Reflection on master thesis: "A qualitative research on artists needs in a context of culture-led development through participatory planning Timișoara European Capital of Culture 2023"

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Contents

1 Why this topic for the article?

I have been interested for a long time in how culture can improve the quality of life of a city, help it develop and foster a city's social inclusion. The idea of researching Timișoara's cultural life dates back to my bachelor studies. At that time, I started to read a lot about Richard Florida's theories about creative class and creative city. I felt personal, very attached to his ideas and theories because I considered them to be very innovative and a recipe for success for many developing cities around the world. Therefore, the innovative ideas of Richard Florida, Timișoara's cultural development potential, and the winning of the European Capital of Culture for 2023 represented one of the main reasons why I chose this topic for my thesis. Despite my long-time interest in cultural development, my consideration for this topic was additionally related to my future career opportunities. Timișoara becoming the European Capital of Culture for 2023 will likely offer opportunities for a career in cultural strategy, research, and development of the city.

2 Why this journal?

The journal I decided to submit my manuscript is called "International Journal of Cultural Policy" (IJCP). The first reason why I choose to submit my manuscript to this journal is its multidisciplinary and interests described in the "aims and scope" section of the journal. According to IJCP, the scope of cultural policy extends beyond those policies that are labeled as cultural or as creative and they also emerge from domains such as religion, science, and education (Taylor & Francis Online, 2021).This approach is similar to my thesis approach, where I see culture as a way to develop a city and a neighborhood. I see cultural expression as a positive expression that can bring social empowerment to disadvantaged people, increase the quality of life and increase the local democracy. After I checked the "aims and scope" of the journal, the next step was to look upon journal metrics. Since I am a junior researcher, I decided to balance my choice between the impact factor and the acceptance rate of the journal. For IJCP, the impact factor for 2020 is 1.533, and the acceptance rate is 43%. According to Elsevier (2021), the Landscape and Urban Planning journal which is one of the most known and cited journals in urban studies has an impact factor of 6.1. Therefore an impact factor of 1.533 in urban studies, could be considered average. For cultural

studies, according to Resurchify (2021), the most well-known journal "Journal of Peasant Studies" has an impact factor of 5.13. Therefore, again, an impact factor of 1.533 in cultural studies can be considered average. The acceptance rate of 43% is high, so the possibility of my manuscript being accepted can be considered to be high. I consider that submitting my manuscript to a journal with an average impact factor and with a high acceptance rate is an appropriate decision for a journal researcher and his first publishment.

3 Theories, literature that could be used

Throughout the year I worked on the thesis, I had read various literature that could be used in my thesis. Part of the theories and literature that helped me in developing my research is Jacobs's (1961) idea of improving urban policies through creativity, Florida's (2002) theories of the creative class, and the "We paradigm" developed by Glăveanu (2010). However, though these theories and literature helped me extend my understanding of creativity in local policies and urban development, I did not include them in my final master thesis. The main reason for that is the drawbacks of creative class theory by Florida (2002). According to Florida (2002, 2004, 2005) paradigm, through specific urban policies, a city can attract the creative class that will directly generate economic growth, enhance the urban regeneration of the city, and will increase the cultural and creative amenities. However, Richard Florida's theories attracted numerous crises. Firstly, Florida's (2002) theory is criticized to serve for urban regeneration measures in favor of a certain elite which is called "the creative class" based on a neoliberal model of society (Krätke, 2010). Secondly, the definition of the creative class is not distinct from the highly educated individuals so there is no reason in defining the highly educated individuals as being the creative class (Glaeser, 2005). Therefore, observing the criticism on Florida's (2002) neoliberalism perspective but also the difficulty in defining the creative class, I decided to not link my thesis to the Florida paradigm. The difficulty in defining the creative class would cause difficulties in choosing a sampling and having a strong and clear methodology. Florida's (2002) creative class theory was highly inspired by Jane Jacobs's (1961) theories of urban development. Therefore, deciding to stop using Florida concepts, naturally led to not using Jacobs's (1961) theories.

Another important theory that I did not use in my master thesis theoretical framework, is the "We" paradigm (Glăveanu, 2010). According to Glăveanu (2010) the study of creativity can be divided into 3 main stages: "He"-, "I"- and "We"-paradigms. Creativity without the social context would not be possible (Glăveanu, 2010). The we-paradigm is stating that being creative always means being creative for another person, group, or society (Glăveanu, 2010). However, the we-paradigm is not trying to say that the individuals are not creative by themselves, but they are creative on a "fundamental togetherness" in the board world or more locally in the classroom, at work, or home (Tanggaard, 2020). The reason why I stopped using the "we" paradigm, is because I preferred to rather focus on culture-led development and participatory planning concepts and theories. Firstly, I consider that the concepts of culture-led development and participatory planning are more adequate for research that is looking upon urban policies and development. While the "we" paradigm approach as Glăveanu (2010) describes, is looking towards the psychological part of creativity. Secondly, focusing on culture-led development and participatory planning theories, naturally designed my theoretical framework logic. It offers a clearer theoretical framework for my thesis where the main focus is the culture-led development (cultural policies, development through culture) enhanced by participative planning.

4 Why the focus on current theory and literature?

In this chapter, I will reflect critically on the chosen theoretical framework and perspective. The theoretical framework is composed of two sub-chapters: culture-led development, participatory planning. But why exactly the culture-led development? As I explained in the master thesis, culture-led development has been constantly used in the last decades by the modern cities to bring economic prosperity and social dynamics and also regularly studied through the years (Montgomery, 1995; Miles and Paddison, 2005; Guinard & Margier 2018). The cultural-led development was also used and studied in the context of the European Capital of Culture for Kosice (Hudec and Džupka, 2016) or Liverpool (Liu, 2019). So having a well-known concept that was also used for ECC has come naturally for the context of my research, where the city of Timișoara developed throughout the year's cultural strategies for city development and became ECC for the year 2023. Why did I choose to talk about participaoty planning? Because in many cases and as many authors mention, for culture led development to have a higher success rate, you need to work closely with the local citizens and the local artists (Degen & Garcia, 2012; Borén and Young,

2017).Reading articles regarding culture led-development, I observed that according to many authors, cultural beneficial impacts towards urban development can be limited if there is not an even and democratic system of communication between artists, policymakers, and the local citizens (Trumbull, 2014; Ferilli et al, 2015; Borén and Young, 2017). However though, there is some literature about the benefits of participatory planning in culture-led development, there is not much literature about how the needs of the artists are linked to culture-led development and participatory planning. So therefore the aim and the input of my research paper is to come with a better contextualization on how culture-led development and pariticipatory planning can work together and if there is a coherence with the needs of the local artists.

5 Why the focus on current methods?

The used methods for this thesis are qualitative, more exactly, analysis of two policy documents and in-depth interviews with local artists or cultural managers and local civil servants. The first reason why I decided to do a qualitative research thesis, is because I wanted to develop my qualitative skills for my future career. Secondly, the research question of the thesis is qualitative: "Does participatory planning in culture-led development (necessarily) imply coherence with the needs and requirements expressed by local artists? ". The researcher wants to discover the needs and experiences of the artists with the culture-led development and participatory planning of the city, therefore qualitative research is adequate. The document analysis of Timișoara's cultural strategy and Timișoara bid book for ECC 2023 helped me to better understand the needs of the city from a cultural perspective and also to prepare me for my interviews. Parts of interview questions have been influenced by the ideas I have got from the bid book and cultural strategies. Also, knowing both documents helped me in the conversation with the interviews and ensured my professionalism. More exactly in my conversation with the interviewees, I would give them examples from the bid book, ensuring them that I read them or they would as me if I had read a certain part of the bid book. From an analysis perspective, the document analysis offered me context and historical background of Timișoara cultural strategies and ECC 2023 development. It also offered me a track on how Timișoara's cultural strategy ideas progressed into the bid book 2023 ideas. The cultural strategy approach and ideas were more functionalist and sometimes even simplistic, while the Timișoara bid book was developed into a more social and culture-led

development approach. Also, the document analysis offered me the advantage of having specific and stable data, unaffected by the presence of my research perspective or my respondent's perspectives.

The in-depth interview technique was appropriate for my research design for various reasons. Firstly, I gathered data from the respondents that I could not have by doing quantitative research. More exactly, I discovered artists' needs, culture-led development perspective, how they experienced their relation with the municipality, and how they express their artistic value in the Fabric neighborhood. At the same time, I had the chance to observe from 2 different municipality public servants how they experienced their relationship with the local artists, how do they work on designing Timișoara cultural strategy and bid book, and deep thoughts about Timișoara bid book plans that could not be known without a well-prepared in-depth interview. I also took into consideration that Romania and Timișoara especially, barely have any research done about cultural policies and culture-led development and participatory planning. Therefore, I considered the in-depth qualitative approach to be more adequate than the more generalized approach of quantitative analysis.

6. A discussion of other results you could have included in the paper

Deciding on what results to present in your research paper is essential. Therefore, choosing the right results have been a time-consuming practice, because I had to re-read all the transcribing's and policy-documents and to rewrite the results for several times. Other results that I could have included are the artists' responses to the following question: "Do you feel there is a difference between municipality support of mainstream and underground artists?". There are several reasons why I did not include any of the responses to this question. Firstly, I have observed that the concepts of "mainstream" and "underground" are very vague for the respondents. Most of the respondents would ask me "Okay, but who is mainstream?", asking me to give them a clear definition. Most of the artists' do not truly comprehend the difference between mainstream and underground artists' from Timișoara. Secondly, I have observed that some of the artists may perceive it to be a sensitive task for them to categorize some of the other artists in underground or mainstream artists. Therefore the responses for this interview questions were as vague as the

question and I decided to not include them in the paper. Other results that I did not include in the paper are the categorization of the respondents into mainstream and underground artists. Initially, I wanted to observe if there is a difference in responses between those artists that have bigger budgets and are part of bigger projects. However, firstly I observed that there is not any difference, which of course can be interesting. But as well, while writing in my reflexivity diary, I decided to not categorize them because they could not agree with the categorization and they may doubt my research intentions. Since I want to continue researching culture and arts from Timișoara, and I may also want to have a career in that sense, losing artists' trust may affect my future career. As the last example of results that I did not write in the research paper, are those results where the respondent explicitly asked me to not write in the paper. There have been 3 cases where the respondents wanted to share with me some insights but asked me to not include them in the paper.

To conclude this chapter, the 3 examples of results that I did not present on my research paper have had an ethical issue for not doing so. I also want to assure the reader that not including any of these results in the paper did not influence my research question answer or conclusions.

7 A discussion of ethical issues relevant to your study, beyond those discussed in the paper

The ethical issues discussed in my thesis are strongly linked to the COVID situation, anonymous of the respondents, and the security of respondents' responses. However, there are also some relevant ethical issues that I did not include in my thesis. I did not include these ethical issues in my thesis because of the words limits of my thesis and because I considered these issues to be more part of my reflective approach from this paper. As a human geographer and researcher that is doing qualitative research, I had to constantly be aware and self-critical of constant ethical implications. The process of constant, self-conscious scrutiny of research and researcher is called, reflexivity (Dowling, 2005). Reflexivity assists in the maintenance of the credibility of the research and are closely linked to trustworthiness and is an indicator of research quality (Ngozwana, 2018).

To help myself in this manner, I kept a research diary while doing the interviews with the respondents. The research diary helped me in improving the quality of the interview, my voice tone, or probing questions. Also, to ensure my critical reflexivity, I answered some questions in my research diary, exemplified by Dowling (2005). For instance, at the beginning of my data

collection, the question from my research diary was: "What are some of the power dynamics of the general social situation I am exploring?". In this case, I expected to discover a very powerful municipality that is taking advantage of the soft power of the artists and cultural managers. I realized that my preconception is not true after I collected the data. From the data analyzed and gathered by myself, artists-municipality power dynamics are way more balanced than I expected. After data collection, I also had some questions addressed in my research diary: "Did my perspective and opinion change during the research?". To answer the previous question, yes. My perspective and opinions constantly changed during my research. Firstly, I wanted to do research highly linked with Florida's (2002) creative class approach, but as I explained in the previous chapters, I decided to stick to the cultural-led development and participatory planning theoretical approach. Secondly, I expected to see a presence of a bigger conflict between the artists and municipality. The last question I noted in my research diary was: "How was I perceived by my informants?". Most of the respondents were excited to know when I will finish my research and thesis and asked if they can have a look at it. Some of them even suggested some future career ideas, invited me to future art exhibitions. Overall, I think the interviews were pleasant for all the participants. I also think that the quality of the interview increased over time which helped me in having better insights from the respondents and to be more relaxed while interviewing them.

8 A reflection on the research process, your role, and the role of your supervisor; and any other important reflections or discussion

The development of this research represented the main step in my maturity as a junior researcher. The research process started when I was part of the course "Research proposal" where I began finding and reading new literature about creativity, arts, urbanism through arts, etc. After constant feedback from professor Hinke Haisma, I decided to propose my course project as a research proposal for my thesis. Therefore I had to find a supervisor that wished to be part of my thesis process and guide me. I e-mailed both professor Sander van Lanen and Daniele Mantegazzi with a kindly request to be my supervisor for my thesis. Sander van Lanen is a professor with an interest in urban policies and a researcher with experience in qualitative research. Daniele Mantegazzi is a professor with interests in cultural and creative industries and statistics and quantitative research.

After an initial meeting with both supervisors, we decided to continue my theoretical findings and to decide upon a theoretical framework and afterward to develop my research question.

Working on the theoretical framework and the introduction part of the research represented a tougher experience than I expected. Reading various research articles represents an interesting part of doing research, deciding on what concepts to use and creating a linear story and clear research question can be difficult. However, though I had some difficulties in finding an adequate research question for qualitative research, after several meetings with the supervisor we decided to work with this question: "Does participatory planning in culture-led development (necessarily) imply coherence with the needs and requirements expressed by local artists?". I find this research question to be inspiring because it connects the needs of the artists with the agenda of the cities that are trying to develop and enhance their participatory planning through culture.

After deciding upon the research question, I started to further develop the methodology of the research. I think writing the methodology process was one of the smoothest parts of the research process. The only considerable obstacle appeared when I started to develop the interview guide.

I think the issue appeared from the fact that I used to be familiar with a large interview guide where I ask the respondents a lot of various questions. While my supervisor, Sander van Lanen, challenged me to do a more minimalist type of interview guide with high-quality on-point questions. Though I found the design of the interview guide to be burdensome after a while. I think it helped me to better understand what qualitative research truly means and how you can get better information from your respondents if you develop a truly high-quality interview guide.

Getting respondents to respond to my interview did not represent a very long process. People responded quite fast and were willing to offer me help by responding to my interview, in just 2 weeks I finalized the interviews with the artists. Having an interview with 2 civil servants was a bit harder because one of the civil servants was constantly canceling the meetings and proposing another date. After collecting the data, I started to code it and analyze it. Analyzing the data and finishing the "puzzle" of the whole research process represented the most enthusiastic part of the research. However, one of the main mistakes I did in analyzing the data was that I tended to be a bit subjective when I represented the artist's cause. However, after some feedback from the supervisors, I realized my mistake and changed the analysis into a much more objective analysis.

I think the role of the supervisors was decisive in having a good quality research and master thesis. Both Sander and Daniele helped me in structuring the high amount of ideas I initially had into a neat research paper with a clear research question, scientific and societal contributions. We had several meetings from April until November and both of them made sure that I can finish my thesis, take my last exams, and find a job, and not get overworked. Daniele had a high contribution in helping me to develop the introduction and in increasing the quality of my writing skills. Sander has been very helpful in developing the methodology, interview guide, and overall to truly understand the whole process of developing research with qualitative methods, approaches, and perspectives. I also think both of them have the quality of creating a friendly atmosphere and turning the long process of writing a thesis into a satisfactory and learning process.

Finally, I appreciated the availability of both of them in offering me as much feedback as possible and in having constant and long meetings where I could express all my ideas and discuss my inquires.

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Appendix: Logbook

Date	Task	Output
February 16	First meeting with supervisors	First meeting with Sander van Lanen and Daniele Mantegazzi. They gave me feedback on my research proposal and discussed some organizational aspects
February 16 - March 9	Theoretical framework reading	After the first meeting, we decided that there needs to be some dramatic change in my theoretical framework. There I started to read some new research papers to change my theoretical perspective
March 10	2) Meeting	Further discussed the feedbacks in detail to better understand the downsides of my current research proposal
April 13	1) work on thesis introduction and theoretical framework 2) Meeting with Sander and Daniele	Discussed In detail my introduction and theoretical frameworks. Still have some issues with my research questions and sub-questions. Overall, the introduction is good. The theoretical framework is taking shape.
May 10	Issues with research questions 1) Discussion about graduation day 2) Meeting	Between April and May, I further worked on my introduction and theoretical framework. Also started to work on defining the sampling and working on the methodological framework. However, I still have issues with the research questions, since I did not receive positive feedback from the supervisors.
June 24	1) Defining the research questions 2) Further work on the methodological framework 3) Preparing and presenting for graduate research day	In the following weeks, I further worked on my thesis research questions. To have better quality research questions I did a table in word to connect the concepts and what I need to research to define my questions. Following this, I and my supervisors decided on the final questions. I also prepared my presentation for graduate day and presented my thesis.

July 19	1) Finishing methodological framework 2) Interview guide	In the following month, I worked on my methodological framework and interview guide.
August	1)Preparing the interviews 2) Document analysis	In August I started to work on my reflection report. Changed a bit the introduction of the thesis and further worked on the interview guide and document analysis. I have read and checked all the documents needed for the analysis.
September 10	Meeting	We discussed more in-depth the interview guides and how to finalize them. We also discussed strategies to have good quality interviews, how to transcribe them, and further the analysis procedure.
September 10 – October 12	1) Interviews and data collection and reflexivity 2) Transcribing and coding	For 1 month I had 8 interviews with 8 artists and 2 interviews with civil servants. While gathering the data I also started to write a little research diary where I started to observe and examine my research observations and judgments. I used the diary to improve my interview skills. I also started to transcribe and code everything.
October 12 – October 20	1) Writing the results 2) Writing the discussion and conclusions 3) Updating the introduction, methodology	After I described everything, I have started to write all the relevant results from the data collected from the interviews. Then I began writing the discussions and conclusion. Finally, I updated the introduction and methodology according to Daniele's feedbacks.
October 26	Meeting	After I sent the draft of the thesis. I and the supervisors had a long meeting where they gave me the last advice and proposed a deadline. In the meeting, we discussed about the strong and weak points of my thesis. What have to be done in the following month with a keen eye on the analysis chapter. We also discussed about the possibility to publish the thesis as an article in a journal.
November 3	Last meeting	In the last meeting, both supervisors offered me a long and detailed feedback about every chapter from the thesis. I had my last questions and decided that this is also the last feedback that I will receive.
January 3	Uploading the final version	In the last months I finalized the reflection document, took into consideration the last feedbacks from the supervisors