

The right to participate in urban cultural life: from inequalities to equity

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In particular, the present paper has contributed to Chapter 9 on 'Democratizing', which focuses on the challenges and opportunities for local and regional governments in implementing meaningful participatory processes, and democratizing decision-making, unpacking asymmetries of power and the underpinning trends affecting processes of democratization. Through the lens of 'democratizing', the chapter explores how local and regional governments can promote more egalitarian, participatory and democratic processes, giving voice to marginalized groups of society, minorities and other groups, and thus contribute to urban and territorial equality.

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Introduction

Inequalities in fields such as economy, health, education or housing have been deeply analysed and discussed. However, inequalities in cultural participation, in the exercising of this cultural right, remain secondary both on the academic and political agendas. Despite some relevant initiatives, public and private organisations have paid relatively little attention to inequalities in cultural rights. Nor, with a few exceptions, has academia systematically analysed these inequalities. Though different degrees of cultural participation are continually and systematically associated with certain social factors and conditions.

Inequalities in cultural participation are not a new phenomenon.¹ But discussions about this topic have been focused on a specific form of participation: formal, “legitimate” cultural activities or habits. Debates have disregarded informal, popular, community and other activities and practices that are part of everyday life and help to develop the right to participate in cultural life. In other words, usually, cultural participation is reduced to the category of the public and/or audience.

Why are inequalities in the right to participate in cultural life important? On the one hand, they are important to understand democratic deficits and threats to democracy. They are closely related to a range of social and economic inequalities. In order to understand more general and urban exclusion processes, as well as the development of unequal societies at the broader level, cultural inequalities must be taken into consideration. **Without the right of access to, participation in and contribution to cultural life, any development process runs the risk of not being fully sustainable.**²

On the other hand, cultural rights are inseparable from human rights. Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights refers to “economic, social and cultural rights” as indispensable to the dignity of the human being. Article 27 states that “everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community” and also refers to access to the arts, participation in scientific progress and authorship rights. Citizenship, development and sustainability are three key concepts for

understanding what we mean when we refer to cultural rights, as the different Special Rapporteurs of the United Nations in the field of cultural rights have identified. Besides, the Agenda 21 for Culture, adopted in 2004, which has been endorsed by many cities and local governments in the world, affirms that cultural rights are an integral part of human rights. The organisation United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) has promoted its implementation with the practical toolkit ‘Culture 21 Actions’, adopted in 2015, which devotes a full commitment to cultural rights. More recently, during pandemic times, UCLG and the City Council of Rome elaborated the 2020 Rome Charter as a contribution to the right to participate fully and freely in cultural life, which focus specifically in the obstacles that impede this right.³

The right to participate in the cultural life of the city includes at least four dimensions: a) access to or attendance at activities produced by all kinds of cultural organisations; b) citizen practices which enable creation, training and expression; c) community participation, which means belonging to various cultural entities, groups or collectives; and d) participation in public decision-making and governance, in short, the processes of formulating, implementing and evaluating cultural policies. Thus, this cultural right is not limited to taking part in activities promoted by the public authorities. At the same time, cultural policies have a major responsibility for promoting these four dimensions.

Although the understanding of inequalities in the right to participate in cultural life is more limited than for other fields, inequalities in the four dimensions mentioned above are well-known. Public resources allocated to cultural activities (at least more formal and legitimate ones) are concentrated on the wealthiest, better educated and less ethnically diverse population.⁴ And changes driven by digital cultural participation have opened new opportunities but not solved these pre-existing inequalities.⁵ To sum up, inequalities in the right to participate in urban cultural life persist. Even more, these inequalities are becoming more complex: they are multidimensional and multifactorial.

1. See classical studies from Pierre Bourdieu to Tony Bennet, Antonio Ariño or Modesto Gayo, among others.

2. Bouchard and Meyer-Bisch, ‘Intersectionality and Interdependence of Human Rights: Same or Different?’; Baltà and Dragijević, ‘Cultural rights and their contribution to sustainable development: Implications for cultural policy’; Pascual, ‘Cultural Rights, local cultural policies and sustainable development: constructing a coherent narrative’.

3. See <https://www.2020romecharter.org/>. The Rome Charter was approved in November 2020 by the UCLG World Council.

4. Warwick Commission. Enriching Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth.

5. Gayo, ‘Desigualdad, ¿existe alguna posibilidad de conseguir niveles de igualdad cultural aceptables?’; Mihelj et al., ‘Culture is digital: Cultural participation, diversity and the digital divide’.

On the one hand, inequalities are present in the four dimensions of the right to participate in cultural life. On the other hand, they depend on several factors that can be summarised in three concepts: difference (place of residence, gender, origin, etc.), resources (material, symbolic) and connection (social, digital, etc.). Figure 1 illustrates these ideas.

Having said that, the available evidence is still focused on nations or state spheres. Most of the available data (surveys, researches) is about cultural participation in countries or regions. Knowledge about cultural participation and inequalities at local or urban scale is very limited. That is why the next section will be dedicated to present and analyse some of the limited existing data and knowledge about the right to participate in urban cultural life. The role of cultural participation in a pandemic context will also be addressed.

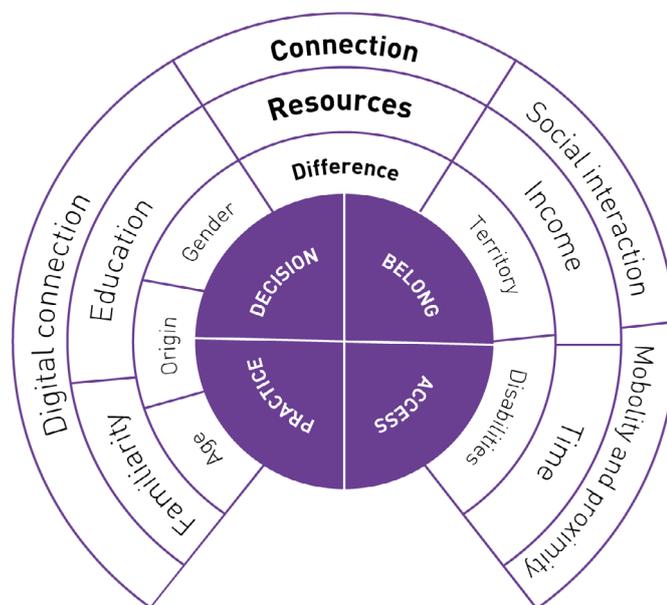


Figure 1. Inequalities in the right to participate in cultural life
Source: own elaboration

1. Inequalities in cultural participation at the urban scale: what do we know?

As explained, most of the available data about inequalities in the right to participate in cultural life is about nation or state spheres. There is a lack of knowledge regarding inequalities at local or urban scale. This is particularly the case about the impact of the pandemic in cultural participation inequalities.

Even if the evidence is limited, some cities have recently developed important surveys on cultural participation. That is the case of Barcelona, New York and Bogotá. Thus, this section presents and analyses available data at local scale in order to identify the main inequalities in the right to participate in urban cultural life.

The first Survey of Cultural Participation and Cultural Needs in Barcelona⁶ provides evidence about different dimensions of the right to participate in the cultural life of the city.⁷ It includes a wide range of cultural practices (e.g. creation, artistic education and community participation) beyond merely consuming products and attending events. It also pays particular attention to evidence of inequalities in this right, taking into account factors such as neighbourhoods, income, level of education, gender, country of birth and family traditions.

The first finding of this survey is that the cultural participation of Barcelona's population is both extensive and diverse, and is not limited to what has been called

“legitimate culture” (activities recognised by and produced with the support of public institutions or other formal agencies in the cultural sector with more prescriptive power⁸). Cultural life of people living in Barcelona also embraces activities not usually recognised as culture, such as storytelling for children and other groups of people, taking part in folk events and other community activities, or walking in nature or around the city (see table 1 below for the details).

Having said that, the survey shows that there are inequalities, and not just differences, in the right to participate in the cultural life of the city. **Why do we talk about inequalities? Because there are different degrees of participation that are systematically associated with certain social and territorial characteristics.⁹**

One of the main factors that condition these inequalities is the neighbourhood of residence. In this regard, the case of Barcelona is similar to that of other cities, where living in a particular neighbourhood is related to a certain level of income. Thus, the survey shows that neighbourhood and income are important to explain the existence of inequalities in cultural participation in Barcelona. This is particularly evident in access or attendance to legitimate cultural goods and events, but also in cultural practice (see table 1).

6. Barcelona City Council, Survey of cultural participation and cultural needs in Barcelona.

7. I was part of the survey's promoting team, together with Montse Tort and Assumpta Manits (Barcelona Cultural Data Observatory, Institut de Cultura de Barcelona), to whom I extend special thanks for this opportunity.

8. These are activities associated with meanings of culture endowed with more social legitimacy. For a detailed explanation of the legitimate culture concept, see the work of Philippe Coulangeon, among other authors.

9. Barbieri, *Es la desigualdad, también en cultura*.

Inequalities in access to legitimate culture are particularly evident, but it is worth noting that people living in neighbourhoods with middle disposable household income (DHI, an index that combines five socio-economic variables that are indicative of the population's level of income, calculated in relation to the city's average value, set at 100) do actively practise culture more than the rest. It is reasonable to conclude that postcode is as or more important than income in explaining the right to practise cultural activities.

Another interesting and relevant survey on cultural participation at local scale is the Biennial Survey of Cultures of Bogota.¹⁰ It also provides evidence about the vibrant cultural life of city's population, and pays attention to inequalities taking into account factors such as territory and socioeconomic status. Analysing the survey, we can conclude that these two factors are remarkably important to explain the existence of inequalities in cultural participation in Bogota. This is particularly evident regarding the attendance to legitimate cultural activities, but also (to a lesser extent) regarding the cultural practice (see table 2).

Due to limited space, it is not possible to explain in detail other important factors that also condition inequalities in the right to participate in cultural life in the city, but the family environment is also very important for this right. In the case of Barcelona, almost 44% of the people without regular contact with artistic expression in the family environment do not have access to any of these cultural activities. Moreover, migration status and country of birth also help to explain inequalities in the cultural participation, but not in all activities. Considering access to legitimate culture activities in this city, people from European Union participate more, and more intensively than people born outside the EU. However, the inequality experienced by this group of people disappears when the type of cultural participation being measured is expanded: cultural practice (in contrast to access) is more equitable.¹¹

On the other hand, the Barcelona survey also asks for what has been called "non-legitimate culture" activities (practices not usually recognised as culture). Table 3 shows there are some territorial inequalities in this kind of cultural participation as well, but at the same time certain activities are more equitably developed.

% Often or very often	NEIGHBOURHOODS			
	TOTAL	LOW DHI	MIDDLE DHI	HIGH DHI
Access or attendance	62.4	49.7	68.4	71.9
Reading books	52.2	39.6	58.3	61.5
Going to the cinema	17.1	12.7	17.6	25.0
Visiting exhibitions, museums	15.9	8.7	19.8	20.0
Going to concerts	7.9	5.1	8.9	11.3
Going to the theatre	7.0	4.5	8.5	8.0
Other activities related to literature	6.6	5.4	8.0	5.1
Going to dance shows	2.4	1.6	2.4	4.2
Practice	39.7	33.8	44.5	38.3
Writing	13.7	12.7	14.9	12.3
Doing photography or audiovisual creations	13.8	10.3	16.9	12.5
Playing instruments, singing, making music	11.3	8.0	13.2	12.5
Painting, drawing, making sculptures	11.1	10.5	11.6	10.7
Dancing of any kind	7.4	8.1	6.9	7.3
Taking part in theatre productions	1.5	1.1	2.0	0.9

Table 1. Legitimate cultural activities: access and practice (% often or very often, last six months). According to disposable household income (DHI) in three types of neighbourhoods. 2019. Source: adapted from Survey of Cultural Participation and Cultural Needs in Barcelona

Indicator	Place of residence		Socioeconomic status		
	District with lowest participation	District with highest participation	Low	Middle	High
Access or attendance (at least once in the past 12 months)					
Theatre plays	14.6	54.5	25.2	25.5	49.5
Visual arts exhibitions	11.5	35.2	15.9	13.7	29.4
Dance shows	10.1	32.1	16.7	15.4	26.5
Cinema or audio-visual exhibitions	18.3	92.1	36.2	35	79.5
Concerts	15.1	88.6	30.9	28.3	73.4
Practice (more than once a week)					
Singing, playing instruments, making music	5.9	17.4	11.4	9.2	13.7
Writing (novel, short story, essay, poetry, comic, etc.)	3.6	14.1	7.5	6.3	10.9
Painting, drawing, doing photography	2.5	9.6	5.6	5.1	9.4
Taking part in performing arts	4.8	17.9	7.9	5.6	13.9

Table 2. Legitimate cultural activities: attendance and practice (% of the total population). According to place of residence and socioeconomic status. 2019. Source: adapted from Biennial Survey of Cultures of Bogota

10. Bogota City Council, Biennial Survey of Cultures of Bogota.

11. Barcelona City Council, Survey of cultural participation and cultural needs in Barcelona.

The Biennial Survey of Cultures of Bogota also develops a relevant work on detecting and measuring 'non-legitimate culture' activities: informal, popular or community everyday practices, very important in the exercise of the right to participate in cultural life. Table 4 highlights territorial inequalities in this kind of cultural participation as well, but regarding socioeconomic status it is remarkable that certain practices are more equitably developed.

As mentioned above, the right to participate in the cultural life of the city is also developed through participation in cultural organisations and public decision-making. This is closely connected to the general issue of democratisation of urban governance. The Survey of Cultural Participation and Cultural Needs in Barcelona explicitly addresses this dimension, including as cultural organisations not only artistic ones but also social entities and sports centres. In this regard, participation is equitable between people living in middle-income and high-income neighbourhoods, and the principal differences are between them and low-income neighbourhoods (see table 5).

More specifically, gender is a factor related to difference that can explain inequalities in cultural participation. In the case of Barcelona, even if a general analysis shows an equitable participation between men and women, a detailed study identifies differences which can be partly explained by the sex/gender system. On the one hand, women are more involved in social entities, collectives and movements, while men opt for sports clubs or hiking centres. On the other hand, women participate slightly more in artistic activities, while men take part in other activities, such as sports, group games or walking around the city or in nature. Thus, the differences seem to stem from socially constructed gender patterns, which represent the existence of inequalities.¹²

Q3. COULD YOU TELL ME IF YOU HAVE SPENT PART OF YOUR TIME ON ANY OF THESE ACTIVITIES IN THE LAST SIX MONTHS?

% Often or very often	NEIGHBOURHOODS			
	TOTAL	LOW DHI	MIDDLE DHI	HIGH DHI
Walking around the city	70.6	58.4	77.9	75.7
Going to restaurants, bars, etc.	43.5	34.7	46.5	54.1
Walking in nature	43.4	43.4	42.8	45.0
Doing sport or playing group games	41.5	31.1	47.2	47.4
Doing arts and crafts, woodwork, etc.	22.1	19.0	24.7	21.1
Going to fairs and markets	21.4	20.6	21.8	22.0
Storytelling	18.5	17.7	20.1	15.4
Taking part in traditional or popular events, or other community activities	15.7	16.5	16.5	11.8
Going to places of worship/religious centres or taking part in some collective spiritual practice	11.8	11.4	11.4	13.4
Going to discos, clubs, dance halls, etc.	7.3	6.0	7.8	8.9

Table 3. Non-legitimate cultural activities (% often or very often, last six months). According to disposable household income (DHI) in three types of neighbourhoods. 2019. Source: adapted from Survey of Cultural Participation and Cultural Needs in Barcelona

Indicator	Place of residence		Socioeconomic status		
	District with lowest participation	District with highest participation	Low	Middle	High
Access or attendance (at least once in the past 12 months)					
Popular festivals	13.5	50.8	23.3	23.4	45.9
Discos, clubs, etc.	18.3	92.8	38.4	37.6	79.6
Historical sites or monuments	10.6	37.9	18.3	20.3	18.7
Fairs and markets	30.8	95.3	51.1	53	85.1
Religious centres	23.2	93.9	43.2	39.3	81.4
Practice (often)					
Traditional language	6	18.1	11.8	11.3	14.7
Traditional craft	4.2	25.3	11.1	9.9	20.7
Popular or traditional arts and events	7.4	50.1	17.6	12.1	42.3
Traditional sports and games	10.6	90.8	27.9	21.9	73.9
Culinary culture	9.9	27.6	15.1	18.5	15

Table 4. Non-legitimate cultural activities: attendance and practice (% of the total population). According to place of residence and socioeconomic status. 2019. Source: adapted from Biennial Survey of Cultures of Bogota

12. Barcelona City Council, Survey of cultural participation and cultural needs in Barcelona.

In short, it can be said that, in order to have the right to participate in urban cultural life, one's postcode is more important than genetic code. But this relationship between territory (including income) and participation is not always unequivocal. **It is important to identify the absence of people and communities from activities offered by public authorities, as well as the barriers to participation. But it is also necessary to highlight citizens' capabilities for involvement in cultural practices off the institutional radar.** This is why the Survey of Cultural Participation in Barcelona introduces the 'cultural asset' concept,¹³ i.e. spaces and communities of reference for cultural participation in a given area. These assets help boosting cultural capabilities of people and communities, enabling them to tackle inequalities.¹⁴ In order to identify these assets, an open question was included asking people to point out the most important spaces or places for a neighbourhood cultural life. As table 6 shows, a large part of the population values spaces not always recognised as legitimate cultural assets.

Q14. ARE YOU CURRENTLY TAKING PART IN ANY OF THE ENTITIES OR GROUPS I AM GOING TO READ OUT NOW, FOR SHARED ACTIVITIES?

% Often or very often	NEIGHBOURHOODS			
	TOTAL	LOW DHI	MIDDLE DHI	HIGH DHI
Artistic entities	19.4	17.4	20.7	19.7
Artistic entity or group	18.8	16.8	20.2	19.0
Book club	1.0	0.5	1.3	1.1
Social entities	42.5	39.1	44.7	43.4
Social entity or movement	23.5	18.6	26.5	25.0
Spiritual or religious entity	13.2	16.1	10.7	14.2
WhatsApp groups for shared activities	7.8	9.0	6.9	7.7
Group of friends or family group	3.5	2.4	4.4	3.6
Community or civic centre	1.5	1.4	1.3	2.0
Other specialist groups	3.9	3.1	4.9	2.7
Sports clubs or hiking centres	29.3	23.3	32.4	33.4
No entity or shared activity	38.5	45.3	34.4	36.0

Table 5. Participation in entities or collectives (% people currently involved). According to disposable household income (DHI) in three types of neighbourhoods. 2019. Source: adapted from Survey of Cultural Participation and Cultural Needs in Barcelona

Q2. WHAT ARE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT SPACES OR PLACES IN THE CULTURAL LIFE OF A NEIGHBOURHOOD FOR YOU?

% Often or very often	NEIGHBOURHOODS			
	TOTAL	LOW DHI	MIDDLE DHI	HIGH DHI
Classic cultural spaces	76.0	74.7	75.4	80.7
Library	45.1	49.5	41.2	46.9
Civic centre, neighbourhood centre, cultural centre	45.3	54.8	38.8	43.5
Theatre, concert venue	14.0	4.0	19.8	18.9
Cinema	10.2	3.4	12.8	16.9
Exhibition hall or museum	7.0	3.4	8.8	9.8
Bookshop	1.7	0.5	2.4	2.2
Art or music school	0.7	0.5	0.5	1.3
Other spaces for cultural life	57.7	60.7	56.5	54.7
Square, park or beach	41.7	41.7	42.3	39.6
Sports facilities	11.0	15.4	9.5	5.5
Primary/secondary/nursery school	7.9	10.5	6.8	5.8
Café or bar	6.5	3.8	7.5	9.5
Market, shopping centre	6.1	6.2	5.3	8.5
Senior citizen centre	5.5	10.7	2.6	2.9
Religious centre	4.0	3.8	4.4	3.1
Disco	0.4	0.2	0.7	0.0
None	0.4	0.2	0.5	0.5
DK/NA	7.4	7.3	7.5	7.1

Table 6. Cultural assets. Important places in the cultural life of a neighbourhood. According to disposable household income (DHI) in three types of neighbourhoods. 2019.

Source: adapted from Survey of Cultural Participation and Cultural Needs in Barcelona

13. Lee and Gilmore, 'Mapping cultural assets and evaluating significance: theory, methodology and practice'.

14. Barbieri and Salazar, *L'equitat en les polítiques culturals*.

Finally, the impact of COVID-19 in the right to participate in urban cultural life must be specifically addressed. This impact is key to understand more general urban exclusion processes related to the pandemic. Debates on this issue have been focused on the professional cultural sector. Being this type of analyses very important, much less has been discussed and analysed about the impact of the pandemic on the right to participate in cultural life from a citizen-based perspective. Besides, the few reports about cultural participation during the pandemic are focused on a national or state scale, without information about local or urban contexts.

The discussion on the impact of the pandemic in cultural participation and inequalities must be conducted focusing on two relevant directions, according to recent findings. On the one hand, the report *Cultural participation during the spring lockdown of 2020*¹⁵ analyses cultural participation in France before and during the pandemic, concluding that the time spent at home enables to somehow bridge the gap in terms of cultural participation between social

classes. Nonetheless this is particularly true for certain habits, such as watching online videos or developing some amateur practices, but not for others, such as reading books. On the other hand, the *National Survey of Cultural Habits 2020*¹⁶ (Mexico) identifies the increase of digital cultural consumption during the pandemic, but also the persistence of pre-existing inequalities. Although Internet helped to reduce distances and economic barriers, online activities did not modify previous trends in cultural participation.

In this regard, the Survey of Cultural Participation in Barcelona, even if it was developed before the pandemic, includes a useful question: "If the library and civic centre in your neighbourhood closed, how would it affect you and people in the neighbourhood?". Considering this hypothetical closing became real during the severe lockdown of the first wave (March-June 2020), the responses showed in figure 2 evidenced the pandemic impact: closure affects low-income neighbourhood residents notably more than people living in middle-income and high-income neighbourhoods.

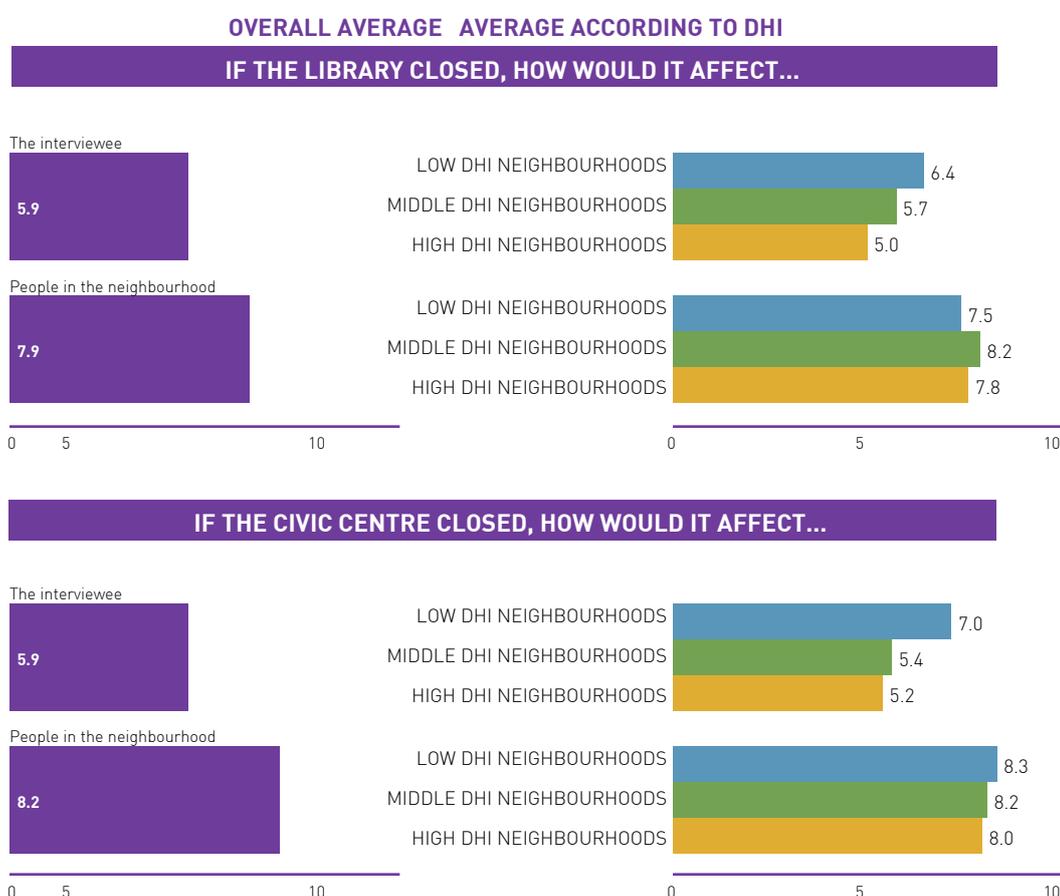


Figure 2. Impact of closing the public library and civic centre. According to disposable household income (DHI) in three types of neighbourhoods, 2019.

Source: adapted by Survey of Cultural Participation and Cultural Needs in Barcelona

15. Ministère de la Culture, *Pratiques culturelles en temps de confinement*.

16. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, *Encuesta Nacional sobre Hábitos y Consumo Cultural*.

2. Public and community responses: equity at the centre of the cultural policy agenda

Cultural and urban policies have been developed since long time guided by the principle of democratisation of culture, built upon an enlightenment conception of culture, in an attempt to popularise the access to arts and operating predominantly at the state or national level. This model presented important problems to face inequalities and, without abandoning it, cultural policies tended to promote spaces of socio-cultural expression and participation, a policy model described as cultural democracy. In this context, local governments claimed they were equally or better placed to take on the task of promoting culture and started (albeit very gradually) to pay attention to the capabilities people and communities have to participate in cultural life. All this process was developed under the pressure of growing competition between cities and economic and social instrumentalisation of cultural policies.

All in all, although there are policies that have attempted to broaden the base of cultural participation, inequalities persist. **Is it possible to identify and promote public and community responses to inequalities in the right to participate in urban cultural life? Can equity be placed at the core of the cultural and urban policy agenda?** Firstly, significant projects and initiatives in this regard do really exist, but we lack structural policies (global, generalised, comprehensive) that face inequalities in its full complexity. However, it is also true that equity is about context, needs and capabilities, all that from a locally-based perspective. So, there are no single or replicable policy "receipts" in all contexts, but it is possible highlight relevant practices and strategic orientations. The next lines are dedicated to that purpose.

Equity is a keyword when thinking about policies that address inequalities. What does it mean? It is important to understand that promoting equity in cultural participation does not mean "one and the same culture for all", administered and provided by the same institutions and organisations. Equity is neither homogeneity nor segregation: a policy based on the idea of "each person with their own culture but well separated" will not allow us to tackle inequalities either. Figure 3 illustrates these ideas.

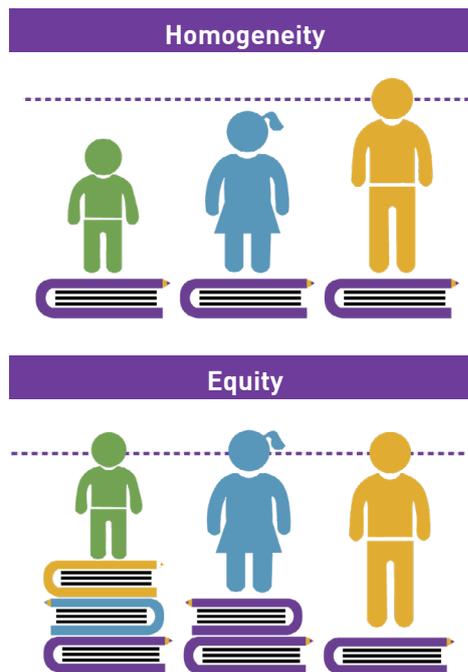


Figure 3. Homogeneity and equity in the right to participate in cultural life
Source: adapted from Sabadell City Council, *Pla per a l'equitat i l'èxit educatiu*

Thus, developing cultural policies (including public and community organisations) from an equitable perspective means promoting specific interventions based on individual and collective needs, with the aim of addressing existing inequalities in the exercise of the right to participate in cultural life. But it also means developing public policies in common, based on the recognition of the diversity of cultural capabilities and forms of participation of individuals and communities.¹⁷ An equitable cultural policy should promote places and moments for sharing, confronting and negotiating the differences. In other words, for doing things between people and communities that are different. All that without forgetting that leaving a community is also a cultural right.

17. Barbieri, 'Isn't culture for me?

Even if these kinds of cultural policies are not generalised, it is possible to find some relevant cases that can be summarised in three strategic and interconnected approaches.

1) The cultural rights approach.

A number of cities have been planning their cultural policies based on a cultural rights approach. This means explicitly placing cultural inequalities as one of the main public problems, attending to cultural needs as one of the key public responsibilities and recognising individual and community cultural capabilities as preconditions for public action. This is the case with Saint-Denis' *Schéma d'orientation culturelle* (cultural orientation framework), a participatory planning process that identified seven orientations for cultural policies and placed cultural rights at the heart of urban policies. In turn, Mexico City passed in 2018 the *Ley de los Derechos Culturales de los Habitantes y Visitantes de la Ciudad de México* (cultural rights of the inhabitants and visitors of Mexico City) and developed a cultural policy plan and specific institutions to promote the right to participate in the cultural life of the city. Barcelona is another city where it is possible to find the cultural rights approach. Recently, the City Council adopted the Cultural Rights Plan, a general agreement on this issue, which includes new initiatives but also the reinforcement of previous programs that have been tackling inequalities in the right to participate in cultural life. These three cities have localised the guidance provided by UCLG with the toolkit 'Culture 21 Actions'. Furthermore, in 2020, building on the UCLG *acquis* and considering the crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic, UCLG and the City Council of Rome explicitly adopted a capability approach to culture with the 2020 Rome Charter: the Charter is based on five capabilities that a city working for cultural democracy must enable for its inhabitants, namely "Discover", "Create", "Share", "Enjoy" and "Protect". In the context of this initiative, actions to deepen the operationalisation of the Charter at city level are being planned throughout 2021.

Finally, the cultural rights approach can also be developed through bottom-up initiatives, e.g. in Seongbuk (South Korea), where the "Common Seongbuk Artist Roundtable" activates a sustainable and autonomous cultural ecosystem, enabling to expand the cultural rights of the citizens and the values of cultural democracy, diversity, governance and sustainability.¹⁸



Bogotá (source: City of Bogotá)

Cases where cultural rights are at the core of cultural and urban policies pose a big social challenge: will cultural rights be claimed by the citizenry? If so, will this claim be explicit, and organised through consistent civil-society advocacy coalitions? It is not just about a sectorial policy or a professional claim. It is about building a society where people can spend time engaging in what they consider to be culturally valuable and significant. Because democracy becomes real and substantive also when cultural rights are fully and freely exercised. In this sense, this paper helps to understand the following ideas:

- Culture is a paradox. It is a place for criticising and transforming development processes (making them fully sustainable), but it can also be instrumentalised for reproducing inequalities and deepening exclusion. Culture (and cultural policies) may promote collective mobilization, an arena for building and reassigning meaning in order to overcome conflicts, but it can also enhance totalitarian representations. Part of the academia criticises the idea of culture as an antidote, capable of balancing and avoiding sectarian standpoints, a notion where unity is inherently preferable to conflict.¹⁹ In contrast, **cultural rights may lead to democratization when they are based on the link between culture and values such as equity and justice, when they recognise the political nature of culture**, without reducing politics to a mere game of partisan interests.
- Promoting diversity without concerning about equitable cultural participation can lead to segregation. Segregation reduces social-interaction opportunities and restricts democracy. The exercise of the right to participate in the cultural

18. See more information in the database of good practices of UCLG Culture Committee, "OBS": <http://obs.agenda21culture.net/en/good-practices/common-seongbuk-artist-roundtables-local-culture-governance-and-art-community>.

19. Eagleton, *The idea of culture*.

life leads to greater democratisation because it allows sharing, confronting and negotiating the differences, doing things between people and communities that are different. A city or territory where cultural rights are fully and freely exercised is a more equitable one. In this sense, **the democratisation of a city or territory is also about facing cultural inequalities, segregation and exclusion.**

- The Fribourg Declaration on Cultural Rights specifies not only the right to access and participation in cultural life, but also the rights to choose one's own cultural identity, to identify or not to identify with one or several cultural communities and to express oneself in the language of one's choice. These rights are exercised in the inter-connection with, in particular, the freedoms of thought, conscience, religion, opinion and expression. Fully and freely exercising these rights leads to greater democratisation. **Democracy becomes real when cultural democracy becomes real, when people's cultural capabilities (particularly self-expression) are recognised and enabled.**

- Cultural rights are inherent to the principles of democratic governance. The right to participate in the cultural life of the city is also developed through participation in public decision-making and governance, in short, the processes of formulating, implementing and evaluating cultural policies. Ensuring equity in the participation in cultural organisations and public decision-making leads to greater democratisation.

2) The transversal and integral approach.

Inequalities can be understood as a "wicked" problem, a complex and multidimensional public problem that is impossible to recognise and address from a strictly technocratic approach based on segmentation and disciplinary boundaries.²⁰ Inequalities in the right to participate in the cultural life of the city are not the exception. This kind of problems requires a transversal and integral approach, i.e. a comprehensive approach to a multidimensional problem. It involves that public, private and community organisations (coming from different policy sectors) go beyond a self-referential and instrumental vision and cooperate on the basis of active and participatory citizenship.

Establishing a transversal and integral relationship between the fields of

culture and education is one of the main challenges in order to face inequalities in the right to participate in urban cultural life. In some cities, cultural and educational agents have recognised that these inequalities are not limited to the educational-school dimension or to the cultural-institutional dimension. Rather, respecting their particular missions and interests, these cultural-educational agents are recognised as interdependent and complementary. This can be seen in general city planning, specific public policies or even small and particular projects. For example, New York City developed in 2019 CreateNYC, a cultural plan that places equity at the centre of the urban cultural agenda and the relationship between culture and education as a key strategy within and beyond the public school system.

In turn, many cities in Latin America (being Medellin or Bogota some of the best known) have developed a cultural, educational and urban comprehensive approach to face inequalities through a public library network. In these cases, public libraries have gone beyond their role as repositories of written culture to become complex spaces of socialisation, access to knowledge and cultural participation. Besides these general programs, a lot of small initiatives are also spreading a comprehensive approach between the fields of culture and education around the world, as for example Turfu les éditions, a publishing house entirely run by high school students of Poitiers that publishes original free e-books.

Finally, the case of the "Youth and cultural citizenship" programme in Yopougon, an urban commune of the city of Abidjan (Ivory Coast), is also a transversal and integral initiative that has received a special mention in the 4th edition of the *International Award UCLG - Mexico City - Culture 21*. After a crisis in which youth were used by those in power for political gains, the city council decided to help structure youth organisations and promote their participation in local governance (and particularly regarding culture). This programme explicitly addresses inequalities in (cultural) participation, specifically considering and supporting cultural expressions of illiterate, migrants, and women communities and individuals. It includes the creation of the Communal Youth Council, several cultural Youth Districts and a project that supports community cultural and sports activities organised by the municipal radio station.

20. Rittel and Webber, *Dilemmas in general theory of Planning*; Koppenjan and Klijn, *Managing uncertainties in networks*.



Seongbuk-gu, Seoul (source: UCLG Committee on Culture)

3) The hybrid approach.

Inequalities in the right to participate in urban cultural life pose a challenge for the type of intermediation that has traditionally been developed by public authorities, and also for the action of many community organisations.

Promoting equity asks for a hybrid kind of intervention: public (not just institutional), community-based and based on diversity. This means to understand and promote cultural participation as a continuum, from legitimate culture to non-legitimate culture activities, from what happens in institutional cultural facilities to other public and community spaces. As the evidence showed, the territory and the family context (neighbourhoods and families) can condition inequalities, but also improve opportunities to exercise the right to participate in urban cultural life. In some cities, community culture projects have assumed this approach, sometimes without institutional support, while others have done so collaborating with local governments. Networks like *Cultura Viva Comunitaria* in different Latin American cities or programs like *Cultura Viva* in Barcelona are developing this kind of hybrid approach.

This approach is not neutral and free of tensions. **Cultural practices are conditioned by power relationships, both in institutional and community contexts.** On the one hand, governments may tend to avoid their public responsibilities; on the other, exclusion and conflicts may arise within communities, traversed by conflicts and exclusion processes. But all in all,

these communities are essential to face inequalities in the right to participate in cultural life. A UCLG briefing²¹ on the Live Learning Experience “The cultural mobilization in the COVID-19 pandemic” held on 22 April 2020 highlights how, in post-pandemic cities, community projects can enable social interaction and citizen engagement in collective problem-solving, by including most affected individuals and communities.²²

3. Conclusions

In summary, inequalities in the right to participate in urban cultural life are important. They are key to understand democratic deficits and threats to democracy. However, inequalities in cultural participation, in the exercising of this cultural right, remain secondary both on the academic and political agendas. On the one hand, this paper presents and analyses relevant evidence on these inequalities. In order to have the right to participate in urban cultural life, one’s postcode is more important than genetic code.

On the other hand, this paper helps to understand how democracy becomes real and substantive also when cultural rights are fully and freely exercised. In this sense, equity should be placed at the core of the cultural and urban policy agenda. What does it mean? Developing cultural policies from an equitable perspective means promoting specific interventions based on individual and collective needs, capabilities and forms of participation, with the aim of addressing existing inequalities.

21. UCLG, The cultural mobilization in the COVID-19 pandemic.

22. Sacco, Large European cities’ post-pandemic recovery strategies for the cultural and creative sectors.

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