range of outreach experiments, which were evaluated and described in a publication on “best practices” in 2012. The programme represented a continuation of former cultural policies in terms of the drive to reinforce welfare and democracy by increasing user involvement in public culture and institutions. Taking a closer look at the argumentation in these policy papers, it is however also obvious that the democratic vision is mixed up with a corporatist vision of social inclusion, as well as a corporate vision of private enterprise. Social inclusion and private enterprise are both cultural policy ends that have gradually permeated cultural policies in Denmark, as well as other comparable welfare states since the late 20th century alongside the democratic visions to bring cultural policies into a highly entangled (neo-liberal) policy field. This question is explored in detail by Jutta Virolainen through an analysis of Finnish policy documents.

Within Danish – and Nordic – cultural policy research there is a tradition of adopting a critical approach to cultural policies, claiming a gradual decline in

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2. Reach Out inspirationskatalog – navigér i brugerinddragelse og brugerdrevet innovation, CKO and Ministry of Culture Denmark 2012.
the relationship between welfare, democracy and public culture since the 1980s. This claim is based on the German political sociologist Jürgen Habermas and his theory of a general decline in deliberative democracy under the influence of neo-liberalism in both economics and politics (Duelund 2003, 2008; Mangset et al. 2008). The period from 1961 to the mid-1980s is considered the golden age of cultural policy due to its relative autonomy, while the subsequent period from the mid-1980s into 2000s is criticised for social “instrumentalisation” and economic “colonisation”. The golden age is linked to the continued expansion and consolidation of the welfare state and its classic representative institutions, while the 1980s mark the transition to a post-welfare competitive or market state with its New Public Management principles. The decline arguably illustrates that the substantial task of democratic/welfare cultural institutions has shifted from “Bildung” to social competence or employability, turning cultural communication into an instrument of governance. It is also argued that the supposedly unique Nordic cultural policy model, with its tradition of partnerships between public cultural institutions and civil society is under pressure and will be replaced by new public-private enterprises in the service of the experience economy.

By contrast, it has also been argued that Nordic cultural policies demonstrate a continued focus on “Bildung” and on the autonomy of art and culture. It has been argued that welfare cultural policies in the late 20th and early 21st century demonstrate an almost “ritual” belief in the civilizing effect of art and culture and that this belief in this period even has led to a narrowing of the very definition of culture as “high culture”, putting the “cultural democratization” way of thinking from the 1960s before and above the “cultural democracy” way of thinking of the 1970s (Røyseng 2007; Bjørnsen 2012, Harding 2015). In their article in this issue, Åsne Haugsevje, Ole Marius Hylland and Heidi Stavrum examine how this has changed again due to a renewed focus on the social and inclusive role of art and culture. They nevertheless argue that basic at least Norwegian cultural policies since the 1960s have been highly “convergent” or “sedimentary” across policy levels and institutions – even though there is a huge gap between “good intentions” at policy levels and the everyday reality and practices, leaving the latter with various paradoxes to be handled.

In general, the move in the last decade of Nordic cultural policies towards “user participation” in the broader sense of bringing in new users and facilitating their active engagement has been met by a less critical and more “realistic” approach from Nordic researchers, although the influence of the experience economy on public cultural institutions has been met with scepticism from a predominantly Habermasian perspective (Skot-Hansen 2008; Hvenegaard-Rasmussen, 2016; Harding & Nathanson 2016). It has also been argued that the shift in attention from content to visitors and the aim of turning non-users into (active) users reflects an intensification of governance, in this case from a more Foucauldian perspective (Kann-Rasmussen & Balling, 2015).
This publication aims to revitalise the critical approach and expand the post-critical position as one that engages in a “democratizing of democracy” by rethinking the democratic perspective from the point of view of a “radical” democracy as put forward in Democracy in What State (Agamben, ed. 2010). The basic idea is that the participatory agenda is part of an entangled neo-liberal, political complex in need of re-direction by an “agonistic” or “dissensual” cultural politics as described by Belgian Chantal Mouffe and French Jacques Rancière, respectively. Contrary to a Habermasian belief in the possibility of reaching consensus, they each foreground disagreement and conflict in order to push, eschew and redirect the ongoing struggle for an open, engaged and experimental cultural citizenship.

“PARTICIPATION” AS DEMOCRATIC PARADOX AND RADICAL EXPERIMENT

Contrary to Habermas’ deliberative, consensus-seeking democracy, Chantal Mouffe considers democracy to constitute an antagonism and call for an agonistic politics. Even if consensus should be reached on the ideal claim of freedom, there will always be different answers as to “how”. Mouffe distinguishes between “the political” and “politics”, the first being the foundation of the latter as a place for the actual distribution of power and as a specific way of organising against hegemony. Radical politics is significant in its acknowledgement of the principle of antagonism, pursuing an “agonistic” politics and conflictual pluralism. Mouffe further argues that critique as a way of engaging in radical cultural politics can and should be performed both without and within (art) institutions, not least cultural institutions such as museums. Cultural institutions might provide an alternative to the market and the market-oriented experience economy, although struggling with the demands of a neo-liberal cultural politics (Mouffe 2013: 101). She also gives some examples of institutions that she considers radical and to enhance an antagonistic public space, for instance MACBA in Barcelona. This is explored in detail by the art historian Claire Bishop in her Radical Museology (2013), as well as in the article by Sabine Dahl Nielsen in this issue.

While Mouffe foregrounds the issue of liberty, the French political philosopher Jacques Rancière engages with the issue of equality. According to Rancière, democracy is a dynamic and “uncontrollable” process, never completely definitive, attainable or consensual, but a continuous attempt to grasp the vision of it momentarily (Rancière 2014 [2009] and 2015 [2010]). He argues that democracy constitutes a basic paradox which cannot be dissolved, but only pushed, eschewed and re instituted through radical politics. Rancière defines such a politics as a disturbance of the existing social order by “dissension”, e.g. an invocation of the principle of equality in situations, in places and of subjects that are not embraced by it. “Politics” is, according to Rancière, the opposite of “police”, which maintain the given social order with its distribution of equality and its regulation of what is deemed sensible and valid. That is also
why politics and aesthetics are intertwined. At stake in politics is the distribution of the sensible:

I call the distribution of the sensible the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it. (Rancière 2015 [2010]: 7)

The Dutch educational researcher Gert Biesta, who has contributed to one of the core policy papers within Danish museum policies (Biesta 2014), has introduced Rancière to a Danish/Nordic public. He is engaged in the idea of a radical democracy and its implications in terms of education and Bildung. According to Biesta, radical democracy must be understood as a shift away from a focus on citizens as members of a state, where attention is mainly on duties and rights and on political representation, towards a focus on active citizenship in communities based on practised participation. Biesta understands Bildung as “subjectification” and as a concept of the active citizen within the framework of the participating/practising community – rather than a concept of the citizen identified with and represented by a group. What is radical about this concept of subject and Bildung is that its objective is not equality (and the absence of difference), instead equality (in the different and the socially unequal/excluded) is its starting point, as formulated by Rancière in the paradigmatic essay on “The Emancipated Spectator” (2014 [2009]). The ideas of Rancière and Biesta are further explored in the article by Hjørdis Brandrup Kortbek, Charlotte Præstegaard Schwartz, Anne Scott Sørensen and Mette Thobo-Carlsen in this issue. But let us now examine how they have been applied in a more specific analytical approach to cultural policy, institutions and communication by a range of cultural critics and professionals.

“PARTICIPATION” AS A RADICAL PRACTICE

The Austrian cultural critic and curator Nora Sternfeld (2013), currently at Aalto University in Helsinki, has put forward that the new participatory agenda in cultural policies and institutions risks creating a new form of transformational rather than a truly transformative practice, i.e. a control-based governing rationality, which aims at enlisting everyone and incorporating critique without involving the actual power relations and structures. She states:

Participation is not simply about joining in the game, it is also about having the possibility to question the rules of the game: the conditions under which education, the public realm and representation within institutions happen. And, when understood in this way, participation can indeed make a difference. (Sternfeld 2013: 4)

Sternfeld is inspired by Rancière, and, like Biesta, uses his distinctions between politics and police and a representative versus an expanded demo-
The aim is to clarify how participation as a cultural strategy balances the two. Sternfeld is particularly interested in what she considers patronising efforts to include in the representational logic those previously excluded. She deems it a strategy that is ultimately about self-legitimisation of the institution, and advocates instead (as does Rancière) solidarity with the part “that does not have any part” (Sternfeld 2013: 6). This is to be achieved, according to Sternfeld, by challenging the “police” logic and its power mechanisms through various forms of dissension and by contributing to establishing a non-representative public space open to possibilities and presence. This is encouraged by reducing the (much too) controlling/controlled curating in favour of open, performative invitation and by making room for the unexpected and unusual encounters.

Another source of inspiration for Sternfeld is the British critic of art and culture Irit Rogoff, who, along with the cultural activist Florian Schneider, has developed an experimental platform for the “post-representative” cultural institution/museum in the form of a “productive anticipation”, i.e. an actualisation of the (better) future as a potential and a possibility (Rogoff & Schneider 2008). In their efforts to clarify this strategic intervention they look to historical, as well as current forms of activism on a global level, from the 1968 movement via the Chinese Tiananmen Square uprising in 1989, to the anti-globalisation movements of today. These are considered successful in changing the protocols of the given political culture by cultivating a practised citizenship, which in all its chaotic diversity is its own motivation or explanation. In their analysis, Rogoff and Schneider use the concept of multitude borrowed from the critical political scientists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri to describe the collective subject that in these cases momentarily crystallised out of the mass and found a common direction, only to dissolve – again – into a multiplicity of singular individuals and their diverging agendas. They reveal that both these old and new forms of activism constitute an alternative to an academic/intellectual critical culture by investing in the now and establishing a form of parallel/virtual reality. Criticism, then, changes from being a means to an end to being actualised, alive and a sense-concrete being (Rogoff & Schneider 2008).

Rogoff and Schneider examine some of the keywords used in current institutional and non-institutional experiments in order to direct them towards what they define as a productive anticipation. It concerns “access”, non-scripted “participation”, “singularity”, “collaboration/collectivity” and “ownership”. They first speak ironically of the banal ways these concepts are employed – access for example must not be confused with accessibility – next looking to philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze, Georgio Agamben and Jean-Luc Nancy for a more radical understanding. Despite their differences, these philosophers believe in challenging the representative, identity-borne and consensus-typed democracy/community in favour of a lived, diverse and also paradoxical and agonistic or dis-sensual togetherness. Characteristic of the latter is the modification of citizenship from “having something in common” to “being together/sharing” – not to be understood as an overarching community, but as
one “between those who have nothing in common”. Participation, then, must acknowledge the fragile and unpredictable, yet nevertheless intense, insistent and affectively invested as opposed to the conditioned, calculated and thereby ultimately indifferent – this is the approach that Rogoff describes elsewhere as a certain type of “seriousness” in art and culture (Rogoff 2012).

“PARTICIPATION” AND THE RADICAL CULTURAL INSTITUTION/ THE RADICAL MUSEUM

Rogoff and Schneider ask: “What do the ways look like through which culture becomes an investment of citizenship with life and power?” They propose that this investment signals a new “non-representational” cultural modus, by means of which culture as such can be freed from the mimetic creativity that has caused the present troubles in/for the world, in favour of an aspirational and anticipatory attitude that can set new agendas (Rogoff & Schneider 2008: 6). They state that to be able to imagine and anticipate is vital for the emergence of a new institutional culture that, instead of reflecting what already exists, can open up new public spaces where activities can take place that have not yet been firmly defined and where the unavoidable paradoxes and the inherent uncertainty can become a dynamic driving force (ibid: 6).

These ideas correspond to a number of other efforts to conceive art, culture and institutions free of representation. As a theoretical concept, the non-representational has been developed by cultural geographers such as Nigel Thrift and Hayden Lorrimer, although the latter prefers to speak of “more-than-representational” theory. A non- or more-than-representational cultural concept stresses that culture is not something that exists as an encapsulated value to be uncovered by the researcher and mediated by the expert. Culture is what arises, is created, is affectively invested in and ascribed meaning as such in situation-determined meetings and processes between things, places and people, which includes the institutionally framed meeting in, for example, the museum or the urban space. Within museology, alternative concepts are used, such as the “relational” museum (Grewcock 2014) or the “radical” museum (Bishop 2013). These express a desire to transgress the negative- and post-designations and instead to signal a new type of cultural institution that points towards an anticipation of the possible, common future. Grewcock (2014) finds inspiration in Nicolas Bourriaud’s aesthetics-theoretical concept of relation, with its focus on the relation between art/materials, the public and institutions. Bishop (2013) prefers to speak of a radical museology, emphasising that it designates the way of understanding and running a museum, and is inspired by the same radical philosophers as Rogoff and Schneider (2008). She is particularly interested in examining how museums of contemporary art engage in the idea of the “contemporary”, and the extent to which they make themselves a critical or rather anticipatory medium that connects past, present and future, and at the same time places resources at the disposal of and enters into collaborations with active groups of citizens.
Based on various examples, Bishop outlines a typology of institutional forms that have arisen historically, but which also exist side by side in today’s museum world: 1) the “representative” museum, which arose with the modern and had its heyday in the 19th to 20th centuries, characterised by its historical-mimetic endeavours and its informative orientation; 2) the “presentist” museum, which is a late-modern phenomenon of the 21st century, characterised by its accumulation of present times and it’s here-and-now experience orientation; 3) finally, the new “radical” museum, the contours of which are only now beginning to take shape through a series of experiments, and is characterised by its anticipatory endeavours and its alliances with various civic groups, initiatives and projects. Things, places and people are not inscribed onto a particular identity or meaning, nor do they have meaning “taken” from them, rather the links are opened up to new connections, insights and possibilities along with a renewed interest in objects, spaces and materials inside and outside the museum world (for this “material” perspective, see also Dudley 2010; Marres 2012).

Inspired by Chantal Mouffe, Bishop bases her argument for a radical museology on three cases, all museums of contemporary art: the Van Abbemuseum (Eindhoven), the Museo Nacional de Reina Sofía (Madrid) and MSUM (Ljubljana). According to Bishop, despite limited finances and reduced budgets, each has succeeded in establishing an experimental curatorial practice that addresses the present and challenges the institutional logic by involving various groups of users and citizens at various levels (see also Sabine Dahl Nielsen’s article on this). Bishop stresses that the three examples are not offered as ideals, but as examples of how one can navigate the ambivalences of today’s institutional framework. Drawing on her analysis, we end this introduction by discussing how a bigger and rather new Danish art museum struggles with the entangled policies of participation and translates them into an exhibition programme and daily practice. Bishop’s ideas are also developed further in the articles by Sabine Dahl Nielsen and Hjørdis Brandrup Kortbek, Charlotte Præstegaard Schwartz, Anne Scott Sørensen and Mette Thobo-Carlsen.

“PARTICIPATION”: FROM CULTURAL POLICY TO INSTITUTIONAL, COMMUNICATIVE PRACTICE

In summer 2015, Arken (The Ark), a relatively new museum of modern art located in a concrete suburb of Copenhagen, held a conference on “participationism” as a trend in the mediation of art and culture. The aim of the conference was to encourage reflection on the outreach agenda. Contributors were invited to consider what has become dogma and what possibilities remain. In Denmark, Arken can be seen as an example of the issues raised here. Currently, it seems squeezed between major blockbuster exhibitions, such as the popular Bjørn Wiinblad exhibition held in autumn 2015, and more experimental ventures, such as the re-erection of the Danish artivist Palle Nielsen’s installation The Model in 2014 or the landscape exhibition Art in Sunlight in 2015, which
(as the advertising claimed) “makes the area around ARKEN – from Ishøj Station to the beautiful coastal park – a living arena for art, play and physical activity”.

The latter exhibition extended over the whole summer of 2015 and included 10 temporary installations and a few permanent ones, all of which in various ways invited both museum visitors and ordinary beach visitors and passersby to sit down and take part (cf. the Arken website). They therefore offered a public resource and several of them could be considered “anticipations of the future”. One of the installations was a pyramid construction of wood, entitled Kom vi hertil uden ofre? (…)[Did we come here without sacrifices?] and erected by the water’s edge by the Danish artist Jesper Dalgaard. It acquired a radical topical significance as an evocation of the migrant boats as stranded victims of global politics, while also being a very physical, “sustainable” anchorage point stretching towards land and into the future, acquiring a more universal significance. Another installation was the Danish artist Karoline H. Larsen’s Common Dreams, which consisted of a series of colourful dream-catchers that had been woven by women from local integration projects, who were also regularly involved in the installation. Other pieces included the German artist Thilo Frank’s large swing standing in the water, and one of Danish Jeppe Hein’s already widely known Modified Benches that have been installed in a number of large cities. These two works invited us – the user-participants – to experience with our bodies, challenging the way we use our bodies and move around in our everyday lives, both separately and with others. They challenged our conceptions of everyday things, how they exist in the world and how we, the user-participants, interact with them.

3. From September, 2015, to be found in the archive for earlier exhibitions.
The reason for highlighting these examples is to emphasize the fact that an aspirational and anticipatory practice has to be grounded in continuous experimentation and the struggle to disclose the possible within actual financial and political orders. It can also be found in subtle moments, elements or details. It can lie in collaborations between various user groups etc. For those participating, a new beginning can even be found in what Rogoff describes in her paradigmatic essay “Looking away” (2005) as a turning away, a renunciation of a work, an exhibition or an institution – so as to turn towards something else, towards the social, the other museum visitors or the public space. Or it can possibly be found in laughter, attentiveness and intensity – and in being present among others who are present (Rogoff 2012). We now turn to the presentation of the articles in this thematic issue on “participation”.

PRESENTATION OF THE ARTICLES ON “PARTICIPATION” IN THIS THEMATIC ISSUE

The guest editors of this thematic issue, Hjørdis Brandrup Kortbek, Anne Scott Sørensen and Mette Thobo-Carlsen (with Charlotte Præstegaard Schwartz), have written an article on “The participatory agenda: An anticipatory intervention”, based on the conceptual framework outlined in this introduction. It argues that an agonistic/radical cultural politics would require a conceptual intervention and reclaiming of the core terms of liberal cultural policies in general and of the participatory agenda in particular: democracy, transformation etc. We focus on three of the core phrases of the participatory agenda, as suggested by Rogoff & Schneider (2008) and foregrounded by three cases we have been involved in: “access”, “agency” (participation) and “ownership”. We argue that cultural politics in general and the participatory agenda in particular are full of paradoxes that emerge when translated into practice. These paradoxes cannot be resolved but only reworked by an agonistic politics including a performative conceptual intervention in the form of an anticipatory analysis and practice, grasping and materializing the future in the now.

In her article on ”Aktion! Kuratering som organisering af participatoriske konfliktzoner” [Action! Curating as organization of participatory conflict zones] Sabine Dahl Nielsen explores the conceptual framework. Her starting point is Chantal Mouffe’s theory of radical democracy and agonistic politics, as well as the Danish-British curator and critic Simon Sheikh’s interpretation hereof. She claims that art institutions can be thought of as friction filled sites of mediation. Taking this claim as a point of departure, she elaborates on how art institutions can function as social spaces that contribute to the production of so-called conflictual consensus. She examines how art institutions can commission participatory projects in public spaces and underlines how such projects can function as catalysts of conflicts and negotiations in urban contexts. She also discusses how institutions can help turn friction filled situations into critical, political and democratically engaging aspects of their modus operandi. Conducting an analytical project similar to Claire Bishop (2013), Nielsen ana-
lyses a series of curatorial experiments led by the art museum MACBA between 2000 and 2008. She argues that the agonistic perspective of MACBA and the museum’s practice in particular during the period in question has facilitated a much needed debate about the participatory visions and practices. She ends by mentioning another contemporary project, the Edgware Road Project in London, which develops further the means of a radical cultural politics of conflictual consensus.

In the article “Participatory turn in cultural policy? An analysis of the concept of cultural participation in Finnish cultural policy”, Jutta Virolainen explores the semantics of “cultural participation” in core policy papers in Finland. She interrogates the understanding of cultural participation per se by revealing how the concept of cultural participation has been actively constructed within the framework of the political and through actual cultural politics. Cultural policy documents from core cultural institutions and at different policy levels are subjected to discourse analysis to uncover the inherent semantics and sense-making. As a result, the article presents a typology of the main discursive themes manifest in the concept of cultural participation in Finnish cultural policy. The typology is considered relevant in a broader context, and in particular for reviewing Nordic cultural policies in a wider European context.

From these three theoretical-analytical articles, the thematic issue moves on to praxis and ethnographic methods. In the article: “Kultur for å delta. Når kulturpolitiske idealer skal realiseres i praktisk kulturarbeid” [Participatory culture. When cultural policy ideals are to be made into practice] Åsne Haugsevje, Ole Marius Hylland and Heidi Stavrum investigate the paradoxes that emerge when participatory cultural policy ideals at the national level – in this case framed as a combination of cultural democratization and diversity/inclusion – are realized within a local, municipal context. They consider what kind of dimensions – organizational and practical – must be taken into account when local cultural workers engage new groups of cultural users, in this case children and young people from a multicultural background. How can the relationships between local practices and national policy objectives be described and analyzed? What can be learned from local cultural work when it comes to the interrelation between political objectives and political levels of government? The empirical basis of the study is participant observation and qualitative interviews conducted as part of a research project that has followed three different cultural initiatives in Drammen, Norway’s second most multicultural city. The material is presented as three cases, each corresponding to different cultural activities for different age groups (pre-school, primary and secondary school). Through these cases, the authors aim to contribute to empirically and practically oriented knowledge on cultural policy ideals and how these are translated into practice in a local setting. The main conclusion is that local cultural policies are loaded with “good intentions” to form a “convergence” or “sedimentation” at the visionary level, also found to be the case in other Nordic and European studies, but also a range of paradoxes to be handled in the often chaotic everyday settings of the local institutions.
The article “From a project culture to long-term partnerships. Connecting art and vocational education (CAVE)” by Mathias Rude, Louise Russo and Leslie Ann Schmidt also examines how the participatory agenda is put into practice locally, this time in terms of partnerships at the institutional level to frame new objectives and forms of learning in museums. Reaching out and engaging with new visitors and taking on new educational functions as a platform for social learning, inclusion and democratic training are part of the changing task of the museum as described in the Danish Museum Act of 2015. New ways of working with primary and secondary schools, but also schools and institutions offering vocational education for young/adult students have been required, as well as new approaches to communication, content, activities and pedagogy. The authors report on practice and the ongoing process of developing new methods for working across institutions, adopting the concept of (sustainable) partnership from organizational theory, as well as the concept of dialogic learning and social action from pedagogic theory. The institutions involved are Brandts, Museum of Art and Visual Culture in Odense and a number of educational institutions on Funen. The article considers how to integrate the participatory agenda in the context of these institutional partnerships and manage the transformation of the museum to meet groups of users unaccustomed to the institution, and how to create new types of learning, not directed by the learning goals of the formal educational system.

From the theory and practice of cultural policies, readers are invited to join a discussion of methodology in the last two articles of this thematic issue but in two quite different respects. In the article “The participatory researcher: developing the concept of ‘accompanying research’”, the authors Dorthe Refslund Christensen, Louise Ejgod Hansen, Ida Krøgholt and Carsten Stage address the methodological challenges that arise when researchers and professionals/practitioners come together in a kind of provisionary partnership to develop new types of knowledge around specific phenomena, practices or empirical fields. They argue that new forms of collaboration, for which they suggest the term partnerships and/or participatory research, but prefer to term “accompanying” research, transgress existing definitions such as ethnographic or anthropological field work and evaluation or interventional/action-based research. Significantly, this type of research is generated neither solely from the position of the researcher nor from the position of the researched, but is developed through commonality and is continuously developing (albeit for a shorter period) on an equal ground. “Accompanying” research involves new types of networks of research and practice in which the distinction is challenged between product and process, in order to generate new tropes of knowledge. The article is based on three cases, one of which highlights the concept of “the assemblage” (with reference to Manuel DeLanda). This concept makes it possible to consider how elements (among them the researcher persona) are attached to each other in ways that transform their singular properties into (more or less empowering) capacities and ultimately transform the assemblage’s own capacity to act and produce. The assemblage approach defines
“accompanying research” as a way of creating a “research assemblage” or perhaps rather a “researched assemblage”.

The last article by Geir Grothen challenges the inherent premises of current cultural policy research. One of the main objectives of Norwegian cultural policies (and those of other comparable welfare/democratic countries) regards the accessibility of art and culture to all citizens and is said to require detailed knowledge of non-users in terms of “incentives and barriers”. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s distinction between “nomadic” and “royal” sciences, the article discusses possible approaches to this call for knowledge. Based on two studies, which both make use of qualitative interview methods, it argues for the need of complementary, “nomadic” methods in the production of qualitative (oral) data to study the relationship between the public and the arts/culture. Grothen argues that established research, not least when adopting Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of distinction and applied models hereof in terms of segments of users etc., repeats the same type of knowledge to the extent that the supposed findings are in fact mere production – a result of the embedded premises. Drawing also on Brian Massumi, he argues that new knowledge is generated while it happens – that is on the spot, embodied and in the joint efforts of researcher and researched. Grothen explores how the concept and method of “assemblage” implies an engagement with artefacts, technologies and affects. The article ends by briefly outlining this new theoretical and analytical approach, imaginatively illustrated by his own field notes from the opening exhibition of Astrup Farnley (museum).

Anne Scott Sørensen and the guest editors, July 2016

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