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Master Thesis:

The impact of culture on civic participation in the digital era: the case of the European Cultural Foundation

The link between civic participation, cultural production, and consumption

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When I was providing my services as a Human Rights educator for peacebuilding activities in my home country, the island of Cyprus, I participated in a seminar on the role of internet platforms in reconciliation activities. This workshop provided me with an insight regarding how to construct a communication bridge between the Greek-Cypriot and the Turkish-Cypriot community. After 1974, these two communities were forced to live separately. Consequently, they experience every day the trauma of the division and separation.

The seminar provided me with useful knowledge concerning networking strategies and information dissemination through internet platforms. Meanwhile, I started participating actively in online communities dealing with conflict resolution. I got impressed by the way people were interacting. As a result, I decided to study the impact of Internet platform on the political and social life. Then, I came to Uppsala, and I joined the program “Digital Media and Society”.

Generally speaking, the program assisted me deeply to comprehend the role of the internet in our life. Furthermore, the final master thesis gave me the incredible opportunity to match two of my main interests civic participation and, cultural production and consumption. In this point, I would like to thank my family and dear Uppsala friends Ekaterina, George, Bart, Kirill, Maria, Eva, Iro, Danai and Kiril G. for their support. I would also like to thank my supervisor Göran Svensson. Finally, I would like to thank all the people who assisted me in the data collection procedure.
Abstract

Politics and cultural production and consumption activities are among the essential dimensions of the social and political life. Firstly, they may shape and be shaped by different social infrastructures. Secondly, they may define the allocation of power within the society. Cultural production and consumption activities should not only be regarded as a form of entertainment but also their impact on politics. Cultural production and consumption practices may stimulate civic participation. That is to say, they may function as a vehicle of citizens’ encouragement to voice their opinions through artistic manifestations. The establishment of online communities may facilitate the gathering and networking of citizens interested in civic participation and, cultural production and consumption practices. Non-governmental/ non-for-profit organizations dealing with the promotion of civic participation through cultural production and consumption manifestations may facilitate the access to a wider audience to the cultural public sphere. The study was focused on the case of the European Cultural Foundation (ECF). Specifically, the data collection procedure was conducted mainly on the online community of the ECF Labs, a platform established by the ECF. The primary goal of the platform is to gather citizens keen on politics and cultural production. Among the main findings was that cultural production and consumption activities may mobilize citizens to participate in the political and social life. However, if there is an absence of the necessary infrastructures cultural production and consumption activities may have no impact on civic participation.

Keywords

cultural production and consumption, internet platforms, cultural public sphere, ECF.
CHAPTER I

1.1 Introduction

The ongoing evolution of Internet, and particularly of the Internet platforms, shapes the different forms of civic participation (Van Dijk 2012, 98). Citizens may exchange ideas and debate on topics that directly concern them. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the relationship between civic participation and cultural production and consumption practices. The central objective of the thesis is whether the cultural production and consumption practices are connected with civic participation. Specifically, I tried to approach whether cultural production and consumption practices may urge citizens to participate actively in the political and social life. Generally speaking, many political messages are embedded in cultural artifacts, such as texts, poetry, literature, videos, films, documentaries, paintings, photos, acting, music, etc. That is to say, cultural industries is a source of understanding the world around us (Hesmondhalgh 2013, loc.438).

The relationship between cultural production and consumption, and civic participation is very broad. Consequently, it is not feasible to be studied in a Master thesis project. As a result, I delineated my research in the following two research questions:

1. How European Cultural Foundation (ECF) contributes to making cultural production and consumption activities, accessible to a wider audience?
2. How the ECF uses the internet platforms to approach decision-making bodies and citizens?

Cultural artifacts could also be regarded as means of identity formation (Martiniello and Lafleur 2008). In addition, cultural production could be seen as a form of civic participation (Martiniello and Lafleur 2008).

My research goals were approached from the aspect of the online participation. Internet platforms allow the creation of online communities. Usually, the online communities are established for a particular purpose (Miller 2011, 184). Like-minded individuals are gathered in these communities and exchange views on different topics. Politics and the organization of collective actions are among the most popular topics of online discussions (Hands 2011, loc.353). However, I regarded the online participation from the perspectives of cultural production and
consumption. There is not a large number of individuals interested in creating a bridge between civic participation and cultural production/consumption practices. In addition, there are not many studies that approached the aspect of online participation from this particular point of departure.

The evolution of internet platforms generates new associations between artists, policymakers, and the wider audience. The internet platforms accelerate the circulation of ideas and cultural artifacts. Furthermore, the internet platforms may assist networking and communication between citizens interested in voicing their concerns through cultural production and consumption activities either at a professional or an amateur level. The latter may support the development of highly politicized collective actions within the framework of cultural production and consumption manifestations.

In addition, the internet platforms may contribute to the work of non-governmental/ non-for-profit organizations oriented to promoting civic participation through cultural production and consumption practices. The work of these organizations usually has two primary goals. The first objective is to bring artists in touch with audiences. Additionally, these organizations aim to assist the networking among individuals active in the cultural production and consumption activities. The other one is to approach high-level decision-making institutions so that to augment the accessibility of cultural production and consumption practices to all kinds of audiences. The latter might stimulate the civic participation throughout cultural production and consumption practices. The relationship between cultural production and consumption, and civic participation will be explored theoretically and empirically.

This research methodology and data collection were based on the case study of the ECF. ECF is a non-profit organization that aims to promote civic participation through cultural production and consumption practices in Europe and neighboring countries¹ (culturalfoundation.eu 2014). Additionally, one of the goals of ECF is to promote cooperation between citizens in Europe and neighboring countries (culturalfoundation.eu 2014). Particularly, the ECF established its own online community, the ECF Labs which permits individuals around Europe and neighboring countries to network and debate about topics related to politics and cultural production/consumption.

¹ The term neighboring countries refers to Eastern European states, Balkan Region and Maghreb countries.
The data collection procedure was based on the method of online ethnography and interviews. More specifically, I was observing the interaction among individuals within the online community ECF Labs. Furthermore, I conducted some interviews with some members of this particular online community. Another source of my data was the tweets from the official Twitter accounts of ECF and ECF Labs. The data gathering took place between 28\textsuperscript{th} of January- 28\textsuperscript{th} of February 2015. It was based on online ethnography and interviews. The gathering of online ethnographic data was held within the online community ECF Labs. The ECF Labs is an online community established by the ECF, and its primary objective is to bring together citizens fond of cultural production and consumption to exchange opinions, diffuse news, and network.

This thesis is organized as follows. Firstly, the case study of the ECF will be presented. Secondly, the literature review will be presented. Thirdly, the methodological and analytical frameworks will be demonstrated. Before the presentation of the methodological framework, the epistemological framework will also be presented. Then the results and final conclusions will be presented and discussed.

1.2 Presentation of the non-governmental/non-for-profit organization ECF

The methodological framework of this thesis will be based on the case study of the non-governmental/ non-for-profit organizations ECF. This part will provide a general overview of the ECF’s history, work, and goals. In addition, the reason it was chosen this particular case will be demonstrated.

The ECF is a non-governmental, non-for-profit organization established in Geneva in 1954. Among its founders were prominent personalities of Europe such as the Swiss intellectual Denis de Rougemont and the political thinker Robert Schuman. The founding members were sharing a common understanding concerning the vital role of culture and arts in constructing tolerance and understanding between Europeans after the end of the Second World War. They were also embracing the idea of the contribution of culture in promoting democracy building and civic participation.

Over the years, the ECF developed a discourse regarding the role of cultural production and consumption in bringing together citizens in Europe and neighboring countries. Moreover, a significant part of ECF’s work is to make cultural production and consumption accessible to all citizens regardless of class, ethnic, religious and language background. The latter is achieved by
providing support schemes to citizens who are engaged in the fields of cultural production and consumption at a local and international level. Among ECF’s ambitions is to create local and global networks of citizens involved in cultural productions (culturalfoundation.eu)\(^2\). It could be pointed out that the latter may reinforce both the cross-national and cross-border cooperation. Generally speaking, the transnational cooperation is strengthened by an ongoing established cross-national cooperation. Furthermore, the ECF intends to endorse the evolvement of new visions of Europe outcomes of a bottom-up action. Specifically, those bottom-up actions will incorporate cultural production and consumption activities aiming at reinforcing civic participation.

I chose this particular case for the following reasons. Firstly, this organization has been active in the fields of democracy building and culture for sixty years (culturalfoundation.eu)\(^3\). Furthermore, for the years 2013-2016, it launched the thematic focus Culture, Creative Communities, and Democracy. This thematic focus aims to support even more the core objectives of the ECF. Currently, the ECF would like to reinforce even more the cultural exchange, sharing of knowledge between citizens engaged in arts and culture, advocacy for arts and influence policy-making. Secondly, the organization is active both online and offline. As a result, I may observe the interaction of online and offline realities. In addition, I may detect how the online presence of the ECF may accelerate to the networking among citizens fond of cultural production in Europe and neighboring countries. The ECF is present on the primary internet platforms Facebook and Twitter. The ECF intends to promote civic participation, cultural exchange, networking and diffusion of knowledge through the establishment of its own internet platform, called ECF LABS.

The overall vision of the ECF is to promote a democratic, open and inclusive dialog in Europe and neighboring country in which cultural production and consumption are the main consisting elements. As a result, this particular organization fits for the main purpose of this thesis because that is to examine the interrelation of cultural production and consumption and civic participation. Precisely, the ECF invites organizations, the private and public sectors, civil society, individuals, policy-makers, researchers and journalists fond of cultural production and consumption to join and follow its activities. This goal is achieved through grants, event and, the

\(^2\) http://www.culturalfoundation.eu/advocacy
\(^3\) http://www.culturalfoundation.eu/story/
interaction between individuals, institutions, and policy-makers, online and offline. The online presence of the ECF is reinforced by offline actions, such as grant provision and assistance to different kinds of events.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview

Politics and, cultural production and consumption are among two of the most important components of social life. Politics may define the power structures, consequently the organization and decision-making procedures of the society (Senellart and Foucault 2010; Mouffe 2005, 17). In addition, politics may create the necessary infrastructures for the civic participation of citizens in the decision-making procedures (Marinetto 2003; Prior 2005). Cultural production and consumption, are two activities that shape and are shaped by society (Hörschelmann 2002), and influence social and behavioral norms. In general, cultural production and consumption could be regarded as means to understand the world around us (Bennett 1999; Schlesinger 1997). In addition, many political meanings are embedded in cultural products, such as text, cinema, theater, music, literature a.o. Therefore, it could be inferred that cultural production and consumption practices influence the evolution of politics. On the contrary, ongoing political debates affect both the cultural production and consumption (Martiniello and Lafleur 2008).

The cultural production practices take place mainly within the framework of cultural industries and other more amateur/ less-commercial spheres (Hesmondhalgh 2013, loc.514). The term cultural industries introduced by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Both of them affiliated with the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. Adorno and Horkheimer regarded the cultural production as a form of critique and a vehicle that provided a utopian idea of a better life. Notably, in their work *Dialectic of Enlightenment* they provide an analysis of the role of the cultural industry (Adorno and Horkheimer 1972). Culture and industry were presumed to be two opposing concepts. Nevertheless, the development of modern capitalist western societies led to the further connection between culture and industry (Hesmondhalgh 2013, loc.961). In the late 1960s, cultural production and consumption, business and society became more and more connected. An illuminating example, are the transnational investments in cinema and music. The latter had implications in social and political life (Hesmondhalgh 2013, loc.969).

The approach of Adorno and Horkheimer does not take into consideration the recent technological developments, especially the rapid evolution of internet platforms (Hesmondhalgh 2013, loc.978). Precisely, the accelerated expansion of internet platforms created new
opportunities in both cultural production and consumption, both at a professional and an amateur level.

Generally speaking, cultural products function as meaning-making mechanisms since they provide citizens a representation of the social reality (Hesmondhalgh 2013, loc.521). For this reason, cultural production, and consumption practices influence the identity formation process and the public life of individuals (Hesmondhalgh 2013, loc.521). Eyerman (2002), points out that music, a form of cultural production and consumption, may function as a means of collective identity construction that will lead to the development of collective actions. An illuminating example is that marginalized social groups, such as ethnic minorities and immigrants, tend to express their concerns through cultural production and consumption activities (Bennett 1999; Eyerman 2002). In other words, the narratives of some cultural products embrace the concerns and the everyday problems of marginalized social groups. In addition, it should be acknowledged that internet platforms augment the circulation of cultural products. The latter has a significant impact on our knowledge and understanding about the world we are operating (Hesmondhalgh 2013, loc.514).

This chapter is organized as follows. Firstly, the evolution of the public sphere will be portrayed. Secondly, the concepts of cultural citizenship, and cultural participation will be explained.

2.2 The evolution of the public sphere

Habermas (1991) defines the public sphere as a space between the public and the private (11). The public sphere is a space that accommodates the expression of diverse opinions through discursive practices (Habermas 1991, 24). The operation of the public sphere requires that all citizens can participate, freedom of assembly and association and freedom of expression (Habermas 1991, 24). That is to say, the public sphere denotes a space of social life in which something related to the public opinion can be expressed and formulated (Habermas et al. 1974). Given that access to all citizens is a requirement for the construction of the public sphere, citizens gather and establish a public body. Consequently, a significant part of the public sphere is incorporated into everyday discussions (Habermas et al. 1974).
The public sphere was established by the bourgeois social class in the eighteenth century (Habermas 1991, 14). The expansion of trade transactions after the thirteenth century coincides with the appearance of the bourgeois class in Europe (Habermas 1991, 14). Habermas (1991) maintains that the bourgeois social class integrated smoothly without facing troubles by the already established power structures (14). In particular, a public sphere, which was operating strictly in the political spectrum emerged firstly in coffee-shops in Great Britain. The primary goal of the public sphere was to influence the decisions of the state authority (Habermas 1991, 57-59). Coffee shops were a space for deliberation and political discussions. The limitations of royal power accommodate the appearance of the political public sphere in Great Britain (Habermas et al. 1974). In addition, apart from coffee-shops, the freedom of expression was expanded in other places as well, both public and private, since the Parliament abolished censorship with the Licensing Act of 1695. However, there were some restrictions on the freedom of the press (Habermas 1991, 59).

The evolution of political public sphere together with the evolution of mass media led to the transfer of political debates from coffee shops to more private spaces, such as houses (Habermas 1991, 171).

The evolution of the public sphere is strongly related to access to information (Flynn 2004). The rapid expansion of trade during mercantilism created the need for a more accurate, credible and frequent information in different parts of Europe. In specific, the flow of news was associated with trade activities and the development of the stock market. In the beginning, the flow of news had the form of correspondence letters. As a result, big cities became centers of information about trade and politics. However, merchants preferred the information to be kept within inside cycles (Habermas 1991, 16). Later, the flow of news was facilitated by the development of news media institutions, such as the press and mass media, a development that influenced and is still influencing politics (Habermas 1991, 170-171). Except for spreading information about economic and political life, the press functioned as a mean of criticizing the government and policy-making procedures. In particular, the bourgeois social class was debating and criticizing the public authorities throughout “intellectual newspapers” (Habermas et al. 1974).

The procedures of information production shape the public opinion. Media is a major channel of production and diffusion of information. In other words, media provide a representation of social and political realities. As a result, media affect the perception of citizens about politics.
and society. For this reason, it could be articulated that media influence the public opinion (Hjarvard 2013, loc. 1086). In the information society, citizens have access to a vast amount of information. As a consequence, it is quite challenging to assess which piece of information is accurate and which is not (Van Dijk 2012, 24). In addition, the network structure influence the ranking of information sources (Castells 2013, 31-32).

2.3 The citizen as the instrumental component of the public sphere

Citizenship is always a wide-discussed concept in the socio-political discourse (Carpentier 2014). Hands (2011) suggests that the notion of citizenship denotes a relationship between citizen and state in which citizens gather and formulate a public opinion (loc.437). That is to say, citizens form part of a political community in which they can debate, exchange ideas, make collective decisions and develop collective actions. The latter has a significant impact on both social and political life as far as all citizens have equal opportunities to participate (Eley 2002). In other words, the role of citizens is to get involved actively in public discussions and influence directly or indirectly the decision-making procedures by producing and exchanging rational and well-developed arguments (Chambers 2003). Citizens construct communities in which they deliberate themselves by expressing their concerns about politics (Flynn 2004). However, the existing power structures may create asymmetries in participation and impede some citizens to participate (Castells 2013, 31-32; 54; Kesby 2005).

Almost all the liberal democracies adopted a representative model of governance in which citizens seem to have a passive role. Nevertheless, the concept of civic participation and citizens’ involvement is highly illustrated in political debates and policy-making actions (Marinetto 2003). Eley (2002) maintains that in the contemporary discourse, the concept of the public sphere denotes the questioning of political agencies in a period of an increasing abstention from election procedures. As it has been stated, a public sphere functions as a space for deliberation and organization of collective actions (Eley 2002). However, both the discussions between citizens and organization of collective actions are strongly related to the existing power structures (Flynn 2004; Hermes and Dahlgren 2006). Phelan (2012) suggests that the concept of citizenship is adapted to the transformations of social, political and economic spheres both at a national and international level (106). Dahlgren (2006) maintains that the concept of citizenship needs to be redefined regarding practices, communication, and identities. The ECF approaches the concept of
citizenship through cultural production and consumption practices that embrace the interrelation of different cultural and national identities.

2.4 Critique to the Habermasian approach

Habermas (1991) regards politics as a space for deliberation in which citizens are heard and voice their concerns (28). According to Habermas (1991), the process, of developing and exchanging of rational arguments, will lead to a consensus by adopting the most reasonable opinion since individuals are communicative rational (164). Mouffe (2005) states that it is quite challenging to reach an agreement due to the existence of different and sometimes conflicting interests (21). However, Hands (2011) asserts that the consensus is a form of recognition, and it does not necessarily imply the elimination of diverse opinions by developing his communicative action theory (loc.366). According to the communicative action theory, interlocutors are concentrated on understanding each other and reaching a consensus. The latter maintains the possibility to come to an agreement (Hands 2011, loc.365).

Chambers (2003), articulates that reaching a consensus should not be the ultimate goal of citizens’ civic participation. In addition, Chambers (2003) highlights the fact that participants in public debates are expected to satisfy their own particular private interests. Verstraeten (1996) challenges the Habermasian approach that implies that the public sphere is a neutral locus that accommodates discussions and ongoing exchange of rational arguments. In particular, Verstraeten (1996) characterized the approach of the public sphere neutrality as utopia due to the continual confrontation of different groups and interests. As a consequence, the public sphere cannot be neutral. In addition, Verstraeten (1996) points out that the ongoing transformations in politics at an international level do not highlight the need for a homogenous public sphere but the construction of several discussion panels. Those panels will accommodate the development of diverse opinions that may lead to the emergence of different public spheres.

2.5 The evolution of the public sphere concept in the digital era

The emergence of internet platforms accelerates the gathering of like-minded individuals within the online environment. In other words, citizens, who share similar concerns about politics, may gather debate, communicate and network with other individuals around the world regardless of time and space (Miller 2011, 184-186). In addition, citizens may communicate directly with
several political stakeholders and thus influence the decision-making procedure. Internet platforms may also give a voice to marginalized social groups, such as immigrants; ethnic minorities a.o. Marginalized social groups may communicate and network with other individuals, and raise awareness about the problems they encounter. In general, internet platforms connect the public and the private spheres (Hermes 2006). A remarkable example is that the organization of collective actions, such as the Zapatistas movement, takes place within the social networking platforms (Hands 2011, loc.893). Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that the internet platforms are not neutral (Bennett and Segerberg 2011). Specifically, social networking platforms, are developing according to the interests of several public and private stakeholders. An illuminating example is the role of big corporates, such as Microsoft, Apple, Facebook and Google in the development of the internet (Van Dijk, 2012, 60). The latter may influence networking and communication activities (Castells 2013, 113-114; Van Dijk 2012, 60).

Despite the utopian view that internet platforms will emancipate citizens to participate in politics, some attributes of the Internet platforms may impede the civic participation (Papacharissi 2002). In the digital era, whatever is happening at the Internet platforms is stored and is kept forever (Deuze 2012, 86-88). In addition, the increased surveillance is a factor that may dissuade civic participation (Miller 2011, 117-118; Papacharissi 2002). Apart from data storage and monitoring, in the digital era content retrieval is enabled, a factor that restricts the access to a complete and accurate information (Papacharissi 2002). Consequently, it is highly probable that internet platforms will adapt to the principles the existing public sphere than create a new one (Papacharissi 2002). As it has been already analyzed, all citizen should have equal access to participate in political debates. Digital inequalities may lead to the exclusion of some citizens from the debate. The term digital inequalities embrace the citizens who have no access to the internet, or they do not have the adequate competencies to use ICTs (Van Dijk 2012, 172).

2.6 Cultural production, cultural consumption, access to culture and the public sphere

According to Habermas (1991), in the early development of the public sphere dance and theater were not part of the public (9). Later, the development of press and mass media made the cultural products accessible to a wider audience. As a result, cultural products began to stimulate political debates (Habermas 1991, 29; McGuigan 2005). Precisely, press and cultural production gave a
voice to the bourgeois social class during the transition from feudalism to capitalism (McGuigan 2005).

McGuigan (2005) develops the Habermasian concept of the public sphere into the notion of the cultural public sphere in which politics that includes the whole spectrum of media and popular culture. Specifically, political messages are articulated through cultural production (McGuigan 2005). In addition, marginalized social groups express their concerns through cultural production and consumption. An illuminating example is the development of hip hop culture by young people with a migrant background (Bennett 1999).

Before I proceed to the definition the cultural citizenship concept, the notion of cultural capital will be introduced. The idea of cultural capital was introduced by Pierre Bourdieu (Upright 2004). This particular concept attempted to explain differences in children’s outcomes in France during the 1960s. According to Bourdieu (1984), the cultural capital includes the accumulation of cultural knowledge which establishes even further the existing power relations (11). Empirical studies showed that exposure to artistic activities during childhood, high-quality education, ethnic background and income influence the cultural participation of adult citizens (Upright 2004). However, it should be taken into account that Bourdieu’s study is dated.

In specific, Bourdieu (1984) attempts to examine the conditions that facilitate the construction of citizens’ preferences concerning cultural products (11-12). Appreciation of artistic products is an outcome of several social conditions. Different circumstances related to the modes of production and consumption constitute the legitimization framework of taste (Bryson 1996; DiMaggio 1987). In addition, Bourdieu (1984) illustrates the role of education level (years of schooling) in preferences in the areas of literature, music, painting, theater a.o (328). In addition, a social class is another important variable that shapes preferences in different kinds of cultural products (Bourdieu 1984, 328). Apart from education level and social class, family socialization is a determinant factor that ensures that class-related artistic preferences will maintain from generation to generation (DiMaggio and Useem 1978).

In addition, DiMaggio and Useem (1978) highlight the role of higher education in the establishment of “high culture” and the immersion in different kinds of esthetic experiences. The latter determines the evolution of artistic taste (Bourdieu 1984, 27; DiMaggio 1987). The term high arts, incorporate opera, ballet, modern dance, theater and classical music. Those genres of
cultural products are more likely to be increasingly consumed mainly by upper-middle and upper class and decreasingly consumed by lower-income class (DiMaggio 1987). As a consequence, the primary audience for “high culture” activities is the upper-middle and upper class. Apart from the consumption, the interpretation of cultural products’ content requires training. Citizens who belong to a lower social class do not have access to this kind of training (DiMaggio and Useem 1978). DiMaggio and Useem (1978) illustrate that people “must learn to ‘read’ a painting or a piece of music just as they must learn to read the printed word”. It is obvious that lower-income classes do not have many opportunities to have this kind of training. In addition, lower-income individuals are more focused on satisfying survival needs. Consumption of culture is not considered as one of the primary needs that have to be satisfied. On the contrary, it could be deduced that cultural products are considered as luxury goods.

Despite the emerging obstacles of social origin and access to higher education, individuals tend to participate in cultural activities related to their identity. An illuminating example is the participation of Black people, in the USA, in cultural activities related to Afro-American artistic form (DiMaggio and Ostrower 1990). The latter illustrates the increasing need of minorities for representation and maintenance of their particular cultural production traditions. In addition, it may enhance the acceptance of minorities by the society (DiMaggio and Ostrower 1990).

Gillett (1996) articulates that Civil Rights Movement contributed to decreasing exclusion of Black people from the public entertainment and empowered the involvement of black artists within the framework of non-commercial activities (8). Gradually, the entrance of black artists augmented the tolerance of white people towards Afro-American cultural production heritage (Gillett 1996, 8). On the one hand, class and education background may create barriers to participating in production and consumption of cultural products. On the other hand, the need for representation of different social groups may create new forms of participation in both production and consumption of cultural products.

The primary objective of participatory activities is the empowerment of citizens. Phelan (2012) points that the modern approach to citizenship denotes all the participatory practices in which citizens influence the decision-making procedures through collective and communicative actions (110). In addition, among the goals of participatory activities is to deconstruct power relations (Kesby 2005). The notion of participation seems to be omnipresent in the political
Citizenship embraces civil, political and social rights. Civil rights include freedom of speech, thought and faith, the right to justice, and liberty of the person. Political rights embrace the right to participate in the political life, i.e. vote and get involved in the decision-making process. Social rights encompass the right to welfare and social security (Pakulski 1997). According to Pakulski (1997), cultural citizenship enlarges the spectrum of citizenship beyond civil, political and social rights throughout the concept of cultural rights. Hitherto, cultural rights have been considered as a constituent of social rights (Pakulski 1997). Pakulski (1997), challenges this idea. In particular, he suggests that cultural rights encompass the free and legitimate representation of identities, tastes and lifestyles. Alternatively, cultural rights are related to the promotion of different cultural identities, meaning making procedures and symbolic representation. The concept of cultural citizenship involves the obligation of all citizens to recognize that their fellow citizens have the right to express and negotiate their culture and identity (Hermes 2006; Pakulski 1997).

Hermes (2006), suggests that cultural citizenship embraces the processes of identity formation and community construction. Above all, cultural citizenship contains the following set of rights and responsibilities. Citizens have the following rights: be part of a community, articulate their opinions and express their preferences. Furthermore, citizens should be tolerant towards diversity and accept the artistic tastes of their fellow citizens (Hermes 2006). As mentioned above, cultural products may influence civic participation to a significant extent (Martiniello and Lafleur 2008). Different groups of people may express their views in several political debates through cultural production and consumption practices. In addition, accessibility to several artistic events and funding opportunities in the field of cultural production may function as a vehicle for the social inclusion of different marginalized groups (Belfiore 2002). Cultural production and consumption may lead to the emergence of the cultural participation concept. Notably, cultural participation indicates a form of civic engagement derived from a more popular sphere that has not been established mainly for political purposes (Svensson 2014). It could be inferred that cultural
participation may enhance the decrease of power relations within the society and the organization of collective actions.

Cultural participation and taste are strongly related. In general, different individuals have a different opinion concerning the esthetic value of several cultural products. Some factors, which influence the consumption and production of cultural products by various groups of individuals are the class and education background (McGuigan 2005). For instance, citizens with higher status and income have more opportunities both to consume and produce a different kind of cultural products (Upright 2004). In addition, class background influence the way citizens perceive different types of cultural product (McGuigan 2005). Firstly, because individuals tend to be identified with various cultural products (Martiniello and Lafleur 2008). Secondly, the meaning-making property of cultural products stimulates the identity negotiation process. In addition, production and consumption of cultural products are more accessible to high-income and upper-class citizens (Upright 2004).

Williams (1983) regards the cultural production as the signifying factor that influences the evolution of social, economic and political life (xv). Hesmondhalgh (2013) maintains that cultural industries refer to those institutions (profit-making corporates, public and non-governmental/ non-profit) that directly engaged in the production of social meaning procedure (loc.793). Consequently, almost all definitions of cultural industries would include mass media, the cinema, music recording, book publishing and the performing arts. In addition, Hesmondhalgh (2013) classifies the creative industries into two big categories, the core cultural industries and the peripheral ones (loc.793). On the one hand, the core cultural industries include all those industries dealing with the industrial production of cultural products. Some outstanding examples are broadcasting (radio and television), film industries, the music industry, print and electronic publishing (Hesmondhalgh 2013, loc.805). On the other hand, the peripheral industries deal with the reproduction of meanings based on semi-industrial or non-industrial procedures. The latter does not imply that are less important than the core cultural industries. Nevertheless, it should be considered that peripheral cultural industries have a smaller audience in comparison to the core cultural industries (Hesmondhalgh 2013, loc.822).

During the late 1960s, cultural production, society, and the economy started becoming more connected than ever before because transnational corporations began investing in film,
television and record industries. These kinds of industries increased their influence in the social and political realms (Hesmondhalgh 2013, loc.962). The evolution of cultural production leads to the development of different cultural industries. Each cultural industry follows its set of principles, for instance, broadcasting industries operated in a very distinct way of the film industry (Hesmondhalgh 2013, 979). Additionally, the rapid evolution of the internet platforms created new associations between the cultural industries and different social, economic and political stakeholders. On the one hand, Internet platforms facilitate the communication and networking among various cultural stakeholders. On the other hand, the circulation of cultural products is augmented (Hesmondhalgh and Saha 2013). Moreover, the development of internet platforms increased co-creation activities since users can interact with each other simultaneously (Hesmondhalgh 2013, loc.7805). Co-creation influences economy and politics to a great extent. An illuminating example is the emergence of the ownership discussion that deals with the property rights of final products. On the one hand, co-creation is a form of participation and interaction between users (Banks and Humphreys 2008). On the other hand, co-creation lead to the exploitation of individuals and development of precarious working conditions in the realm of cultural industries (Banks and Deuze 2009). However, in this thesis the concepts of co-creation and ownership are not going to be analyzed.

Kibbe (1982) points that cultural production is interrelated with the business activity (120). In other words, the twentieth century is characterized by the augmenting commodification of cultural production (Hesmondhalgh 2013, loc.438). As a result, if an artist is keen on earning money by producing cultural products s/he should cooperate with business stakeholders. Nevertheless, there are some artists who prefer to get involved in cultural production activities individually or collectively so that to express their personal vision of the world (Kibbe 1982, 121). In the EU, cultural production is facilitated different initiatives and programs, i.e. Creative Europe. The mission of these policies is to promote transnational cooperation between cultural stakeholders from various countries and provide funding to cultural production activities (Leiva 2011). In addition, some non-governmental/non-for-profit organizations, such as the ECF, focus the main part of their work to enhance access to participatory activities.

As it has been mentioned above, cultural production does not denote mainly the manifestation of creativity. Cultural production embraces both professional and non-professional
activities oriented to the production, distribution and commercialization of culture. In particular, professional activities denote the practices held in broadcasting, music, theater, film, literature, painting and publishing institutions (public, private, non-profit). Non-professional activities indicate the ones that are taken place in a more amateur sphere. An illuminating example is the involvement of African-American in the production of jazz music. The professional activities may reach a larger audience than the non-professional. One explanation is that big corporates allocate a huge amount money on marketing and promotion (Hesmondhalgh 2013, loc.438).

In general, cultural production could be regarded as a meaning-making mechanism because it formulates the way we perceive the world we are operating. Additionally, cultural production has a great impact on the way we are interacting with each other. As a consequence, it could be articulated that cultural production influences the development of social norms, values and political ideologies (Burgess 2006; Hesmondhalgh 2007). Cultural production is a dynamic non-constant process. Political and social realities influence creativity and the dissemination of political messages through cultural products (Hesmondhalgh 2013, 528). An illuminating example is the development of cultural production in Europe. The European landscape embraces elements from many other cultural traditions such as Greco-Roman, Judeo-Christian, Celtic, Arabic, Slavic, Germanic (Leiva 2011).

2.7 From the public sphere to the cultural public sphere

Fraser (1990) regards the Habermasian approach of the public sphere as a space for civic participation. Citizens voice their concerns through the medium of talk because it functions as a space of production and circulation of different discourses. Nevertheless, historical and social transformations require the refinement of the idea of the public sphere (McGuigan 2005). According to the Habermasian approach, the two primary components of the public sphere are the literary and the political public sphere (Habermas 1991, xi).

The political public sphere is constructed mainly from everyday news and information about ongoing political and social debates (Habermas 1991, xi-xii). In addition, the political public sphere concerns mainly current events. On the contrary, the literary public sphere is not restricted strictly to the realm of journalism, and it does not consider only current events (McGuigan 2005). In addition, the literary public sphere provides an area for an in-depth reflection about the social and political life (McGuigan 2005).
McGuigan (2005), intends to refine the idea of the literary public sphere by expanding it into the theoretical concept of the cultural public sphere. In particular, the notion of the cultural public sphere embraces the whole spectrum of media and popular culture. In addition, this particular concept encompasses the formulation of politics, the public and the private sphere, through esthetic and emotional modes of communication, such as production and consumption of cultural products (McGuigan 2005). Marinetto (2003), points that the idea of civic participation and community involvement derived from a more popular sphere becomes important over the last decades. As a result, the embeddedness of cultural production and consumption activities differentiate the cultural public sphere from the public sphere. In addition, it could be articulated that through the premises of the cultural public sphere provides the necessary infrastructures for the further development of the cultural rights concept, i.e., rights to representation.

As has been analyzed before, the concept of the social capital may create inequalities in both production and consumption of cultural products. In addition, it may establish differences concerning esthetic education (Upright 2004). Appreciation of fine arts was a characteristic of the upper-middle and upper class. The taste is directly associated with class and education background. In addition, taste does not function only as a meaning-making and self-identification mechanism. Esthetic taste is also strongly related to social status (DiMaggio 1987). In particular, during the end of the nineteenth-century appreciation of fine arts constituted a characteristic of upper-middle and upper classes. It was an endeavor of the upper-middle and middle class to be distinguished from lower social classes and immigrants (Peterson and Kern 1996). In addition, the cultural production activities and entertainment practices of lower social classes and immigrants were regarded as inferior and as a threat to the ethics and morals of the society. As a result, the esthetic practices of the lower social classes and immigrants might have been obscured (Peterson and Kern 1996).

Bryson (1996) articulates that taste endorses the already existing boundaries between different social groups. Precisely, Bryson (1996) articulates that tolerance and music taste follow a particular pattern of social exclusion. For instance, those genres of music whose audience are mainly low-income and marginalized individuals are disregarded. Some illuminating examples are gospel, country music, rap and heavy metal (Bryson 1996). The latter may lead to the construction
of different kinds of identities which are confronted within the cultural public sphere (Oring 1994). This development of different identities through cultural products will be analyzed below.

Apart from the taste and cultural capital, the access to cultural production and consumption practices is strongly related to the income. Individuals with high income have more opportunities to participate in different kinds of cultural production and consumption practices (Upright 2004). As a consequence, it could be articulated that the cultural public sphere tends to be dominated by upper-middle and middle-class citizens. The latter will reinforce the existence of power structures within social and political life. In addition, the esthetic dominance of particular cultural products and entertainment practices might lead to the cultural suppression of different social groups (Peterson and Kern 1996).

The cultural public sphere should operate as a space for deliberation and creativity of all the social groups regardless of social background and taste (Belfiore 2002). For this reason, the cultural policy of national governments and inter-governmental bodies should focus on reinforcing the access of all social classes to cultural production through different kinds of funding schemes. Providing funding for individuals or groups of citizens for cultural production activities may endorse the social inclusion procedures of the various groups. For this reason, the cultural public sphere becomes more accessible. Belfiore (2002) refers to the transformations in the British decision-making procedures regarding cultural policy. Precisely, the policy-makers acknowledged the role of cultural production and consumption in fostering social inclusion and civic participation of different cultural groups (Belfiore 2002). In addition, the various national and international agencies should not focus only on providing funding to cultural production but also opening a deliberation arena where citizens may expose their views about funding for cultural production. The internet platforms may facilitate the gathering of individuals keen on cultural production and politics (Miller 2011, 191).

2.8 Cultural production and consumption, and citizens’ involvement

Cultural production and consumption activities may endorse civic participation because they operate as a mean for citizens’ deliberation (Martiniello and Lafleur 2008). That is to say, that cultural production activities should not be conceived only as practices of creativity. On the contrary, the cultural production activities may motivate citizens to participate actively in political and social life (McGuigan 2005). As a consequence, the impact of cultural production on politics
should be furthered explored. It could be articulated that cultural production and consumption have a broader influence on the promotion of the core values of tolerance and understanding. Cultural production and consumption may lead to the development of collective knowledge, common identity and collective actions. Nevertheless, the access to cultural production and consumption activities, as well as, the adequate cultural education are some factors that should also be taken into account.

Cultural production and consumption activities are held both at a professional and amateurs frameworks. However, cultural production practices held in a professional, and more specifically in a corporate setting, are diffused more quickly than the ones held in a more amateur setting or by individual artists. The reason is that the corporate sector may afford promotion activities. For this reason, those inequalities in the field of cultural production and consumption might be alleviated by non-profit/ non-governmental agencies, i.e. ECF. In addition, these kinds of agencies are focused on advocating more funding in the cultural sector and, individual and cultural production activities held outside the corporate setting of cultural industries. Consequently, these kinds of agencies, may operate as mediators between decision-making bodies and citizens through cultural production activities. In addition, these types of institutions may contribute to making culture and arts accessible to a wider range of audience.

In addition, non-profit/ non-governmental cultural agencies may contribute to the establishment of a cultural public sphere. Given that the cultural public sphere is not set primarily for political purposes, citizens around Europe might be empowered to express their concerns by sharing cultural products, such as photos, films, texts, music a.o. Their concerns may be related to their country of residence or their country of origin or about the world. Thus, citizens will be motivated to develop their personal vision of the world through the cultural production and consumption.

Internet platforms operate as a space for information dissemination and gathering of like-minded individuals (Miller 2011, 184-186). As a result, Internet platforms may function either as a space for information or as an assembly area for citizens interested in cultural production and active citizenship. For instance, non-profit/ non-governmental cultural agencies may use internet platforms to diffuse information. Thus, non-profit/ non-governmental cultural agencies may provide information about political and social debates, grants in the field of cultural production
and ongoing developments in cultural policy in different countries and the EU. Apart from information dissemination, non-profit/ non-governmental cultural agencies may accelerate networking and communication of citizens around Europe interested in cultural production and politics (Van Dijk 2012, 23). In addition, the increased networking and communication may bring together citizens from different parts of Europe and motivate them to develop a collective cultural project.

2.9 Conclusion

The extensive literature review focused on the relationship between cultural production and consumption activities, and civic participation. Particularly, the notion of the cultural public sphere embraces the role of cultural production and consumption in promoting civic participation, construction of a common identity and collective actions (McGuigan 2005). The idea of the cultural public sphere enlarges the concept of the public sphere by promoting the interrelation of politics and, the public and private spheres, within the framework of cultural production and consumption. As it was mentioned before the cultural public sphere refers to a space of public deliberation set not strictly for political purposes (McGuigan 2005). However, cultural products may embed political and social messages that might urge citizens to participate actively in social and political life in creative activities. Thus, the cultural public sphere may endorse another form of civic participation. Additionally, the cultural public sphere may create the adequate infrastructures for the further establishment of cultural rights.

The role of social status, income and education influence profoundly the cultural participation. Citizens with higher social status, revenue and education have more opportunities to participate in the cultural production and consumption activities. It could be argued that cultural capital is associated with the taste as well. That is to say, different social groups appreciate various kinds of cultural products differently according to their social status, income and education (Bryson 1996). In addition, esthetic taste is interrelated with social status (DiMaggio 1987). For instance, the cultural production and consumption activities of marginalized social groups, i.e. minorities and immigrants, could be disregarded by dominant social groups (Bryson 1996).

As it has been mentioned before, among the primary stakeholders of cultural production are the cultural industries. In addition, the cultural production is also held within the framework of amateur settings. Nevertheless, creative practices held in cultural industries are diffused more
quickly than the ones held in a more amateur setting or by individual artists. The reason is that cultural industries may afford promotion activities. For this reason, those inequalities in the field of cultural production might be alleviated by non-profit/ non-governmental agencies, i.e. ECF. Particularly, the ECF aims to bring together citizens and democratic institutions by connecting artistic change-makers and communities around Europe and neighboring countries (culturalfoundation.eu). Furthermore, these kinds of agencies are focused on advocating more funding in the cultural sector and, individual and cultural production activities held outside the corporate setting of cultural industries. Consequently, these kinds of agencies, may operate as mediators between decision-making bodies and citizens through cultural production activities.

In addition, non-profit/ non-governmental cultural agencies may contribute to the establishment of a cultural public sphere. Given that the cultural public sphere is not set primarily for political purposes, citizens around Europe might be empowered to express their concerns by sharing cultural products, such as photos, films, texts, music a.o. Their concerns may be related to their country of residence or their country of origin or about the world. Thus, citizens will be motivated to develop their personal vision of the world through cultural production.

The literature review follows the construction and implementation of the epistemological framework. The epistemological framework assisted me to approach and regard my qualitative data from a particular point of view.
CHAPTER III: The construction and implementation of the epistemological framework

3.1 Overview

This chapter will be devoted to the construction and implementation of an epistemological framework. Generally speaking, the epistemological framework assisted me to regard the data from a particular point of view. The qualitative methodologies embrace a degree of bias because the researcher has her/his values and social principles. Consequently, the procedure of data analysis requires the establishment of a concrete epistemological framework. In general, there are many ways to extract information and interpret qualitative data. In other words, the interpretation of qualitative data depends on many parameters, i.e. researcher’s cultural and social background, historical framework and social norms.

In general, the primary role of the epistemological framework is to assist the researcher to approach the qualitative data and proceed to conclusions from a particular point of view. That is to say, the epistemological framework contributed to delineate my analytical scope by setting some guidelines and borders. As, I am operating mainly in a Western background both the epistemological framework and my analytical scope were based on Western philosophical approaches. It could be stated that these parameters are among the main limitations of this research. One of the main reasons is that some individuals who were participating in the online platform of the ECF Labs came from non-Western European backgrounds. Nonetheless, due to time and space constraints it was not feasible to approach my qualitative data from a non-Western point of view. Moreover, I am not highly familiar with non-Western intellectual concepts. I did not have sufficient time to study non-Western philosophical approaches, so, I built my epistemological framework based strictly on Western epistemological notions.

As an individual, I must admit that I have my personal values and social principles. Consequently, objectivity seems to be a non-attainable goal, so this project was not focused primarily on the virtue of objectivity. Generally speaking, it is rather hard to define objectivity and truth in the sphere of the social scientific research. Specifically, the notion of objectivity is strongly related to what is socially accepted as fact. That is to say, that the social, historical, cultural and political framework may set the principles of objectivity and truth related content. Nevertheless, it should illustrate that the existing power relations institutions are among the primary stakeholders who may define the notions of truth and objectivity. As a result, it could be inferred that objectivity
is a non-attainable goal in the field of social scientific research. One of the main reasons is the unpredictability of the human behavior and the ongoing development of different kinds of social institutions.

I chose to construct my analytical framework based on the philosophical approaches of the sociology of knowledge. Briefly, the sociology of knowledge permits the researcher to understand the dynamics of the social and political landscape throughout the transformations of the society.

3.2 The role of social, historical and political background

Merton (1968) approaches the relationship between society and knowledge from the spectrum of the sociology of knowledge (510). According to the approach of the sociology of knowledge, there is a high correlation between society and cultural norms. Precisely, the social norms define the values, actions and modes of thought of different social groups (Merton 1968, 511). The primary goal of the sociology of knowledge is not to approach the existential basis of truth but to comprehend the evolution and transformation of the social landscape (Merton 1968, 524).

Since we are living in the transition from the post-industrial to the digital era, there are some transformations of the social landscape (Van Dijk 2012, 171). The approach of the sociology of knowledge permits us to understand the ongoing adaptations of the social reality of the demands of the digital era. As mentioned before, the emergence and rapid embeddedness of the social networking platforms in the daily life introduced new cultural and social norms concerning the way we interact with each other. An outstanding example is that individuals communicate within the online communities by exchanging emoticons. They exchange emoticons to express feelings or to approve/ disapprove an idea.

The sociology of knowledge points out that there are various types of knowledge. Precisely, all kinds of concepts and ways of thinking, ranging from folk belief to positive science, are included in the realm of knowledge (Merton 1968, 521). That is to say, that even superstitions might count as a legitimate source of knowledge (Merton 1968, 524). It could be emphasized that superstitions might increase researchers’ understanding regarding the cultural, social and historical background of a particular social context. It could be articulated that different kinds of superstitions, for example, legends and myths may constitute an important part of the cultural production and consumption activities. Furthermore, superstitions are usually reflected in artistic products.
Historical and political landscapes are two highly important parameters that should be considered. According to the literature review and the data I collected, the historical and political landscapes shape the relationship between cultural production and consumption, and civic participation. In addition, Merton (1968) articulates that even social norms and truths that are taken for granted should be related to the historical background in which they had been developed (514). An illuminating example is the dominance of the Western narratives in the procedures of cultural production and consumption. People are more familiar with artistic products developed according to the principles of the Western European and North American narratives. Furthermore, people tend to disregard the artistic products produced by ethnic minorities in Europe, such as Romani or immigrants. One possible explanation is that they are not familiar with non-Western narratives because these narratives have limited or no visibility in the social and cultural life. The dominance of some political and cultural institutions might influence the representation of marginalized social groups in the cultural production and consumption activities.

Historical, social and cultural frameworks affect the political stability of the country and the freedom of expression. In countries with political stability, there is usually more freedom of expression. As a result, people feel freer to create and manifest their political convictions through arts. On the contrary, in countries and regions with less liberal or totalitarian regimes, individuals do not feel free to express themselves neither at an artistic level nor a political level. Censorship and other kinds of punishment may dissuade individuals to participate actively in cultural production and consumption activities. The latter has a direct influence on civic participation since people do not feel comfortable to express themselves. It could be argued that countries that used to be under colonialism or other totalitarian regimes the notion of freedom of expression is not well diffused within the society. Consequently, people are still reserved to express themselves even if their country is not ruled by a totalitarian regime anymore. Among one of the points that I focused my attention was the social and historical background of a particular region. This assisted me to distinguish the differences in participatory culture in various geographical areas.

In the digital era, the society acquires a network structure since almost everybody are part of a network both online and offline. The latter urged me to investigate even more the incentives of people who are participating actively in the online community of the ECF Labs. Some of them, they want to get recognition and promote their artistic work. Some others are looking for partners. Some others they just represent their organizations. One of the main observations is that there is a
dominance of the Western-European discourse. The people who tend to participate more actively are those who live in Western-European countries. It was observed that some people from neighboring countries who participate in the online community of ECF Labs aim to raise awareness about the political and social situation in their countries.

The structure of the social life is constructed by different institutions and narratives (Berger and Luckman 1966, 15). According to Berger and Luckman (1966), knowledge legitimizes the certainty of real social phenomena through a set of scientific principles (13). Briefly, the reality of social life is reflected in the subjective interpretations of several individuals about the world we are operating. Consequently, the primary object of the social analysis is the different meanings we assign to various manifestations of the social life. An interesting dimension is what is considered as a common-sense knowledge. That is to say, some habits and routines of everyday life are shared by all those who operate in a particular social landscape (Berger and Luckman 1966, 33). Both the habits and the legitimization of common-sense knowledge are determined by dominant and powerful social institutions. For instance, the esthetic education in the official education educational curriculum could be determined by the interests of government and business.

As mentioned in the methodology section, the mission of the researcher during ethnographic participants’ observation is to extract meanings of everyday life. The aspect of common sense may assist the researcher to understand better the norms of the field by taking for granted some discourses. Nonetheless, in case of heterogeneous social landscapes the aspect of common sense might create some kinds of confusions.

Notably, different cultures take for granted different sets of social norms and values. In the case of the online community of the ECF Labs, this aspect was taken into consideration. In my case, I had in mind that individuals from different cultural backgrounds may follow different communication practices. That is to say, the conversation tone of various participants of the online community reflected the social norms and what is considered as common sense practices in different regions. In addition, I had to understand how common sense is defined in different culture. However, the dominance of the Western culture implies that some norms seem to be universal for people who are operating in a Western setting. Meanwhile, I also have my personal values and principles. The notion of intersubjectivity assisted me to establish a common ground between my values and participants’ values. In other words, I approached, and I tried to
conceptualize the interaction between the participants and the different communication practices among them.

In addition, the concept of intersubjectivity contributed to perceive better the interaction and connection between online and offline realities (Deuze 2013, x-xi). The communication tone assisted me to identify the incentives of people who joined the online community ECF Labs and also determined the dominance of particular discourses. Furthermore, I could recognize the emerging communications, social and cultural norms of the digital era (Miller and Horst 2012, 3). A remarkable example is that some individuals tend to use abbreviations and write very short messages since people need to have a quick and short information.

3.3 Conclusion

The epistemological framework of this thesis assisted me to approach the qualitative data I collected from a particular point of view. In general, it is rather challenging to extract conclusions from qualitative data. First of all, the researcher has her/his personal values and opinions. Second of all, the researcher is usually influenced by the social landscape s/he was raised. Finally, one of the main characteristics of the data analysis processes is the concreteness. As a result, there is a necessity to view and analyze the qualitative data from particular philosophical points of view. The analytical framework was based mainly on the approach of Merton and the work of Berger and Luckman. On the one hand, the Mertonian approach contributed to comprehend how the transformation of the society influences the production of legitimate knowledge. On the other hand, the work of Berger and Luckman provided a conceptualization of the everyday life.

The relationship between civic participation and, cultural production and consumption requires an adequate understanding of the social, cultural and historical context. Firstly, the participation of people in cultural production and consumption activities is related to the socio-economic factors. Secondly, the historical landscape may define the political stability and the evolution of the discourses of freedom of expression in a particular country or region. Noticeably, freedom of expression may empower different social groups to voice their concerns through artistic manifestations. As mentioned before, the sociology of knowledge permits the researcher to comprehend the evolution of a particular genre of knowledge by attempting to scrutinize the social framework. Moreover, the sociology of knowledge assists the researcher to identify how different narratives influence the historical evolution of a particular social landscape. The idea of common
sense, developed by Berger and Luckman, provided me an understanding concerning the evolution of social norms. Nonetheless, the concept of intersubjectivity provided me the necessary intellectual infrastructures to approach my qualitative data.

The next chapter will be focused on the methodological approaches I followed.
CHAPTER IV: Research design in social sciences

The primary goal of Social Sciences is to contribute to evolving our understanding of the world we are interacting (Whittemore et al 2001). That is to say, the main concern of social scientists is studying and providing adequate explanations of different social phenomena. However, it should be acknowledged that the work of social scientists is challenging. First of all, the social scientists should take into account the unpredictability of human behavior. Second of all, the social scientific research should consider the existing social structures and institutions. The various social structures and institutions define the way we are interacting with each other and thus the emerging power relations.

In addition, among the principal missions of the social scientists are to provide suggestions regarding various social challenges, i.e. social inclusion, civic participation, etc. (Atkinson et al 1991). In other words, the social scientists should attempt to transform their observations and conclusions about the society into suggestions or policy-making recommendations. In general, Social Sciences is an ongoing debate. As a result, the social scientists should focus on introducing new discussions and engaging different social stakeholders (Hancké 2009, 12). The latter may enhance our understanding of the operation and evolution of the social landscape. In addition, the introduction of new debates and engagement of relevant social stakeholders may accelerate the embeddedness of social observations into a policy-making agenda. Social scientists may achieve their objectives throughout an adequate research designed characterized by the principles of validity and reliability (Hancké 2009, 10).

The notion of validity denotes whether the research design and the research outcomes satisfy the principles of the production of scientific knowledge. The latter will endorse the research findings and reassure that the broader scientific community will accept the initial argument or hypothesis (Angen 2000). In other words, validity defines the credibility of research outcomes and embraces recognition by the scientific community. It could be illustrated that the procedures of knowledge production and introduction of new debates is strongly associated with recognition.

The quantitative research methodologies have more concrete principles concerning validity (Hancké 2009, 35-37). One of the main reasons is that the quantitative approach is based barely
on statistical data. On the contrary, the qualitative research approach involves the direct interaction between researchers and object under study (Whittemore et al. 2001). Consequently, the qualitative methods include the challenge of subjectivity (Atkinson et al. 1991). The latter may have a direct implication on both the research design and the interpretation of final outcomes.

Whittemore et al. (2001) point out that defining validity criteria in qualitative research is challenging. First of all, there is a need to embed the aspects of rigor and subjectivity. Researcher, as an individual carries his/her values and biases. As a result, researcher’s bias should be considered both during the research process and in the interpretation of final outcomes. Second of all, creativity, sensitivity, and thoroughness should be taken into consideration as well (Whittemore et al. 2001). As a consequence, the validity might be ensured throughout the establishment of specific research criteria and techniques (Whittemore et al. 2001). In addition, Whittemore et al. (2001) distinguish the validity criteria into primary and secondary. On the one hand, the main criteria incorporate the virtues of credibility, authenticity, criticality, and integrity. On the other hand, the main criteria embrace the notions of explicitness, vividness, creativity, thoroughness, sensitivity and congruence. Precisely, the main criteria are indispensable to all kinds of qualitative research (Whittemore et al. 2001). However, it should be acknowledged that there is a degree of insufficiency in them due to the unpredictability of human behavior. The secondary criteria may reinforce the quality of the research process and interpretation of final results (Whittemore et al. 2001).

Credibility and authenticity reflect whether the research outcomes correspond to the social reality we are operating. Nevertheless, credibility implies the relativistic approach to what should be considered as trustworthy information. Authenticity and credibility are two strongly related ideas. Specifically, authenticity denotes to which extend the production of meaning through the observation of the individuals who are operating in the social landscape under study.

The validity could be ensured by employing specific techniques during the research design (Whittemore et al. 2001). However, before applying any method the researcher should take into account the social landscape s/he is conducting her/his research. For instance, the existing social and institutional infrastructures define the power relations within the society. The latter implies that some social groups are more empowered than some others. As a result, two of design considerations should be to give a voice to less visible less/ less favored social groups. In addition,
the researcher should bring up the issues of the oppressed social groups. Meanwhile, in the sample the opinion of experts should also be included. As a consequence, the choice of the informants might be a challenging procedure. Additionally, the research design should be characterized by the virtue of self-consciousness (Hancké 2009, 30). That is to say, the researcher should acknowledge her/his biases, weaknesses, and limitations.

The data gathering procedure should be accompanied by researcher’s dedication to the field. In other words, the researcher should have a continuous engagement. It could be articulated that researcher’s commitment may motivate the researcher to observe the field more thoroughly. The constant observation together with the transcription and note taking may contribute to the accuracy of data gathering. Nonetheless, the process of taking notes should not distract the researcher from the actual observation of the social landscape and the interaction between the participants. On the contrary, the overwhelmed researcher’s interest in the social phenomenon under study might have an adverse effect on data gathering and interpretation of final outcomes.

The concept of reliability denotes that replicability and testability of research findings are two indispensable criteria. That is to say, other researchers should get the same results in case they follow the same research path under the same conditions and hypothesis. Reliability is a more attainable goal in the case of quantitative analysis than in the case of qualitative analysis. The social landscape is evolving continuously. Consequently, the reliability seems a challenging objective. The virtue of reliability may lead to the production of a more truthful content knowledge. However, in the social sciences reaching the truth is challenging. The truth is something related to the social, political and social landscape.

On the contrary, the careful selection of qualitative material may endorse the reliability of our research findings. For instance, in the case of interviews the selection of the interviewees may influence the quality of data to a great extent. In other words, the informants should be a representative sample of the overall population. Another important factor that may increase the degree of reliability of research findings is the approach of qualitative data from a particular point of view. That is to say, a construction and implementation of an epistemological framework that will permit the researcher to analyze the empirical data from a specific point of view. Generally speaking, the reliability of qualitative data could be further ensured by the development of a consistent coding framework (Hsieh and Shannon 2005).
4.1 Construction of a case study

A significant part of our knowledge about political and social life derives from case studies (Hancké 2009, 60-62). Generally speaking, a case study is a common research approach in the field of qualitative methods (Héritier 2005, 151-154). Social scientists tend to choose to investigate a particular case based on how familiar they are with the particular social context they are going to study (Hancké 2009, 60). For instance, the social scientists they choose to conduct a case study analysis in a region or a social issue they are familiar. According to Hancké (2009), having an essential knowledge about the social landscape under study is not enough to proceed with further research (60). A crucial aspect that should be considered is that a case study is not detached from time and space.

In general, the point of departure of conducting a case study is an argument based on observation, as well as, a particular theoretical approach. As a consequence, a case study analysis lies beyond a single observation (Gerring 2007, 65). From a methodological point of view, a case study should satisfy the following two criteria. First of all, a case study should be associated with time and place. That is to say, to be pertinent and relevant to the social landscape under study. Second of all, the case study must be theoretically driven (Hancké 2009, 70). In other words, the case study should be related to the theory. In other words, the theory may provide the tool to comprehend better a particular case study. In the following paragraph, the methodological approach of the case study will be furthered explained.

Before proceeding with a further explanation of the notion of the case study, a distinction between a case and a case study will be clarified. Hancké (2009) illustrates that a case may refer to an organization, a sector, a region, a country, a policy, an individual, an event, etc. (62). The main reason these kinds of cases are essential is because they illustrate some theoretical approaches (Hancké 2009, 70). Precisely, a case elucidates the theory, something that provide researchers with adequate guidelines concerning the validity of the initial hypothesis and plausibility of her/his argument. It could be argued that the latter may facilitate the research design process. On the contrary, a case study is the thorough investigation of a particular case based on time and space boundaries.

The purpose of the case study is to contribute to the theory refinement by understanding the new perspective of the initial hypothesis or the argument (Gerring 2007, 15). In addition, the
empirical manifestation of an approach may lead to the evolution of new theoretical dimensions and thus the production of knowledge. A case study may result in the emergence of new debates both at an academic and a policy-making level. Furthermore, the empirical manifestation of a theory and the extraction of new knowledge through observation may increase our understanding of the social landscape we are operating in. That is to say, through the case study spectrum we may understand better the incentives of the individual in a particular social landscape.

The case study is a widely implemented research methodology. However, there is a lack of a sufficient understanding of this particular research approach. Gerring (2004) defines the concept of the case study as a thorough study of a single case aiming at providing generalizations for a set of similar cases. In other words, the case study is focused on a particular example with the purpose to provide explanations for a wider social phenomenon. Furthermore, the research approach of the case study should not focus primarily on highlighting causal relations (Gerring 2004). Generally speaking, a case study denotes the methodological approach of one unit (usually related to a social phenomenon). Therefore, the purpose of the case study should not be to provide generalizations but to introduce new models and approaches that might explain a particular social phenomenon.

The methodological approach of the case study has the following three characteristics. Firstly, it belongs to the realm of the qualitative research. Secondly, the research design includes participants’ observation, interviews and other ethnographic research approaches. Thirdly, it is focused on theoretical developments (Della Porta 2005, 198). A case study may lead to the development of new debates both at a theoretical and empirical level. Additionally, the case study approach deals only with one particular unit. Consequently, it is challenging to make broader generalizations based only on one case. As a result, the researcher should choose a case study very carefully and be conscious about the generalization of the final research results (Hancké 2009, 78). The ideal choice for a case study seems challenging. The researcher should choose a case, according to the following criteria. Firstly, the case should reflect the social phenomenon under study. Secondly, the case should be related somehow to the theory since the theoretical background may function as a toolbox for analyzing a particular case.

Overall the methodological approach of the case study have a set of virtues and challenges. As already exposed, one of the primary virtue is the emergence of new debates and the highlight of ongoing discussions. In addition, the case study approach may contribute to the refinement of
various theoretical approaches. Nonetheless, the restriction of investigating thoroughly only one case is one of the major disadvantages of the methodological approach of the case study. That is to say, extracting conclusions and make generalizations for a set of similar cases or recommending policies based only on a single case might not be reliable.

Gerring (2007) points out the issue of representativeness, a notion that denotes to which degree the chosen case represents the social phenomenon under study. Furthermore, the qualitative methodological approach of the case study reduces the derivation of causal relationships (20). As a result, the researcher should be aware of these issues while constructing the research design and choosing a particular case study.

As it has already been mentioned, this thesis will follow a qualitative research methodology based on the case study approach. More precisely the qualitative data will be based on online ethnography and interviews. Generally speaking, data includes any consistent empirical observation that will lead to reaching the answer to the research question. However, high-quality is not easily traceable. Consequently, they should be found and collected strategically. Data should also be both reliable and replicable. That is to say, others should be able to interpret them in the same way as you did. Furthermore, the data should be accessible, and others should come to the same conclusions as you did. The validity and reliability were among the main issues that I had to address during the data collection procedure.

Generally speaking, validity and reliability consist a challenge, especially in the case of qualitative methodological approaches. Precisely, the data set incorporates the researcher’s interpretation to a great extent. As a consequence, the researcher is partially obliged to construct an epistemological framework of both the data collection and analysis procedure. For the purposes of this research, the primary source of the qualitative data sources were the online community ECF Labs and Twitter account of ECF. Consequently, I collected print screens of links, posts and interactions within the online community ECF Labs and tweets. Moreover, the procedure of data gathering was supplemented by conducting in-depth interviews with people who are engaged in the online community of the ECF Labs. The individuals were aware that they participate in a research project and that they have been recorded. The interviews were transcribed. Everybody has access to my primary and secondary data sources. I would like to state that I provided my own
interpretation to the data I collected. Nonetheless, the virtue of reflexivity allowed me to regard my data with a more explicit scope.

Before I pursued the data collection procedure, I did a tiny pre-research so that to acquire an overall idea about the topic and also the field I was about to study. In general, the pre-research may assist the researcher to become familiar with the research field and also embrace better his/her research topic. According to Hancké (2009), the pre-research provide an insight of what kind of knowledge should the researcher have before entering the research field (46). That is to say, the researcher should be aware of what type of data s/he is looking for during her/his presence in the research field. It could be illustrated that the pre-research may provide the researcher with the necessary guidelines concerning her/his performance within the research field.

Precisely, the researcher should have a well-developed understanding regarding the ascribed meaning of different notions in the research field of study. Specifically, in the case of the online community ECF Labs the participants come from different countries of Europe and neighboring countries. As a result, during the pre-research process I tried to comprehend how do individuals from various cultural backgrounds understand the concepts of cultural production and consumption, politics, democracy, and civic participation. I must admit that this was among the most difficult part of data collection and analysis. I overcome this obstacle by collecting secondary sources, such as images, past interviews and blog posts produced by the participants of the online community of the ECF.

In addition, the literature review provided me with a solid understanding concerning in which elements should I focus on during my presence in the research field, in our case the online community of ECF Labs. The researcher should be aware of the different theoretical approaches to the particular research topic so that to be able to identify and examine different kinds of correlations within the field. The literature review has also enlightened me on emerging debates about the relationship between cultural production and consumption, and civic participation. The latter provided me with the necessary guidelines concerning the construction of the interview guide. Furthermore, the literature review assisted me to identify some criteria regarding the selection of the interviewees.

Given that my thesis employed a qualitative research approach I had to take into account some ethical aspects before entering the field. It is vitally essential that the individuals who are
operating in the field of study are well-aware of researcher’s presence and intentions. That is to say, the researcher should be open and transparent about her/his intentions. Especially, it is ethically unacceptable if s/he should proceed to data gathering by manipulating or fooling those who are operating in the field. Before starting following and participating in the online community ECF Labs I created my profile. On my profile, I uploaded a picture of me and I gave some information about myself and why I had joined this community.

Mainly, I stated that I am a Master student in Digital Media and Society, and currently I am conducting a Master thesis project in the role of cultural production and consumption in civic participation. I clarify that I was eager to have the views of the people who are participating in the community. Apart from the basic information about myself and intentions I provided links to my personal accounts on the internet platforms WordPress, Twitter, and Facebook. First of all, the participants of this online community could verify that I am a real person and find my contact information more quickly in case they wanted. Second of all, I thought it was a way the participants of the online community ECF Labs to shape an opinion about me and also feel more comfortable with me. Generally speaking, in the digital era people tend to shape perceptions about other people based on their profiles on the internet platforms (Miller 2011, 162).

The second step of the data gathering procedure was starting approaching some participants of the online community. During my approach, I adopt a friendly tone, and I did not give the impression that I am stalking them. It should be indicated that some of the participants of the online community ECF Labs work in the ECF. Most of them act like moderators of different labs. The selection of informants was based on various criteria that will be explained later. Firstly, I sent them a private message through the ECF Labs platform. In addition, I approach some of them via email and Facebook in case they provided that information on their ECF Labs profile. In total, I contacted fifteen people. Finally, only eight responded. Secondly, I started building a communication with each one of the eight people that responded, and we arranged a date and time for the interview. Seven interviews were conducted over Skype and one via email. I tried to keep a gender, region and age balance. I would like to mention that the establishment of a good communication before the Skype interview contributed to the deliberation of the interviewees during the interview procedure.
4.2 From ethnography to online ethnography

As it has already been mentioned, the research methodology was based on online ethnography and interviews. Online ethnography is a research methodology that permits researchers to observe behavioral patterns within online communities (Miller and Horst 2012, 3). In other words, online ethnography refers to field work in online communities. Nonetheless, researchers who implement this particular methodology should firstly comprehend ethnography. Furthermore, a proper understanding of the methodological approach of online ethnography requires a real comprehension of ethnography. As a result, firstly, the methodological approach of ethnography will be demonstrated. Secondly, the methodological approach of online ethnography will be presented.

4.3 Ethnographic research

In this section, the methodological approach of ethnography will be explained. Different researchers define the ethnography differently (Hammersely and Atkinson 2007, 1-2). However, almost everyone would agree that ethnography refers to the whole depiction of a particular social landscape (Hammersely and Atkinson 2007, 1-2). The researcher should take into consideration the aspects of time, space and the cultural context s/he is operating. The process of data collection is held directly in the field. In other words, the researcher is not staying in her/ his office but s/he is gathering her/his data by interacting with individuals in the field s/he is studying.

The core objective of ethnography is to conduct a qualitative study of people in a particular context (Singer 2009). That is to say, researchers attempt to study individuals within their own space through intensive field work (Singer 2009). The particular research methodology emerged in the nineteenth century, and it referred to the cultural studies of communities and individuals outside the Western context. Over the years, ethnography evolved as a research approach. Since the early of the twentieth-century ethnography developed as one of the most essential qualitative methodological research approaches (Emerson et al 2011, 1-3).

Nonetheless, the overall objective of the ethnographic research approach should be further clarified. That is to say, the purpose of ethnography is not to provide a mere description of a particular social context and behavioral patterns within it. The primary goal of the ethnographer is to detect meanings and extract different kinds of connotations and denotations. The ethnographer
will conduct her/his research by interacting with the participants and comprehending the construction of this particular social context. In other words, ethnography is not strictly an intensive field note and transcription research practice. Precisely, it refers to the interpretation and detection of meanings. Alternatively, ethnography is not about reporting but providing adequate descriptions and explanations.

The interpretation process requires the active participation of the researcher. Consequently, it should be acknowledged that it will embed a degree of bias. As a result, before proceeding to the analysis of the interpretation of research outcomes we should take into account the relationship between the researcher and the social context s/he is studying. Furthermore, we should consider that the researcher has her/his own values and biases, a factor that will influence the interpretation process to a great extent.

It is rather obvious that ethnography requires the presence of the researcher in the actual research field. Therefore, the researcher should firstly access and secondly enter the field s/he is intending to study without disturbing the operation of the field. However, it should be acknowledged that entering a particular field might be challenging. An outstanding example, are highly closed communities, i.e. political groups, immigrants, artists, etc. First of all, the researcher should establish a close relation with some members of the groups who might facilitate her/his entrance in the field. Moreover, those people will introduce the researcher to the other members of the group to become familiar with the researcher. As a result, the entrance of the researcher in the field will be smoothly accommodated. Second of all, the researcher should try to interact with the participants to extract useful information. Nevertheless, at the same time s/he should keep the necessary distance.

In addition, the researcher should try to identify the existence of gatekeepers and leading figures within the field to shape a better understanding concerning the function of the field. The latter may result in the identification of emerging power relations within the field. One of the questions is whether the participants will pretend or overreact in the presence of the researcher. Obviously, this will distort the quality of the data. In case the researcher is present for a long period s/he will be able to identify if the participants try to pretend or not. One of the main reasons is that the participants will not be able to pretend all the time (Lofland et al 2005, 78). Given that the access to the field might be challenging, sometimes researchers face the ethical dilemma to deceive
or not. A good researcher should embrace some moral restrictions. As a result, s/he should not try to cheat either the gatekeeper or any of the participants. In other words, s/he should be clear about her/his intentions from the early beginning.

Furthermore, once the researcher enters the field s/he should anticipate being questioned about her/his presence. As a result, s/he might be required to explain the topic of her/his research in a simple and clear way. Additionally, s/he should mention what motivates her/him to study this particular social context. In this way, s/he will approach more the participants. It could be deduced that the latter may motivate the participants to deliberate themselves. Therefore, the researcher may extract useful information about the field. On the contrary, this may lead to the overreaction of some participants. Consequently, the researcher should provide the necessary explanations concerning her/his topic without causing any kinds of overreaction.

The primary source of data in ethnographic research are the field notes. In my case, the field notes were gathered by participating in the online community of the ECF Labs. First of all, the researcher should develop a good understanding on what s/he should write down. In other words, before starting taking notes s/he should detect what is important and what is not important. Second of all, the researcher should design a strategy concerning the organizations of her/his notes, such as chronological order, place, etc. Finally, the researcher should organize her/his notes in a coherent way so that in the future be able to follow what s/he did in a particular social field.

In addition, the researcher should have a clear idea regarding when to begin and when to finish jotting down notes. It could be inferred that the researcher should start taking notes once s/he becomes familiar with the social contexts s/he is studying. On the contrary, it could be argued that s/he should stop jotting down notes if s/he observes any repetition. That is to say, in case the field has no additional information to provide then the researcher should stop taking down notes.

The overall objective of Ethnography is to portray a particular social context based on the experiences and routines of people who are operating in this context. Among essential elements of a research, the field is the interaction between people and especially under which the circumstances. On the one point of view, the reader is interested in identifying behavioral patterns. On the other point of view, the reader tends to be keen on to understand under which circumstances those behavioral patterns emerged. In addition, the researcher should be able to identify different kinds of emotional responses and reactions accompanied by tiny gestures and facial expressions.
The field notes process could be completed with mini informal, spontaneous interviews with people who form part of the field. These spontaneous interviews might enrich the data set with useful information.

4.4 Advantages and limitations of ethnography

In this section, some advantages and limitations of ethnography will be presented. Firstly, the advantages will be demonstrated. Secondly, some limitations of ethnographic research will be portrayed.

The ethnographic research approach provides an overall description of the social phenomenon by approaching in details the questions “what”, “where”, “when”, “why” and “how”. The first three question (“what”, “where” and “when”) concerns a superficial description of a social phenomenon. Consequently, one of the most significant advantages of the ethnographic research is that it provides answer the questions “why” and “how” about a particular social context.

As it has been mentioned before, the reader is also interested in the circumstances in which a particular social context has been developed. In addition, the development of a coherent understanding of the dynamics that created a particular social context may provide a useful feedback to policy-makers. In general, a social context is better conceived when regarded both from a macro and micro perspective.

The ethnographic practice may contribute to approach a social context both at a macro and a micro level. For instance, once the researcher enters the research field firstly, s/he may get an overall impression concerning the establishment of the field. Secondly, s/he may get a more precise information by approaching individuals who are operating in the field. Another virtue of the ethnographic approach is that it takes into account the views, emotions and meaning-making practices of different kinds of individuals within the field. In general, the continual presence of the researcher in the research field contributes to extract detailed information about a social context.

Despite the fact that ethnography may provide useful information about a particular research context, sometimes it is rather difficult to proceed to generalizations. Firstly, the researcher conducts her/his research based on a single case. Secondly, there is the challenge of representation. That is to say, to which degree the ethnographic data represent the social reality. The researcher intends to provide a description and explanation of the social reality by relying
strictly on the words and actions of individuals within the research field. It might emerge the issue of the validity of ethnographic data by questioning the credibility of results obtained from ethnographic data. It could be argued that the validity of ethnographic data is increased by informal interviews and other sources, i.e. media, videos, artistic products, etc.

Given that ethnography is a qualitative method the researcher should take into consideration the unpredictability of human interaction. In addition, the processes of data collection, organization of notes and analysis are highly correlated. In the following paragraph, the position of the researcher in the research field will be discussed.

4.5  The role of the researcher in the research field

As mentioned before the researcher is in direct contact with the research field and the participants who are continually operating within it. As a result, the position of the researcher within the research field is a factor that should be taken into consideration. In other words, the researcher should consider how s/he will place her/himself within the field so that to gather as credible data as possible. First of all, the researcher should not introduce her/himself as a crucial person. That is to say, s/he should try to operate within the field similarly to other participants. Second of all, the researcher should not function as an inspector who is observing and register the reactions of individuals within the field. Third of all, the researcher should take her/his note in a discreet manner.

The integration of the researcher in the field could be challenging. On the one hand s/he should be approachable and develop a good contact with the individuals who are operating in the field. On the other hand, s/he should keep the necessary distant from the objects of her/his study, i.e. the individuals who are operating in the field. Keeping the appropriate distance is important regarding the quality of the data. For instance, in case the researcher develops close friendships with some individuals in the field her/his data will embed a high degree of bias. In addition, the researcher should try not to overact in case s/he finds something extremely strange. It could be argued that the overreaction may distant the researcher from the research field and the participants. In other words, the researcher should be prepared that s/he might encounter unusual situations.
4.6 The evolution of ethnography in the digital era and the emergence of the online ethnography

The term online ethnography denotes the adaptation of ethnography of the virtual worlds. In other words, it could be perceived as a research tool in the realm of social sciences that permits us to comprehend the interaction among individuals within the environment of the internet platforms. Precisely, Juszczyk (2014) perceives online ethnography as the study of individuals and social phenomena based on users’ behavior within the environment of online communities. For the purposes of my research, I regarded online ethnography as a sort of online participant observation.

Beaulieu (2004), argues that the evolution of internet platform gave birth to new methodological approaches and also theorizing new anthropological approaches. Notably, Fox and Roberts (1999) maintain that the emergence of a computer-mediated communication led to the evolution of new forms of human interaction that embrace some unique attributes and limitations. Furthermore, this new types of human interaction depend highly on the structure of the network. That is to say, the position of each within the network may define with whom they may interact. Juszczyk (2014), argues that the researcher should join an online community as a user and not as a guest in the case of online ethnographic data collection. The status of the user will introduce her/him better to the members of a particular online community. However, the researcher should pay attention also to asynchronous communicative practices.

It could be pointed out that from a sociological point of view, the computer-mediated communication between individuals differs from the face-to-face communication (Fox and Roberts 1999). The data gathering and the analysis of online interactions requires the detection of new patterns, routines, and social norms. The researcher should be aware of the development of the emerging new cultural norms of the digital era (Van Dijk 2012, 210). Precisely, Van Dijk (2012) points out that the ongoing evolution of the internet platform leads to the development of new communication and cultural norms and values (211). As a consequence, the researcher also should take into consideration the ongoing transformations and evolution of the existing communication and cultural norms within the internet platforms. Furthermore, the researcher should observe the way these communication patterns are transferred in the offline life. The main reason is that the online and offline spaces are highly interconnected and blurred. On the one point of view, the online communication and cultural norms are influenced by the offline space. On the
other point of view, the online space may shape several behavioral patterns in the offline space. Due to time and space restrictions, we will not proceed to a distinction between online and offline worlds.

The online ethnographic research methodology requires the attention of the researcher to both the synchronous and asynchronous communication (Fox and Roberts 1999). The term synchronous communication reflects the direct interaction between the participants of an online community. On the contrary, the term asynchronous communication denotes the non-direct interaction between the participants of an online community. That is to say, the participants do not respond immediately to a particular threat but after some time. It should be mentioned that online ethnography embraces the aspect of asynchronous communication, a characteristic that differentiates it from ethnography. It could be inferred that the emergence of asynchronous communication is associated with the geographic and time discrepancy of the participants of a particular online community (Miller 2011, 190). That is to say, individuals from every part of the world and different time zones may communicate both in terms of real time and asynchronously regardless of space and time (Miller 2011, 190).

The ethnographic practice requires the direct integration of the researcher in the research field. On the contrary, the online ethnographic research approach implies the effort of the researcher to comprehend the interaction and communication among participants within an online community by joining and participating in this particular online community. In the case of open and more accessible online community, in which everybody, the researcher may easily join the community by sending a request. On the contrary, in the case of more closed and more restricted online communities, the researcher may have to contact some gatekeepers and persuade them to give her/him access to join this particular online community. Overall, it could be argued that a particular online community may represent a social context in the virtual world.

As it has been mentioned above, the structure of the network influence to a great extent the communication among individuals in the internet platforms. Specifically, each individual represents a node in a network which is connected to other nodes (Van Dijk 2012, 22). The network structure may influence to a great extent the entrance of the researcher in an online community. In addition, the architecture of the network may determine the communication of the researcher with the participants of an online community.
As in the case of ethnography, the researcher should enter the field by establishing a connection with gatekeepers and key figures in the field. In the case of online ethnography, the gatekeepers are more powerful. Particularly, they have the power to accept, reject and dismiss members by just one click. In other words, the gatekeepers set the rules who will access the online community and who will be expelled. Furthermore, the gatekeepers set the rules of the operation of the online community. It could be stated that the gatekeepers may construct the power structures within the virtual environment of online communities. Another issue is that anonymity or pseudonymity permits to the users of online communities to have multiple profiles. The latter may influence the validity of the data collection procedure.

4.7 The ethical considerations of the online ethnographic research approach

As in the case of ethnography, the online ethnographic research approach embeds some ethical aspects that should be taken into consideration. In particular, the researcher should take into account the new cultural and ethical issues that have emerged in the evolution of the Internet. Driscoll and Gregg (2010), illustrate that the environment of the Internet platforms accommodates new forms of accelerated intimacy between the researcher and the participants. It could be argued that this kind of intimacy may create a closer relationship between the researcher and the participants. The latter may influence the validity of the data because the degree of bias increases. It could be articulated, that it is more difficult for a researcher to keep the necessary distance from the objects of her/his study due to the architecture of the network.

In addition, within the internet platforms people tend to deliberate more than in the offline space (Miller 2011, 190). That is to say, the participants of an online community tend to expose some aspects of their private lives that they would not have exposed in the offline life. As a consequence, the researcher should be careful regarding what kind of data may access. Furthermore, the researcher should always have the consensus of the participants of the online community in case s/he will use some of their posts for research purposes. The researcher should also ensure the participants that anonymity will be kept. First of all, anonymity is necessary for ethical reasons because it protects the private life of the people who are contributing to the study. Second of all, the guarantee of anonymity may establish confidence between the researcher and the participants of the online community.
4.8 Interview as a research methodology

In-depth and long interviews may consist a good way to dive into the dynamic of the field and extract useful information. That is to say, the participants may give you information about tiny details that are not directly visible in the field. Furthermore, an informal conversation with individuals who are operating in the research field may provide the researcher with useful insights about the field. In my case, the first interview with a cultural production and consumption professional draw my attention to some aspects of the field that I completely ignored. A remarkable example is the development of discourses of Western-European and USA dominance in the fields of civic participation and, cultural production and consumption activities. The in-depth interviews allow the researcher to become further familiar with the dynamic of the field.

During the interviewing the researcher should leave the informant to speak so that to extract as many information as possible. That is to say, the researcher should make the informant feel comfortable to share her/his experiences. The researcher may provide some guidelines in case the informant is stuck. However, these guidelines should not distract the attention of the interviewee. In addition, the researcher should not interrupt the informant if it is not necessary. The advantage of the open questions is that they allow the informants to deliberate much more than in closed questions. Moreover, the closed questions are more restricted than the open questions. Less restricted questions permit the informant to express her/his views. Hence, the quality of qualitative data is further reassured.

A critical remark that should be taken into account is that interviewees express their personal point of view strictly. Hence, it could be inferred that their opinions do not necessarily represent the overall impression of the field. Therefore, the researcher should aim to interview different kinds of individuals. However, this is not always possible. Firstly, not everybody is willing to contribute to a research project. Secondly, some of them might not feel comfortable to participate in a research project since they feel that they have nothing to share.

In my opinion, a qualitative data collection procedure could not be based only on interviews for the following reasons. Firstly, the informants tend to reply the words of the researcher. Therefore, sometimes it is rather difficult to have the actual opinion of the informant. Secondly, interviews usually give an idealized or an exaggerate image of the reality (Hancké 2009, 90). I tried to avoid this obstacle by designing my interview guide according to my research goals and
the overall dynamic of the field. My questions were rather open than strictly “YES” or “NO” and “elaborate” question. As has already pointed out, online ethnographic data and interviews accompanied by secondary sources, i.e. interviews, videos, blog posts a.o.
CHAPTER V: Presentation of qualitative material

In this section, the qualitative material will be presented for transparency purposes. As has already been mentioned the qualitative data were gathered from the online community ECF Labs, the official Twitter account of the ECF and interviews. In addition, in this section I will make a reference to the problems I faced during the research procedure. I would like to remind the reader that the data gather was held between 28th of January- 28th of February 2015.

For the purposes of the data collection procedure, I had to join the online community ECF Labs and interact with the participants. In addition, I had to interact and communicate on Twitter as well. For me, it was easy to access the online community ECF Labs because I am engaged in debates about cultural production and consumption, and civic participation for more than three years. As a result, I know some of the individuals who participate actively in the ECF Labs. When I access the community, I tried to figure out the most active and the less active members. In this way, I attempted to identify what motivates some members of the community to participate more than some others.

After I had spent some time to understand how the online community functioned in terms of communication norms I started contacting some members of the online community. Since I wanted to enrich my online ethnographic data with interviews, both synchronous and asynchronous, I selected my informants based on the following criteria. Firstly, I chose people who are active within the community so that to identify what motivates them to participate in this particular online community. Secondly, I selected people who are not very active so that to identify the reasons they joined the online community of ECF Labs. Finally, I chose people who work for the ECF so that to have insight information regarding the work of the ECF. I tried to approach some people who work at the ECF via email, but they did not respond. Nonetheless, when I approached them through the ECF Labs, I received at least one answer. Hence, I managed to get the insights of an informant who works for the ECF via Skype.

The online community ECF Labs permits the participants to contact other participants through a private message. As a result, I started sending private to the people I wanted to interview. In total, I sent fifteen messages and I got eight responses. I tried to keep the gender, age and region balance.
During this research project, I reassured all the informants and participants in the online community ECF Labs that my primary objective was to exchange views and experiences with them strictly for research purposes. Furthermore, I reassured them that their real names will not be revealed.

5.1 My data

My qualitative data consisted of totally 55 tweets, interactions in the online platform ECF Labs and interviews. Initially, I started observing the interactions within the online of ECF Labs based on the frequency and content of posts (political and artistic). Moreover, I regarded the interactions on Twitter based on which organizations and individuals are engaged in the exploring the relationship between civic participation, cultural production and consumption.

The members of the online community, ECF Labs are posting videos, documentation and photos. From this kind of material, I could extract information concerning what kinds of cultural production and consumption activities are popular. Some videos were accompanied by a short description. The description provided me with useful information concerning how different individuals interpret different kinds of cultural products. I was taking notes on the reactions of the posts. Then, I was also revising the profile of the people who were sharing information and content so that to identify their motivation. Furthermore, it was a way to identify the individuals I would like to interview. The posts were analyzed in terms of content and communication tone, i.e. the use of emoticons and appreciations.

The tweets provided a guideline concerning which debates are pertinent. It was observed a mutual retweeting between the ECF and ECF Labs. In the official accounts of ECF and ECF Labs, it was observed an interaction with different organizations and individuals. Therefore, I could identify which are the key players in the fields of cultural production, cultural consumption, and civic participation. Some of the members of the online community ECF Labs were active also on twitter discussions. The issue is that most of the tweets were not directly related to cultural production and consumption activities, grants and scholarships but to politics. Precisely, most of the tweets had a mere political content.

The interviews that conducted via Skype were recorded and transcribed. Each interview was transcribed in 4-5 pages. Totally, I have 30 pages of transcriptions. The interviews had mainly
a friendly conversation tone given that some of the participants either they knew me personally or they have heard about me. Almost all of the interviewees after I contacted them via the online platform ECF Labs they added me on Facebook and started following me on Twitter.

5.2 The online community of ECF Labs

The online community of the ECF Labs consists of several labs. Each lab accommodates a particular theme of discussion, for instance, immigration, public space, social inclusion, etc. In addition, the online community of the ECF Labs provides participants the possibility to create a new lab in case they would like to introduce a new debate. Some labs have a moderator some do not. Before starting the data collection procedure, among the primary impressions was that there is no interaction between the followers of the Facebook page despite the fact that there is a continuous update of the content. On Twitter, there was a kind of interaction, such as retweets and mentions, between followers. Nonetheless, the primary interaction between people who are engaged in the work of the ECF was held primarily within ECF Labs.

Within this particular community of individuals with a particular interest in civic participation, cultural production, and consumption joined this forum to network and communicate. The online community of ECF Labs gathers individual from Western Europe, Maghreb countries, and Eastern Europe. Many of them joined this community following a post on Twitter or Facebook, or an offline event. As mentioned before ECF Labs is an evolving platform. The interface is constantly altering. There is a column with all the labs and one of the most popular labs. The popular labs usually have the largest number of interactions.

Among my first impressions was the ongoing launch of new labs which means the introduction of new discussion topics. In general, the main themes of discussions are immigration, conflict resolution, gender equality, social inclusion and civic participation, within the framework of cultural production and consumption practices. Until the 28th of February there were in total, there are twenty-five labs. However, due to the time and space constraints I collected data only from only fourteen labs. In addition, the discussion thematic of several labs overlap. The labs I chose to collect my data are: Aghet_A great catastrophe, B/ORDERS, Hacking the Veil, Ladies First,

4 http://ecflabs.org/

5 Find a description of the Labs on the Appendix 2.
MOVE!, Nataša Platform, occupolitics, #PublicSpaceis, Occupolitics, REFRAME – a comics Lab, Rethinking Audiences, Rurality, Sounds of Europe and TANDEM.

In the online community ECF Labs, it was observed a continuous exchange of different kinds of resources, such as video, speeches, texts and photos. These resources are mainly cultural artifacts that incorporate political messages. Furthermore, there was an exchange of resources of ongoing grant schemes and feedback on how to encourage civic participation through cultural production and consumption. The content of some labs’ discussions was also migrating on the official Facebook and Twitter account of the ECF.

Personally, in the beginning I found it weird that some discussions were not related to cultural production and consumption. Later, I realized that the online community of the ECF Labs also accommodates the concerns of citizens not so engaged in the cultural production and consumption.

5.3 Tweets

The Tweets have been collected primarily from the official account of the ECF. This particular data collection was supplemented by the collection of some Tweets by the official account of the online community ECF Labs. At the beginning of the data collection procedure, I started retweeting some interesting Tweets of the ECF. Immediately, individuals and organizations involved in the fields of civic participation, cultural production, and consumption started following me and establishing an online communication with me via Twitter. The collection of print screens of 55 tweets held between 28th of January–28th of February.

The twitter assisted me to contact people and make myself visible in the network of individuals who are engaged in the cultural production and consumption activities. From interactions on Twitter, i.e. retweets and mentions, I shaped an idea how different organizations and individuals are related. For example, I could gather information in which ways different artists are affiliated with several political and artistic foundations. Most of the times, artists need funding to implement their projects. As a result, they should make themselves visible and connect with organizations that might provide them funding.
5.4 Interviews

The qualitative data collection was complemented by eight in-depth interviews conducted via Skype. The interviews have been recorded and then transcribed word-by-word. The selection of the informants took time. Firstly, I had to choose a representative sample of informants in terms of gender, age, and region. Secondly, I had to contact the informants and wait for their response. It was not rather difficult to get their trust since personally I am active in the field of civic participation, cultural production, and consumption for many years. Precisely, some of them knew me throughout my engagement in different initiatives. Given that I have had already an established contact with some of the members of the online community of ECF Labs it was easier to approach them and ask them to share with me their views. Despite the fact that initially most of them seemed willing to be interviewed, they did not respond when I asked them to schedule a date for the Skype interview. Before I conducted the interviews, I prepared an interview guide. The interview guide consisted of the central axes of my research. Moreover, the interview guide was based on open questions. The main axis of my research was the link between cultural production, consumption, and civic participation. Meanwhile, I tried to examine which dynamics may motivate people to get involved in political and social life through cultural production and consumption manifestations. You may find the interview guide in appendix 3. In appendix 4 you may find brief information about the background of the informants. For anonymity purposes, the name I gave them has no relation with their real name.

During the interview process, I tried to make the informant feel comfortable with me. Once the informant feels comfortable is easier to share her/his view of the interviewer. As seven of the interviews were conducted over Skype, I reassured that my sound and video settings were in order. In my point of view, it is rather important to have a video call over Skype when you are interviewing someone. The video permits the researcher to observe some gestures and facial expressions that might be important in the coding procedure. In my case, not all of the informants had a vivid body language. During the interview, I was also taking some supplementary notes. These notes helped me to adapt my questions in the interview guide simultaneously. I would like to mention, that during the interview some of the informants shared with me additional material, such as texts, images and videos related to the encouragement of civic participation through cultural production and consumption.
During the research process, I tried to empower the informants to talk to me about their experience in the field by reassuring them that there are not “right” or “wrong” answers. On the one point of view, some felt enough empowered to have a conversation and even share secondary sources with me. On the other point of view, some participants who either had a language issue or they did not feel comfortable enough to share their views brought me in touch with other individuals.

After the end of each interview, I was transcribing the whole conversation. In the transcription, I also included the pauses and exclamations. Then, I started coding the interview by gathering the most important points of the discussion. The notes I was taking during the interview process assisted me to code the whole discussions.
CHAPTER VI: ANALYSIS

6.1 Overview

The analytical part of the thesis will provide an analysis based on the results extracted from the qualitative data. As mentioned the sources of data collection was the online community ECF Labs, the official Twitter account of ECF and eight in-depth interviews. In general, the online community ECF Labs is a user-friendly platform. In addition, the communication tone among the participants is civilized and respectful. That is to say, there is not an exchange of offensive comments. On the contrary, there is an exchange of supportive comments. The online community of ECF Labs was established to gather individuals fond of arts, culture, and politics. Consequently, is nearly expected that this particular online community will endorse the development of a more supportive and solidarity tone. You may find a detailed description of the online community ECF Labs on the appendix 2.

Among the general observations is that the people who are participating actively in the online community of the ECF Labs are professionals in the fields of cultural production and consumption. Despite the fact that some of the participants are amateurs, the online community of the ECF Labs seems to be restricted more to professionals than to the general public. Precisely, Eliza, one of the informants, claimed that previously the online community of ECF Labs was more open and accessible to the general public than now. Despite the presence of moderators, there is a completely freedom of speech within the platform. Some of the moderators work for the ECF some others are just users of the online community of ECF Labs.

In general, the online platform of ECF Labs is constantly evolving. An outstanding example is that the participants open new labs continuously. Each lab represents a particular topic of discussion, and all the members of the online community of ECF Labs have the possibility to open a new lab. For instance, the creator of the project “VOIZES” created a new Lab entitled “re.Prison”. In this lab, he promotes his project and meanwhile he is gathering the views of people about imprisoned people. The ongoing launch of new labs indicates that the members want to discuss different topics related to civic participation and, cultural production and consumption. Nevertheless, it was observed that many labs accommodate topics of discussion more related to politics and less to arts and culture. In other words, they introduce topics that are strongly related
to ongoing political discussions such as racism, immigration and the crisis in Ukraine. Sometimes, the issues are not related to cultural production and consumption.

In the beginning, I assumed that these kinds of issues might be introduced by individuals who are not very engaged in the cultural production and consumption activities. This assumption was falsified after I checked the profiles of individuals who are posting political content purely. I found out that people who are actively engaged in arts and culture either at a professional or an amateur level they tend to post merely political threats. The participants of the online community, ECF Labs would rather share their thoughts about cultural production and consumption and civic participation through this particular online community rather than Twitter or Facebook. Specifically, Stephan from Serbia, one of the interviewees, illustrated that the communication and information sharing on Facebook and Twitter are massive and chaotic. As a result, a precise form of information might remain invisible. In addition, the online community of ECF Labs constructed to gather all those who are interested in the relation between civic participation and cultural production and consumption.

In the case of the online community of the ECF Labs, the approach of the sociology of knowledge assisted me to determine the dominance of particular cultural discourses in the fields of cultural production and consumption. Precisely, there is a dominance of the Western European culture. The culture of minorities in Europe is not visible enough. A probable explanation could be found throughout the approach to the common sense discourse. That is to say, the common sense aspect is socially determined by the most dominant social groups. As a consequence, the cultural manifestations of minority groups do not always fit the sphere of the socially constructed common sense. In many cases, the cultural production and consumption activities of marginalized social groups are regarded as inferior. Despite the fact, the cultural manifestations of minority groups may have an esthetic value, those groups remain almost invisible in the cultural public sphere.

In addition, the approach of the sociology of knowledge assisted me to understand why in some countries the cultural products are more politicized than in some other countries. For example, in countries where people face socio-economic hardships individuals tend to voice their concerns through cultural production and consumption activities. The epistemological framework was to assist me to approach my qualitative data from particular points of view. Furthermore, the
procedure for the construction and implementation of an epistemological framework supported me
to keep the necessary distance from the individuals who are operating in the online community of
ECF Labs.

The analysis will be constructed on the following axis. The literature review will function
as a tool to approach the case study of ECF. First of all, the development of the cultural public
sphere will be presented. Second of all, the dynamics that define the aspects of cultural production
and consumption will be analyzed. Finally, the impact of internet platforms on stimulating
discussions related to civic participation and, cultural production and consumption will be
demonstrated.

6.2 The evolution of the cultural public sphere in the digital era

The development of mass media accelerated the accessibility of cultural products to a wider public.
Furthermore, the rapid evolution of internet platforms augmented the diffusion of cultural
products. That is to say, the content sharing practices within the Internet platforms among users
assist the immediate spread the spread of cultural products in all over the world. In addition, the
Internet platforms facilitate the networking among artists who would like to implement cross-
national artistic projects.

Precisely, many artists or cultural production or consumption stakeholders, use the online
community of ECF Labs to find partners for future creative projects. This has been also verified
by my discussion with the interviewees. Jonathan from Austria stated that many artists do not have
the means to travel around to look for partners for their projects. As a consequence, the ECF Labs
may assist them to endorse their networking activities. The latter may make the cultural production
and consumption activities more accessible. Consequently, the citizens may feel more empowered
to voice their concerns about political and social life through cultural production and consumption
activities.

ECF launched the online community of ECF Labs. As a result, there is a continual
advertising of ECF’s activities and grants. The primary activities of ECF are focused on the
question who owns the public space. Specifically, throughout different kinds of activities, the ECF
aim to engage citizens in the artistic transformation of the public space, i.e. city squares, parks,
etc. In other word, the ECF would like to create a sense of ownership of the public space by the
citizens. The discussions in the different labs illustrate that this particular sense of the public space ownership is developed through cultural production and consumption activities.

The development of the ownership consciousness augments the feeling of belonging to a community, a factor that may endorse the development of collective actions. Based on the video “PublicSpaceis”6 citizens in Europe and neighboring countries are called to express their ideas about the public space through drawings, photos, texts, and music. This particular lab provided us with interesting insights regarding which groups of people are more engaged in the cultural public sphere and why. An interesting insight is the Poetry pyramid7. The pyramid consists of poems written by students during a summer school in Sussex, UK. The main topic of the poems was the ownership of the public space by the citizens. This pyramid could also be considered as a product of a collective action. In the lab “Public Space,” many participants were posting good practices of cultural production and consumption activities related to the public space.

Furthermore, two of the interviewees, Elena from Romania and Jonathan from Austria, illustrated the place they come from influence the development of their personal esthetic education. That is to say, people who live in cities with high cultural production and consumption activity, tend to have a better understanding concerning arts and culture. Jonathan claimed that been born and raised in Vienna gave him the opportunity to come across with different cultural manifestations. Vienna is a cultural city where accommodates many cultural production and consumption manifestations. The interviewee from Romania, Elena, pointed out that her city in Romania is a city with many artistic manifestation. Elena claimed that her city is one of the most important cultural cities in the country. Therefore, she has more opportunities to get involved with the cultural production and consumption practices than her compatriots in other regions of Romania.

Individuals who are engaged in cultural production and consumption practices develop a strong sense of belonging. As a consequence, they focus their efforts to improve the place they feel affiliated with cultural production and consumption activities. These activities aim to engage ordinary citizens as well. These kinds of cultural production and consumption activities are usually

6 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gekDSUgIsYw
7 http://ecflabs.org/lab/publicspaceis/image/poetry-pyramid
launched in public places, and they are free of charge. The primary objectives are the following. Firstly, the individuals who initiate cultural production and consumption activities in public spaces aim to make cultural production and consumption activities accessible to a wider audience. Secondly, they aim to provide an adequate artistic education so that to urge citizens to participate in social and political life in cultural production and consumption activities.

It could be argued that the creation of ownership of the public space is an important dimension of civic participation. According to the literature review, the most important component of the public sphere is the citizens. That is to say, without the citizens there are no discussions. Furthermore, the development of a consciousness of ownership may mobilize citizens to advocate for a better transformation of the public space. A way to mobilize and sensitize citizens about the public space are the implementation of cultural production and consumption activities.

Jonathan works for the ECF and also is one of the moderators of the online community ECF Labs stated the following: “Long-term cultural activities and workshops that engage citizens to make or producing something together, or exchange opinions may have an impact. People might become more engaged in their communities, and that may endorse participation and more responsible citizens.” It should be clarified that workshops are considered as another kind of artistic education. Usually, the cultural production and consumption workshops are launched by NGOs dealing with arts, culture and civic participation, i.e. ECF. The role of this kind of workshops is to make cultural production and consumption activities accessible to a wider public. As has already pointed out, cultural production and consumption activities tend to acquire an elitist form due to the fact they are mainly accessible to high-income households.

According to Jonathan, an ECF award was given to a project in Croatia, that focused to engage citizens to express their concerns about the control of the private sector in the public space. Notably, the interviewee claimed that this project was awarded because it was promoting civic participation and not for its artistic value. From this fact, we may infer that ECF focuses on making cultural public sphere as the locus of civic engagement. Furthermore, ECF does not pay attention primarily to the quality of artistic products. Nonetheless, cultural participation is an important component of the cultural public sphere.
6.3 Dynamics of cultural production and consumption

As has already been mentioned, cultural production and consumption activities are connected with the financial situation of a household. One of the most probable explanations is that individuals tend to satisfy more urgent needs such as food and housing firstly. That is to say, the cultural production and consumption activities are considered as luxury activities. Elena and Laura characterized cultural production and consumption as a luxury. They said that people should firstly satisfy urgent, important needs. Notably, in the online community of ECF Labs participate mainly individuals who are engaged in the cultural production and consumption activities at a professional level.

In addition, another two dimensions that endorse cultural production and consumption are the education and family background. These were also verified by the collected. On the one point of view, education is essential because they provide students with the necessary knowledge concerning arts and culture. Individuals become familiar with the content of artistic products through artistic education. Consequently, they may use cultural production and consumption activities to voice their concerns. Family background also embraces the long family artistic traditions. For instance, some families have a collection of books, photographs, and paintings. Family tradition may urge an individual to dive more into the practices of cultural production and consumption. Moreover, the family tradition may motivate individuals to take private lessons in art schools or engage in artistic associations. An enlightening example is the testimony from Elena: “To be honest since I was a child because I was influenced by my family. We have an art collection for many generations. I have been in contact with arts, and I have a lot of books. I have been in contact with arts even since I remember.”

Artistic education is not accessible to all since it is not part of education curricula in all the countries. Furthermore, private esthetic education tends to be expensive. On the other point of view, the family background, may encourage or discourage individuals to get involved in cultural production and consumption activities. Laura, Elena, Stephan and Camille had an extra-curriculum artistic education from an early age. Moreover, most of them come from an artistic family background, i.e., their parents were fond of arts, or they were artists.

Concerning education, the state institutions, as well as other dominant social institutions, may determine the content of cultural products circulated at schools. For instance, they would
control if the content corresponds to the interests of the dominant social groups. An informant from Serbia claimed that the artistic products of school usually portray a nationalistic point of view of the society. Particularly, in Serbia there is a circulation of cultural products that embrace nationalistic messages. As a consequence, education may provide access and information to a particular genre of cultural products. It could be argued that these products may shape the political point of view of the students. In addition, artistic education is more accessible to big cities or to places where there are ongoing cultural production and consumption manifestations. Therefore, individuals living in rural areas do not have access to cultural production and consumption education.

Among my primary reflections were that the parameters of artistic education and family background makes the cultural public sphere accessible to particular social groups. As a consequence, there might be an absence of pluralism. That is to say, the cultural public sphere is not readily available to different groups of people neither offline nor online. The latter influence to a great extent the aspect of cultural participation. However, the dimension of cultural participation is highly influenced by the business sector. The business is focused on the production of cultural products based on the aspects of sales and marketing. That is to say, the production companies are concerned mainly to produce a cultural artifact that will increase their sales range. This aspect influences the way people regards cultural product. Furthermore, some marginalized social groups tend to remain invisible since their cultural production and consumption manifestations are not in the high interest of the business sector.

Cultural production and consumption manifestations assist the procedures of identity construction. The cultural production and consumption activities provide a space to individuals to express themselves. Cultural artifacts is a representation of our perception of the world around us. Specifically, two of the informants pointed out that cultural production and consumption activities play an important role in identity development. First of all, through artistic manifestations individuals are encouraged to exchange thoughts and shape further their personalities. Second of all, people feel disappointed from the political and economic system. They perceive the cultural production and consumption activities as a way to escape from the reality and find a space to develop their identities. Finally, the embedded social and political values may influence the procedure of identity development. The outcomes of cultural production and consumption
practices embrace political and social values that may motivate citizens to participate actively in the social and political life. Stephan, Elena and Laura implied that cultural products have always been politicized because artists get inspiration from the world around them. Elena stated that nowadays, the cultural products are more politicized than before because of the globalization. The turbulent situation in a particular region may urge citizens to participate in the cultural production and consumption activities. Specifically, one of the informants stated that the situation in Serbia during 1990s urged him to get involved with artistic movements. Moreover, he got involved mainly with popular culture manifestations since they embrace emancipatory messages.

Nonetheless, an interesting point of view is that cultural production and consumption activities and identity construction have an ongoing dialectical relationship. In other words, as one Laura from Brazil noted “they feed each other,” which means that individuals share a part of their personality during cultural production and consumption practices. The artistic products provide a self-identification mechanism. The engagement in cultural production and consumption activities may endorse the procedure of the development of a collective identity, an essential component of collective actions development.

Concerning the development of a collective identity the informants have a contradictory point of view. On the one hand, some stated that citizens engaged in cultural production and consumption practices share a strong collective identity and ideas. On the other hand, some claimed that citizens involved in cultural production and consumption practices do not necessarily share a common collective identity. These statements were also observed within the online community of the ECF Labs. Laura stated that citizens engaged in cultural production and consumption activities tended to develop a sense of belonging to an artistic community. In addition, usually they share a common vision of the role of cultural production and consumption activities in endorsing civic participation. An interesting finding was that Stephan mentioned the battles between different opposing artistic movements. In other words, some artistic movements regard the role of cultural production and consumption, in civic participation from a totally opposing point of view. It could be inferred that the latter may lead to the emergence of antagonistic relations between the several artistic movements.

On the other hand, Jonathan stated that individuals engaged in cultural production and consumption activities do not share a collective identity. As a result, their primary focus is rather
selling their art than to promoting the emancipatory nature of cultural production and consumption activities. Nevertheless, one informant shared a neutral point of view. Precisely, he stated that individuals who are engaged in the fields of cultural production and consumption do not necessarily share a strong collective identity.

One of the most interesting findings was that individuals who seem to believe that citizens engaged in cultural production and consumption practices share a collective identity are among the most active participants in the online platform of the ECF Labs. Another interesting finding, all of the informants seem to share the same opinion regarding the important role of cultural production and consumption activities in mobilizing citizens. However, it should be pointed out that cultural participation is strictly related to the establishment of the sufficient participatory conditions. In other words, cultural production and consumption activities do not guarantee the endorsement of civic participation. That is to say, cultural production and consumption could be mainly a tool that could function under the necessary circumstances.

6.4 The impact of internet platforms on stimulating discussions and networking among individuals

The evolution of the Internet platforms led to the acceleration of communication and networking among individuals (Van Dijk 2012, 24). In the case of cultural production and consumption, it could be inferred that the internet platforms augmented the way artists connect with other artists, managers, and their audience. The Internet platforms transformed the diffusion of cultural products. Over the last decades, many stakeholders of the cultural production and consumption sector migrated to the virtual environment of the Internet platforms. First of all, they would like to promote their work. Second of all, they would like to exchange ideas with other like-minded individuals. In addition, the excessive exchange of information and views on cultural artifacts may provide inspiration to artists and amateurs to develop politicized cultural products. On the contrary, the internet platforms may provide a well-established locus of identity negotiation and development of a collective identity.

The primary topics of discussion in the online community of ECF Labs are aligned with ongoing political discussions in the offline and online realities. For instance, some of the primary discussions were migration, the veil, gender equality and the situation in Ukraine. Particularly, a comic artist promotes the issue of the veil throughout a series of comics within the Lab “Hacking
the Veil”. The goal of the artist is to show that some Muslim women choose to wear the veil. Moreover, the veil does not always connotes oppression towards women.

Identity construction is a major factor for the cultural production and consumption activities. As pointed out above, the artistic products could be perceived as meaning-making vehicles. In the digital era, the vast circulation of information may accelerate the need for identity negotiation. The political aspect of the cultural production and consumption practices may influence the identity development of the citizens. Elena, Laura and Camille claimed that nowadays cultural production and consumption activities are more politicized than before. In my opinion, this observation could be explained by the following two facts. Firstly, the increased mobility over the last years created transformations in the social and political landscapes in Europe and neighboring countries. Thus, citizens tend to voice their concerns or escape from their reality by participating in cultural production and consumption practices. Secondly, the evolution of the internet platforms may accommodate political discussions. Even though, some online communities have been set for entirely different purposes; citizens have the tendency to voice their concerns about politics. One of the main reasons is because politics shapes their lives and identities.

The online communities gather individuals with similar interests and concerns. Hence, it could be articulated that the virtual environment of internet platforms may support the development of a shared collective identity among the users. Specifically, Laura highlighted the role of online communities as follows: “The internet connects us very much...so it’s easier to construct and share a common identity, much easier than it was before”. Online communities may lead to the development of civic participatory actions throughout cultural production and consumption activities. Nonetheless, the existence of an adequate civic participatory mentality is an important component that should be taken into consideration. On the one hand, some of the posts in the online community of ECF Labs, showed that cultural production and consumption activities may set the bases for the establishment of a strong civic participatory consciousness. For example, the Lab “Crowdfunding for Culture” it promotes some projects that may create a participatory consciousness. Meanwhile, the participants of this particular lab intent to promote their projects so that to gather money and implement them. On the other hand, some other Stephan claimed the opposite. That is to say, the cultural production and consumption activities may
function strictly as a civic participatory tool only in case there is a well-established civic participatory landscape.

In my point of view, access to information and cultural education are two important factors that will mobilize citizens to participate. Meanwhile, access to cultural education may stimulate the interest of citizens for cultural production and consumption activities in an extremely politicized context. In other words, citizens from all kinds of backgrounds should access to videos, books, files, images, exhibitions and different types of documents stored in cultural institutions, media organizations and private collections. Specifically, the Lab “Media Archives for the Commons” was created to address these kinds of debates. Among the main objectives of this particular labs is to advocate that video, audio files, images, books, paintings and other documents do not only belong to the sphere of cultural heritage. On the contrary, they may act as a tool for civic participation. As a result, they should be open and easily accessible to the general public.

On Twitter, there was only a brief information about initiatives and calls about mobilizing people through cultural production and consumption activities. Sometimes, there was also a spread of news of strictly political content. I observed that individuals who were active on Twitter discussions were active in the online community of ECF Labs. Some of them wanted to increase the visibility of their own particular projects. An illuminating example is the creator of the project “VOIZES”, a project that gathers testimonies from prisoners. The creator of the project, started promoting his project via Twitter and then he created a different lab in the online community of ECF Labs. Moreover, on Twitter there was a circulation of videos, texts, images and other kinds of resources that helped me to approach and perform better on the online community of ECF Labs.

The ECF focuses its work to promote civic participation through cultural production and consumption practices by launching different kinds of workshops and cultural events online and offline. Usually, these workshops are free of charge and are addressed to local communities. Different kinds of events and workshops may engage citizens to start searching more about the political aspect of cultural production and consumption practices both online and offline. For example, if an initiative is launched mainly in the online environment there is the risk to remain invisible due to the information overload. That is to say, offline activities might make the online discussions about the political aspect of cultural production and consumption practices more visible. Events, exhibitions, workshops and museum open days may increase the proximity among
artists and citizens. The latter may create a dialog between artists and citizens and thus enable the transfer of different kinds of political discourses in the form of cultural production and consumption activities.

Among the primary activities of the ECF is to approach decision-making stakeholders and thus reassure the accessibility of cultural production and consumption activities to a wider audience (culturalfoundation.eu)\(^8\). For this reason, the ECF implements both an offline and online advocacy strategy. On the one hand, they have a direct communication with EU and national policy-makers about cultural affairs. On the other hand, it diffuse the latest news about cultural production and consumption activities through its own Internet platforms. The Internet platforms permit the ECF to maintain a continuous dialog both with ordinary citizens and high-level policy-makers. The final results will be presented in the next section.

6.5 My role as an observer

Online participant observation was a challenging task of the research process. Obviously as an individual I have my own bias and values. Moreover, I have my personal perceptions about the world that are shaped mainly within a Western context. The challenge for me was not to be objective but to keep the necessary distance from the participants and specifically from the interviewees. On the one hand, I had to be immersed in the field and friendly. On the other hand, I avoided creating friendship bonds with the participants. Objectivity was not one of my goals since it is almost an unattainable goal in the field of social scientific research.

I participated in some discussions on the online community ECF Labs and Twitter. Firstly, the participants should have got used to my presence. Secondly, I acquired a solid understanding concerning the communication tone within the platform. I was spending more than eight hours per day within the platform. Thereby, I was able to get an adequate overview of the discussion topics and interactions between the participants. However, I embrace my personal values as an individual, consequently, my result have a degree of bias.

\(^8\) http://www.culturalfoundation.eu/our-work/
CHAPTER VII: Presentation of final results

7.1 Overview

This section will present the final results of the analysis. The final results will be presented as follows. Firstly, the dynamics that define the relationship between civic participation and, cultural production, and consumption practices will be exposed. Secondly, the role of internet platforms in stimulating the debate about civic participation, and cultural production and consumption will be demonstrated. Finally, the role of non-governmental/ non-for-profit organizations, i.e., in stimulating civic participation through cultural production and consumption practices will be presented.

7.2 The dynamics that define the link between civic participation, cultural production, and consumption activities

The online ethnographic data showed that among the main dimensions that define the cultural participation are income, social class, education and family background. Income and social class could be two barriers that may prevent individuals from participating in cultural production and consumption activities. Moreover, high-income individuals have access to high quality extra-curriculum artistic education. As a result, it could be inferred that the cultural public sphere is accessible mainly to particular social groups. In the online community of ECF Labs participate primarily professionals in the fields of cultural production and consumption. Thus, it could be deduced that the cultural public sphere in this particular case is delineated to artistic professionals. There is no pluralism in the artistic manifestations so the cultural products might reflect the point of view of specific social groups. Cultural education does not depend only on the formal education curriculum. It also depends on the accessibility of different kinds of resources through the Internet. For this reason, the debate about the availability of museum exhibitions, films, documents, paintings a.o., has been further stimulated. The family background is necessary for the following reasons because the family circle profoundly influences the individuals.

In addition, the research field revealed that the political and economic situation in a particular region are two important factors that should be taken into consideration. That is to say, in an economically and politically prosperous area individuals have more opportunities to participate in cultural production and consumption activities. One highly probable explanation is
that they might feel deliberated to express their identities and their political convictions in the form of artistic manifestations. In my case I observed that individuals with Maghreb or Eastern European origin based in Western European countries were feeling more comfortable to express their views than their compatriots who are still in their country of origin. The deliberation is an important component of civic participation.

In addition, organizations that deal with funding in activities that promote civic participation through cultural production and consumption activities are based in politically stable countries. A notable example is that the ECF is based in the Netherlands. However, my data showed the political and economic instability may function as a source of inspiration for individuals engaged in cultural production and consumption activities. An interviewee who comes from Serbia claimed that the turbulent situation in Serbia during the 90s motivated him to start expressing his concern over cultural production and consumption activities.

The results of my qualitative research showed that some manifestations are either invisible or underestimated in cultural production and consumption activities. For example, the cultural manifestations of minority groups remain invisible due to the dominance of the majority. Stephan mentioned that there is the discourse of empowering minorities to participate in the social and political life in cultural production and consumption activities. Nonetheless, the supremacy of several dominant institutions indicate to different minority groups how to express their concerns based on their particular sets of rules. It could be argued, that in the field of cultural production and consumption practices there is a sort of Western European dominance. Several Western institutions claim that they would like to foster social inclusion practices of minorities. However, there is no direct involvement of those minority groups. Therefore, the cultural public sphere seems to marginalize some social groups.

7.3 Internet platforms, civic participation, cultural production and consumption

One of the most crucial issues of the digital era is the information overload. That is to say, individuals are exposed to a load of information. Thus, it is rather challenging to assess the credibility of the information they find on Internet. In addition, some pieces of information may remain invisible because of the massive production and consumption of information. In the case of the ECF, it emerged another need. Individuals who are interested in creating a link between civic participation and, cultural production and consumption practices wanted to find a virtual
gathering space. Facebook and Twitter do not always provide this possibility. On the one point of view, they are massive platforms. On the other point of view, Twitter does not accommodate the development of long discussions. Therefore, it could be deduced that different internet platforms satisfy different needs. For instance, ECF may foster the networking and communication among individuals interested in civic participation, cultural production and consumption through its own online community, the ECF Labs. In the case of ECF, Facebook and Twitter may function as supplementary information and visibility channels.

The closed online communities may also foster networking and communication between individuals interested in a particular topic. The question of the impact of cultural production and consumption on civic participation is very specific. Consequently, the online community of ECF Labs gathers those few individuals interested in this debate. In this point, it should be mentioned that a local event may motivate citizens to search on the internet about online and offline initiatives that promote civic participation through cultural production and consumption practices. A plausible explanation is that almost every institution, individual and collective initiative is online.

7.4 Role of non-governmental/non-for-profit organizations in promoting civic participation through cultural production and consumption manifestations

The goal of this particular research project was to identify which is the role of non-governmental and non-for-profit organizations, such as the ECF, in promoting civic participation through cultural production and consumption activities. Firstly, I concentrate to see how ECF contributes to making cultural production and consumption activities accessible to a wider audience. Secondly, I examined how the ECF use the internet platforms to approach decision-making bodies and citizens. Finally, I studied how the ECF combines online and offline activities.

Non-governmental/ non-for-profit organization, such as the ECF, may contribute to making the cultural public sphere accessible to a wider public. The latter will stimulate the citizens to participate in social and political life in creative activities. On the one hand, they may develop different kinds of grant schemes to individuals and organizations. On the other hand, they may establish online platforms so that to enable the communication between artists, citizens, and policy-makers. Online platforms may facilitate the engagement of young citizens to the social and political life through cultural production and consumption activities. One of the main reason is that young people are highly exposed to internet platforms.
The work of non-governmental/non-for-profit organizations should be a combination of online and offline actions. The offline activities refer to the launch of various kinds of workshops, events, lectures and fairs. In addition, it refers to the advocacy scheme towards decision-making bodies. The offline actions have another important dimension. The individuals who do not have access to Internet or they are not familiar with the new technologies are not excluded from the debate. The online actions have two angles. The first is about the communication and networking of those organizations with decision-making bodies. The second one refers to the grass-root networking between citizens engaged in cultural production and consumption activities.
CHAPTER VIII: CONCLUSIONS

The final part of this thesis will concentrate on presenting and discussing the final conclusions. Among the major findings was that citizens are the most organic part of the public sphere or the public space both online and offline. Briefly, the public sphere functions as a deliberation locus where citizens are gathered and debate about issues of the political and social life. Media are among the most important information diffusion channels. Usually, citizens tend to shape their opinions, according to the available information. Moreover, the media diffuse different kinds of cultural products that could be considered as a representation of the reality. Needless to say, the cultural product are not produced and consumed only for entertainment purposes. Precisely, many political and social messages are incorporated in the form of cultural production and consumption practices. As a consequence, cultural production and consumption are strongly associated with civic participation. Cultural production and consumption practices may urge citizens to voice their concerns and organize collective actions.

The public sphere could be elaborated into the cultural public sphere, a concept that embraces the cultural rights. The cultural rights refer to the right for the representation of different social groups. The cultural public sphere is not established necessarily for political purposes. However, it may assist the development of political and social movements through cultural production and consumption practices. Political and social life has a dialectical relation with cultural production and consumption activities. On the one hand, political and social landscape may provide inspiration for artistic manifestations. On the other hand, cultural production and consumption activities may mobilize citizens to participate actively in political and social life. Furthermore, the cultural production and consumption manifestations may increase the sense of ownership of the public space. A sense of ownership may mobilize individuals to defend the space they are operating from private and state interventions.

Some obstacles impede some social groups to access the cultural public sphere. Among the most significant barriers are income, education, and social status. Eliza, Elena and Laura mentioned that individuals regard arts and culture as a luxury. That is to say, they would rather focus on satisfying other more urgent needs than participating in cultural manifestations. The formal education curricula do not always include a high-level artistic training. However, this depends from region to region. Some countries or regions pay more attention to aesthetic education
than some others. The extra-curricular artistic education held in private institutions usually have high tuition fees. Therefore, it is not accessible to lower income households. In addition, if citizens do not have an adequate artistic education they are not familiar with cultural production and consumption activities. As a result, the cultural public sphere tends to be accessible to a restricted audience. One of the primary outcomes is the recycling of particular discourses of dominance expressed in the form of cultural products. In the field of cultural production and consumption, there is a dominance of Western European and USA cultures. Hence, citizens who are not affiliated with those cultural tendencies are not encouraged to express their concerns through cultural production and consumption practices. As a result, this restriction of the cultural public sphere may dissuade the civic participation instead of encouraging it. Furthermore, it could be inferred that are not constructed further participatory bases due to existing restrictions.

The online communities may encourage citizens interested in forming a bridge between civic participation and, cultural production and consumption to gather and exchange views. Nonetheless, those online communities should try to address a wider audience not mainly professionals in the field of cultural production and consumption. The latter could be achieved by the combination of online and offline actions. Under the necessary circumstances, the internet platforms may make the cultural public sphere accessible to a wider audience. Furthermore, the online community may assist the organization of collective actions within the framework of cultural production and consumption. Nonetheless, the online communities may function as a tool under the following assumptions. Firstly, citizens should have access to the Internet and be able to use the new technologies efficiently. Secondly, citizens are familiar with the communication and networking norms of the digital era. Moreover, the citizens should be trained to assess different kinds of information as on the internet circulate a vast amount of information. The online communities may also encourage the wider public to participate and be user-friendly platforms. The online community of ECF Labs is a user-friendly platform, but it does not encourage non-cultural production professionals to participate actively.

Non-governmental/ non-for-profit organizations have a significant role in stimulating civic participation through cultural production and consumption practices. On the one hand, they should launch online and offline initiatives. Thus, they will bring together artists with a wider audience. Furthermore, they will also assist the networking between citizens engaged in cultural production
and consumption activities with decision-makers. The latter may reinforce the advocacy for funding in the cultural sector at a local, national and international level. On the other hand, they should focus the non-governmental/ non-for-profit organizations may focus their communication strategy on networking with similar organizations and decision-making institutions.

The goal of this thesis was to examine whether civic participation could be encouraged through cultural production and consumption practices in the digital era. Given the results of my qualitative analysis I am not in a position to extract a general conclusion. Cultural production and consumption may urge citizens to voice their concerns. Consequently, it may function as a tool for the establishment of an active participatory landscape. However, if there are not the necessary participatory settings, the cultural production and consumption practices may have no or limited impact on civic participation. Another conclusion is that closed online communities, such as the ECF Labs, may function as gathering space for like-minded individuals. One of the main reason is that these online communities also permit the organization of massive information something that is not yet accommodated on the popular internet platforms Facebook and Twitter.
References


APPENDIX 1: My profile on ECF Labs

URL: http://ecflabs.org/mariestrati
APPENDIX 2: The online community of the ECF Labs

In this section I will provide some information about the different Labs as appeared on the online community ECF Labs. I would like to remind you that you may access the community through the following link: http://ecflabs.org/

Idea Camp 2015- Open Call: http://ecflabs.org/idea-camp

This Labs host different discourses about culture, communities and democracy. It was launched within the framework of Idea Camp 2015, an ECF initiative. Moreover, participants may meet and discuss with a wider community about different kinds of topics.

Build the city: http://ecflabs.org/lab/build-city

The topic of this Lab overlaps with the topic of the lab Idea Camp 2015- Open Call. The themes are culture, democracy, communities and civic participation.

#Publicspaceis: http://ecflabs.org/lab/publicspaceis

Public Space can mean many things to different people living in different cities, countries or even neighborhoods. What does it mean to you? Share your photos, films, words, drawings and sounds that respond to your own vision of public space.

p2p square!: http://ecflabs.org/lab/p2p-square

Peer-to-peer social practices movements are emerging: Assemblies, self-managed cultural centers, DIY citizen platforms, medialabs, hacklabs, maker spaces, urban garden. We are (re)discovering a sharing paradigm. This lab aims to build and curate a network of collective and collaborative experiences across Europe, with main focus on Southern Europe. You are welcome to share your p2p stories here.

Art+Science: http://ecflabs.org/lab/art-science

This lab explores how the paradigm of the two culture's arts and sciences might be transformed through a Cultural Re-Think. Imagine research labs and universities where artists and scientists worked together? Imagine equal funding for projects where both artists and scientists are considered equal in contribution and remuneration? What outcomes could be possible? What solutions might be found to big questions? Let us bring them together in this Lab.
**B/ORDERS:**  [http://ecflabs.org/lab/borders](http://ecflabs.org/lab/borders)

This is an open forum that deals with the plight of the immigrant. Our main concern is immigration in the EU and Europe, but we also welcome stories and articles from around the world. We are looking to create a fruitful conversation regarding one of the most delicate issues affecting the modern world.

**Bombing Brigades:**  [http://ecflabs.org/lab/bombingbrigade](http://ecflabs.org/lab/bombingbrigade)

The ephemeral quality of graffiti reflects life. One day it is here, the next day it is gone. It is our aim to create permanent odes to the illegal brilliance which exists in Europe. Feel free to post any and all good quality photos, articles or other media related to street art within Europe.

**Crowdfunding for culture:**  [http://ecflabs.org/lab/crowdfunding-culture](http://ecflabs.org/lab/crowdfunding-culture)

Nowadays crowdfunding is turning into an increasingly important element of participatory culture, a proven direct/networked way to make your say in regard an untapped artistic talent or a new creative idea. This lab is about sharing practices, information and thoughts on this emerging trend.

**GameOFF:**  [http://ecflabs.org/lab/gameoff](http://ecflabs.org/lab/gameoff)

Following the PirateBox and LibraryBox successful initiatives - allowing through a wifi router access to free digital cultural knowledge off the grid - Dcalk rethinks this device to prototype a LudoBox: a Digital Toy Library to gather a collection of free-licensed games. This lab aims at curating, sharing, discussing topics related to: Games & Commons / Free culture – Print-and-Play / DIY Publishing - Offline networks - Makers / Digital Fabrication – Future of Public (Toy) Libraries – Game Art & Design.

**Hacking the veil:**  [http://ecflabs.org/lab/hacking-veil](http://ecflabs.org/lab/hacking-veil)

How are migrants portrayed in mainstream media in Europe? The imageries daily produced in media are naturalized through recurrent representations. The veil is the construction of these images of fear, conflict, hostility, and otherness. Feel free to share contents related to migration and its prevailing imageries, as well as any communication strategy (such as remix) that might be used to hack the veil and highlight inclusive perspectives on migration in Europe.
**Idea Camp 2014 & Public Space:** [http://ecflabs.org/lab/idea-camp-2014](http://ecflabs.org/lab/idea-camp-2014)

Specially designed for the first annual Idea Camp in 2014, this lab started as a private space for inspirational exchange among the participants. It is now public, and here you can explore some of the 50 innovative ideas to re-define public space. The comment field is still open if you want to join the conversation around any of the ideas.

**Inovación:** [http://ecflabs.org/lab/innovacion](http://ecflabs.org/lab/innovacion)

A closer look at the cultural scene in Spain. Explore how people meet challenges and come up with forward-thinking solutions within culture, technology and economy. You are welcome to share your own stories.

**Ladies First:** [http://ecflabs.org/lab/ladies-first](http://ecflabs.org/lab/ladies-first)

With so many women in art education, workshops and residencies, why is there a lack of visibility in the art world? Often exhausted by a lack of support or encouragement, many talented women face disproportionate difficulty within the artistic realm. Let us build our own tree house in this space. Welcome to this open community of women artists who support each other in an effort to open visible discourse and foster worldwide relationships.

**Lit Lab:** [http://ecflabs.org/lab/lit-lab](http://ecflabs.org/lab/lit-lab)

This is an inspiring site about literature, stories and characters. If you like to read and write, you're in the right place. You can share about classic literature, trends, books, writers and other curiosities. Welcome, and start telling stories!

**Media Archives for the Commons:** [http://ecflabs.org/lab/media-archives-commons](http://ecflabs.org/lab/media-archives-commons)

Digital archives are being generated, shared and used everyday by media organizations, cultural institutions, social activists and common citizens. Video and audio files, images and other documents are not only a tool for communication but also a cultural heritage that needs to be preserved with public and open criteria. Many organizations and independent platforms are already working in building this public space for media archives. This lab is a space to share experiences, reflections, best practices and tools that help us to transform this digital heritage into a Commons.
MOVE! : [http://ecflabs.org/lab/move](http://ecflabs.org/lab/move)

Exploring movement in the physical; be it through dance, physical theatre, performance or time-based media. Let's talk about the why, when, where and how of then and now.

Nataša Platform: [http://ecflabs.org/lab/natasa](http://ecflabs.org/lab/natasa)

Are you involved in artistic and cultural collaborations across Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine? Welcome to share your activities and ideas on this open and informal platform. The Nataša Platform supports sustainable cultural development throughout the Eastern Partnership countries.

Occupopolitics: [http://ecflabs.org/lab/occupopolitics](http://ecflabs.org/lab/occupopolitics)

This lab collects, catalogues and discusses new political parties and campaigns which seek to defend, reclaim and open up public space. Where/how/if the ethos of the post-2008 protests becomes something more concrete. We’re looking for new political parties, new political leaders and different forms of activism. Institutions, policies, traditions. Predominantly in and around Europe. The housing movement, movements to change democracy and decision making, struggles for ‘the commons’ in cities. That kind of thing.

Opportunities: [http://ecflabs.org/lab/opportunities](http://ecflabs.org/lab/opportunities)

There are numerous opportunities available for artists and, likewise, there are numerous vehicles for discovering these opportunities, but what truly constitutes an UNIQUE Opportunity for Artists — one that is truly distinctive and unlike any other opportunity you have ever come across or experienced? That's what we'd like to invite you to share with us — whether you'd like to promote your own opportunity or one you've just discovered or experienced.

Public Space Makers: [http://ecflabs.org/lab/public-space-makers](http://ecflabs.org/lab/public-space-makers)

What if you could reinvent practices, devices and environments that enable people to feel like they can connect, create and collaborate in urban spaces? We will do this by carrying out research with neighborhoods and communities in public spaces, designing and making physical objects and collecting, developing and sharing the methods.
Radical Agoras: [http://ecflabs.org/lab/radical-agoras](http://ecflabs.org/lab/radical-agoras)

How can culture offer solidarity and common ground to overcome economic and political conflicts of our time? Two courageous examples are the Athens Biennale (Greece) and the Visual Culture Research Center (Ukraine), both laureates of the 2015 ECF Princess Margriet Award for Culture. This lab aims to understand the cultural and political contexts in which they work, and to open up a broader conversation on culture in times of conflict and crisis.

re.Prison: [http://ecflabs.org/lab/reprison](http://ecflabs.org/lab/reprison)

Progressive import of U.S. private prison management model, the growing pathologisation of behaviors or the militarisation of European borders, make up part of the strategies of the State apparatus for the control and management of bodies. re.Prison is configured as a space for debate and discussion of the current policies of imprisonment and generation (through collective production) of strategies of countervailing power.

REFRAME – a comics Lab: [http://ecflabs.org/lab/reframe](http://ecflabs.org/lab/reframe)

Inspired by the comics project and exhibition “Reframe: perspectives on Europe through comics from Algeria, Turkey and the UK”, we offer this space to everyone who wants to reframe and share individual perspectives about Europe through the medium of comics.

Researcher’s Lab: [http://ecflabs.org/lab/researchers%E2%80%99lab](http://ecflabs.org/lab/researchers%E2%80%99lab)

Connecting the cultural policy thinkers of tomorrow. Share your work, vision and stories. Generate new knowledge.

Rethinking Audiences: [http://ecflabs.org/lab/rethinking-audiences](http://ecflabs.org/lab/rethinking-audiences)

Audiences... Do we really care? Who cares, why, in what ways and for whose sake? Share your practices, challenges, approaches, research findings and thoughts on what audience engagement is and what it means for the world of arts today.

Rurality: [http://ecflabs.org/lab/rurality](http://ecflabs.org/lab/rurality)

As digitalisation becomes a more prominent part of all our daily lives artists are now able to work together from remote locations. Breaking down boundaries and encouraging new ways of working,
showing work in physical and non-physical spaces with a focus on starting new connections and dialogues between artists.

**Schooling Heritage:** [http://ecflabs.org/lab/schooling-heritage](http://ecflabs.org/lab/schooling-heritage)

How we educate the European citizens of the future and facilitate personal development through national and local narratives of history? Your story counts: so let’s share and explore together the values of cultural heritage learning and let young people gain skills and inspiration in and beyond the school environment.

**Sounds of Europe:** [http://ecflabs.org/lab/soundsofeurope](http://ecflabs.org/lab/soundsofeurope)

This is where we celebrate the diverse sound of Europe. Most of the sounds are contemporary offerings, but we welcome the standards and the classics as well. Look around, find a sound you like and don’t forget to post some music that you love too.

**Step Beyond:** [http://ecflabs.org/grants/stepbeyond](http://ecflabs.org/grants/stepbeyond)

STEP Beyond Travel grants fund up-and-coming artists and cultural workers (giving priority to individuals up to 35 years and/or in the first 10 years of their career) to travel between EU and countries bordering the EU.

**Tandem:** [http://ecflabs.org/lab/tandem](http://ecflabs.org/lab/tandem)

Tandem is an exchange programme for cultural change makers. With you, we connect communities of practice throughout Europe and its neighbourhood. Share your projects and ideas on cross-border co-creation, (un)learning and new networking. Let’s Tandem!

**Aghet:** [http://ecflabs.org/lab/aghet](http://ecflabs.org/lab/aghet)

In this Lab the Dresdner Sinfoniker and guitarist and composer Marc Sinan are looking for an open dialogue on the Armenian Genocide 1915/16. We are preparing a musical project that combines musicians from Armenia, Turkey and Germany in a tour of the three countries. We have strong partners in Turkey and Armenia but are very well aware of the challenge we are facing by realizing a cultural project in this political mine field. We are reaching out to institutions and opinion makers, journalists and experts in the field of World War I and the history of Anatolia who want
to debate with us and help structuring our approach. We're also very keen on all your input, experiences and ideas. Let's discuss!

A print screen of the home page.
APPENDIX 3: Interview Guide

Interviewee’s Background:

1. Hello and thank you for contributing to my research. Could you please give me some information about you (language, ethnic, age, culture and artistic background)?
2. In which kind of arts are you more interested and why?
3. Since when are you involved with creative activities?
4. What urged you to get involved with creative activities?

The role of arts and culture in identity construction:

5. Do you believe that arts and culture influence the procedures of identity construction? Yes, No and why?
6. How do arts and culture function as meaning-making vehicles?
7. According to you, do you believe that some cultural identities are suppressed whereas some others are more dominant in the field of artistic production? (YES/ NO/ Why?)
8. What is the role of formal education in promoting access to arts and culture to everybody regardless of class, ethnic and language background?
9. Do you believe that people who are engaged in arts and culture share a collective identity?
10. Do you believe that taste influence the process of identity construction?
11. May taste influence the construction of different social classes within the society?

The role of arts and culture in social and political life:

12. In your opinion, which is the role of arts and culture in the social and political life?
13. Do you believe that arts and culture may endorse civic participation and citizens’ involvement in the decision-making procedures?
14. According to you, arts and culture may construct a dialog between citizens in Europe and neighboring countries? YES/ NO and why?

The role of internet platforms in networking and communication between culture stakeholders and citizens:

15. The evolution of internet platforms (Facebook, Twitter, fora etc) endorse the communication, information sharing and networking among like-minded individuals. In the case of arts and
culture how the internet platforms may endorse networking and communication between different cultural stakeholders and citizens?

16. Do you believe that internet platforms may bring together citizens and artists around Europe and mobilize them to develop their own artistic project?

**The role of non-governmental/ non-profit organizations in endorsing cultural participation:**

17. Do you believe that all citizens have equal opportunities in participating in creative activities?

18. How do non-governmental/ non-profit organizations (i.e. European Cultural Foundation) may act as mediators between cultural production and citizens?

19. How do non-governmental/ non-profit organizations (i.e. European Cultural Foundation) may influence the policy-making agenda in the field of cultural policy?

20. How do non-governmental/ non-profit organizations (i.e. European Cultural Foundation) may contribute to make arts, culture and other creative activities accessible to everybody?

21. How the internet platforms may endorse the advocacy of non-governmental/ non-profit organizations (i.e. European Cultural Foundation) about an inclusive cultural policy (that is to say, all the citizens should have access to arts, culture and other creative activities)?

22. How do non-governmental/ non-profit organizations (i.e. European Cultural Foundation) may engage different groups of citizens to voice their concerns through creative activities?

23. How the internet platforms may function as a gathering space of individuals keen on art, culture and politics?

**Demographic Data:**

Age/ Country and city of residence/ Country and city of origin/ Gender
APPENDIX 4: The interviewees

In this section I will provide some information about my interviewees. For anonymity purposes I will not provide exact information about name and origin. In the case of the name I will use a random Western name.

Interview 1: Eliza, female, Croatia, 26 years old, MA Philosophy of Arts.

The interview conducted on the 28\textsuperscript{th} of January. Eliza is a professional in the fields of theater and performing arts. She is also engaged in writing, literature and theater teaching. She is a lecturer in a drama school, she participates in international seminars and she launches several theater projects. Her working environment urged her to get involved with artistic manifestations. Eliza is engaged professionally at theater and play writing for two years. However, arts and culture have been part of her life since her childhood. She stated that “\textit{Usually, people who are fond of arts and culture start participating in artistic manifestations from an early age.}”

She believes that education plays an important role in cultural education. She believes that “\textit{Cultural production and consumption activities have an important role in identity development. Through arts we exchange thoughts and those thoughts are shaped by our identities.}” She recognizes the dominance of the Western culture in the artistic manifestations. Moreover, she points out that most of the times people seem to be ignorant about artistic manifestations in other parts of the world.

Eliza, said that in her country there is no funding for cultural production and consumption activities. Regarding the construction of a dialog between citizens of Western Europe and neighboring countries she underlines the issue of the war trauma. Moreover, she points out the elitist aspect of cultural production and consumption practices. She states that not all citizens have access to culture since cultural manifestations are considered as a luxury. Eliza regards internet platforms as a tool. However, this does not guarantee a success. The offline actions are also needed. She points out that the online platform of ECF Labs should not address only to professionals.
Interview 2: Camille, female, French living in the borders with Germany, Architecture student in Germany, 26 years old.

The interview was conducted on the 29th of January 2015. Camille is in the final year of her studies in Germany. She was born and raised in France and particularly in the border region with Germany. She claims that she embraces both French and German culture in terms of habits and language. She interested in activities related to the transformation of the public space. She defines the public space as follows “Open space refers mostly to landscape. A train station, a square belong to the sphere of public space”.

Theater was the reason to start getting involved in cultural production and consumption manifestations. She is engaged in arts and culture from an early age. Moreover, she grew up in a family. Currently, she is involved in various NGOs where she develops her own projects. She believes that “Arts and cultures are the only ways today to develop our identities because our economic system is destroying everything. That’s is the only thing that may have a positive influence in the process of identity construction”.

According to Camille, the dominance of particular genres of artistic production has a direct link with economic and class background. People tend to appreciate other people based on what kind of culture they consume. Regarding the role of education she stated that “School cannot be free of mind because it’s connected to politics. I believe there should be more partnerships between schools and civil society. People who work in the state are not totally free. I suppose that arts and culture should be free”. In addition, she regards artistic products as follows: “For me arts and culture are creating beauty. .... I think it’s important because it’s creating more sense. People become more involved. Ask people what do they want and urge them to be part of it. Create more sense of our environment. It’s a long process”. Concerning the internet platforms she states that they make networking and communication among people engaged in arts and culture rather easy. The flow of information and content may provide artists with inspiration and feedback for their own artistic projects.
Interview 3: Laura, female, Brazilian theater artist, 30 years old. She used to live in the UK. Currently she is based in Brazil. She was forced to leave the UK due to visa expiration. The interview was conducted on the 9th of February. Laura she launched several discussions within the online platform of ECF Labs about immigration and artists who are facing visa issues. She was willing to contribute to my study since in the past she conducted a similar project for her bachelor. She also shared her project and sources with me. Laura was born and raised in a region close to the borders with Uruguay. Hence she is fluent in Spanish as well. She has been living and working in the UK as a theater professional for many years.

She is engaged in arts and cultures since her childhood. Precisely, she started being engaged in theater after following some extra-curriculum drama classes. Her teacher inspired her to follow a career in drama. She is an English literature graduate. In the university, she developed several theater projects. Meanwhile, her family is actively engaged with cultural production and consumption activities. She points out that cultural production and consumption activities, and identity construction have a dialectical relationship. Moreover, she states that arts and culture may have an impact on civic participation by posing the example of the “Theater of the Oppressed”, developed by Angusto Boal. The goal of the “Theater of the Oppressed” or “Forum Theater” is to sensitize citizens about social issues.

She mentions the dominance of the Western culture in the artistic manifestations. Furthermore, she asserts that in Brazil people seem to be ignorant about the culture of indigenous people. Concerning internet platforms she poses the issue of massive information. In addition, she points out that the online actions should be accompanied by offline actions as well.

Interview 4: Stephan, male, 30 years old, Serbian living in the Netherlands, works for the ECF.

The interview conducted on the 9th of February. Stephan is originally from the Balkan area but currently he is based in the Netherlands. He is one of the moderators of the online platform ECF Labs. He is a researcher and a lecturer. Among his main research interests is cultural participation and audience development. In general, he is interested in popular culture because it embraces the aspect of emancipation. He believes that culture and politics are intertwined. The Yugoslavian
wars motivated him to start participating in cultural production and consumption practices. He is involved in cultural production and consumption activities for more than 15 years.

He states that the field of cultural production is like a “battlefield” and the most dominant approach will be the most popular one. He highlights the role of business in promoting certain kinds of artistic production as follows “The market decides the type and volume of production. The market defines the value of artists. It decides the various form of cultural participation and consumption”. In addition he asserts that the powerful institution allow the introduction of particular artistic products so that to maintain the power relations. He states that cultural production and consumption may function merely as a tool for civic participation in case there are the adequate participatory structures.

**Interview 5: Elena, Female, 25 years old, cultural production professional, Romania**

The interview was conducted on the 8th of February. Initially, I contacted a guy from the platform ECF Labs. His English was not good so he introduced me to Elena. Elena was in the beginning active in the platform but now she is not so active. She was born and raised in one of the most cultural city of Romania. Consequently, she has been always exposed to cultural production and consumption activities. Her family background and the extra-curriculum artistic education she received motivated her to study arts and culture in Romania and the UK. Now, she works in the fields of theater, performing arts, music, painting and photography.

Elena points out that the region you come from shapes your esthetic perception. For instance, individuals who are exposed to cultural manifestations in big cultural cities have more probabilities to embrace culture in their daily life. She also highlights the political aspect of cultural production and consumption practices. She asserts that many political messages are incorporated into artistic products. She also says that some cultural manifestations, such as the culture of gypsy people are disregarded. According to Elena, internet platforms accelerate the information sharing about artistic projects and manifestations around the world.

**Interview 6: Tom, Male, 55 years old, cultural production professional, Irish living in Austria**

The interview was conducted via email. Tom has always been engaged in cultural production and consumption activities. He is one of the most active members of the online community ECF Labs. Currently, he is doing his Master in Visual Arts. He started getting involved with arts and culture
since his school years through painting. Cultural production and consumption gave him the means to voice his concern and access wider audiences. Basically, he regards cultural production and consumption practices beyond their esthetic value. Tom asserts that they may “influence things” and shape the world. He poses a very interesting point, we should regard who is actually engaged in cultural production and consumption practices and why. He asserts that cultural production and consumption has a particular importance in the political and social life. Tom asserts that although the internet platforms accelerates information sharing, communication and networking the artists seem to be reluctant to develop a dialog between them.

**Interview 7: Jonathan, Male, 38 years old, and works for the ECF, Austrian. He shares his time between Germany and the Netherlands.**

The interview conducted on the 17th of February. The interviewee works for several projects of the ECF. He already knew me from some common contacts so it was easy to establish a communication with him. He has an academic and professional background in arts and history. He works for three years in the Balkan region. He also worked in a multi-communal and multilingual neighborhood of Cyprus in a peace-building project. Jonathan has a background in visual arts but he is also interested in performing arts such as music, theater and dance. He is engaged in cultural production and consumption practices for 30 years. His region in Austria hosts many cultural production and consumption manifestations. Jonathan claims that dominant cultural identities are highly visible in the fields of cultural production and consumption. However, he states that cultural production and consumption activities may mobilize citizens to participate actively in the social and political life. Regarding the role of internet platforms he asserts that is rather important in countries where there is no funding in arts and culture. Artists may promote their work and find partners quickly and free.

**Interview 8: Paolo, Male, 37 years old, filmmaker, Spain.**

The interview was conducted on the 15th of February. He is actively engaged in the project [http://voizes.org/](http://voizes.org/). The goal of the project is to give a voice to the prisoners, a marginalized social group to speak about their problems and concerns. I became aware of this project through twitter. The official account of the ECF retweeted something about this project. Then, I observed that in

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9 I cannot mention which country exactly for anonymity reasons.
the online platform ECF Labs was launched a new labs called “re.prison” dedicated to this project. After a long research I found Paolo and I asked him to contribute to my study. Paolo would like to promote his project through internet, attract crowdfunding and find partners.

Paolo was politically involved since his adolescence. His political engagement during his university studies motivated him to start getting involved in cultural production and consumption activities. He points out the elitist aspect of cultural production and consumption practices, a factor that may dissuade people to express their concerns through artistic manifestations. He also highlights the Western dominance in the fields of cultural production and consumption.