

BEYOND THE EXHIBITION

A *Vessel* for self-reflexive curating in the Mediterranean

By

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Mediterranean**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is the written result of a practice-based PhD. The thesis presents a 'located' model of curatorial practice that aims to actively benefit the cultural landscape of host regions. It challenges existing definitions of 'the curatorial', taking a multidisciplinary understanding of curatorial practice and evaluating curatorial methods in light of recent geo-political developments.

Concerned with the effects of changes in European cultural policy, and the geopolitical position of the Mediterranean basin, this thesis evaluates contemporary curatorial practices in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership context and, through practice-based interventions, suggests ways to develop situated curatorial processes, appropriate to their geographical context. Specifically, I argue that the temporary, large-scale exhibition formats financially supported by EU policies, such as the European Regional Development Fund, are not necessarily the most appropriate or beneficial to the cultural development of their host regions. I therefore propose an alternative set of methods, tools and considerations for a self-reflexive model of curatorial practice.

This proposal takes the form of a curatorial initiative 'Vessel'; a long-term practice-based research project that seeks models of practice that effectively enable local engagement in cultural production, allowing culture to flourish independently of larger hegemonies. Several of Vessel's experimental initiatives are presented here, and appraised in order to build a theoretical understanding of 'located' curatorial practices that can inform alternative approaches.

This research is developed through case studies of Manifesta, *Liminal Spaces*, Matadero and Intermediae; all of them testing grounds for 'Vessel', a curatorial initiative based in Puglia, Italy. Puglia has been chosen as a site for this research because of its central role in the current Mediterranean situation. This thesis illustrates the theoretical, geographical and historical context of this

investigative project, and documents the evolution and outcomes of the curatorial initiative attempted.

This thesis represents the first practice-based study of contemporary curatorial practices in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EUROMED) context, which seeks primarily to develop situated curatorial processes appropriate to their geographical context. The thesis discusses aspects of human geography, cultural studies, social science and European studies, all filtered through practical implementation and reflective examination of the main discipline of interest: curatorial studies.

This research acknowledges the role of the curator as a mediator between cultural producers and the political and bureaucratic conditions for cultural production. This role offers the opportunity to develop an awareness of the potential *influence* of those conditions on the artists, their work and their audiences. In other words, the curator is in a unique position to have an overview of the practices, interests and concerns of cultural producers, as well as those of policy makers and administrative bodies, and any potential conflicts of interest that may arise. Thus, curators are in a privileged position to operate as proactive agents, particularly when they observe that cultural policies are not achieving the aim of fostering cultural development. This thesis, therefore, invites curators to consider their responsibility to critically assess the long-term effects of their practice on cultural and epistemological development in Europe.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 presents the research questions, clarifying their terminology and broadly discussing their rationale, context and theoretical focus. The chapter questions current EU cultural and economic strategies and suggests that they may be misguided.

In Chapter 2, the level of analysis shifts from the geo-political context to a more specific situation: the position of art practitioners involved in the above situation, and the outcomes produced. Since the exhibition format is popular and has been envisioned by the EU cultural agenda as one of the most effective instruments for creating a dialogue between different geographical areas,

Chapter 2 challenges this understanding of the format and the ways of production embedded in it.

Chapter 3 presents a series of alternative curatorial approaches coming from the South and related to the four theoretical pillars of the self-reflexive approach: geography, time, process and epistemology. Starting with the methods used to investigate the case studies, the chapter traces connections between theory and practice. The chapter moves through close readings of the alternative case studies and comparative analysis, to the use of self-reflexive practice.

Chapter 4 is at the heart of the thesis: it presents the methodologies underpinning both the approach to case study analysis and the practical research. This involves the curatorial proposal put forward and practised through Vessel. Vessel is therefore presented, in Chapter 4, as a self-reflexive model of located curatorial practice that is appropriate for located curatorial engagement.

The conclusion addresses the capacity of curatorial practices to cultivate local epistemologies. I propose the outcome of the Vessel research project, and associated case studies as a set of curatorial methods and considerations for a 'located' model of curatorial practice.

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Introduction: A geopolitical partnership through the lens of curatorship

I. Overview

This research aims to investigate the possible development of a curatorial practice model that enables contemporary art in the South of Europe to operate independently of the 'Northern hegemony' (as defined by Stamenkovic, 2013; de Sousa Santos, 2013; Castro-Gomez; Tozy, 2013), within the context of the current European Union (EU) cultural policies that fund and influence cultural production.

This thesis represents the first practice-based study of contemporary curatorial practices in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EUROMED)¹ context, which seeks primarily to develop situated curatorial processes appropriate to their geographical context. The Mediterranean region is the geographical focus of this project, as it is recognised 'as a meeting point of the 'North' and 'South' and of different cultures in the area: as an interface between three continents, North Africa, Europe and Asia [...] a 'region' with diversity and as a complex case which presents challenges – perhaps more than other areas' (Pace, 2006:3). As discussed by Slavenka Drakulić (2013), its 2008 inclusion in the EU 'EUROMED partnership' has changed the way in which cultural practices are funded and facilitated by political bodies, creating a period of flux and allowing space for (and, arguably, the *necessity* for) a re-consideration of the suitability of models of cultural production that were developed primarily in Northern Europe.

¹ This research refers to the geo-political zone. I have not found any study that refers to the curatorial development related to the current development of this geo-political zone. From European Union web site we can learn that : 'The Union for the Mediterranean promotes economic integration and democratic reform across 16 neighbours to the EU's south in North Africa and the Middle East. Formerly known as the Barcelona Process, cooperation agreements were re-launched in 2008 as the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM).' (Europea /EEAS, 2013:np for more info see http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/index_en.htm)

As its title suggests, this project seeks to problematize 'exhibition making' and 'biennialist' curating (Tang, 2007), and to re-think curatorial approaches within the Mediterranean region. In doing so, it considers the potential for the discipline to enable the inclusion of situated (Rogoff, 2000) and 'subaltern' knowledge in cultural discourses. The project aims to facilitate the re-imagining of this 'region', and challenge 'mediterraneanist' assumptions and stereotypes (Cassano, 2005; Chambers, 2008; Pavicic, 2012), by developing alternatively 'located' curatorial approaches.

This alternative approach has been called self-reflexive, a term which stems from an understanding of Liz Muller's definition of 'reflexive curating' (2009). She builds her definition from Stephen Scrivener's (2006, 2010, 2013) application of Donald Schön's book *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983). The reflective practice she refers to is an empirical and practical set of methods constantly integrating the findings and outcomes of the research into an 'overarching cycle of grounded reflection, analysis and practical innovation'. Whilst Muller's approach produced a series of new discoveries upon which to reflect, the self-reflexivity proposed in this study concerns not simply the findings and discoveries of the practice, but a reflection on the way the curatorial practice itself has been used.

II. Context

Problems concerning the cultural and geo-political status and identity of Southern regions are receiving increasing attention from scholars (Stamenkovic, 2013; de Sousa Santos, 2013; Castro-Gomez; Tozy, 2013), who have identified the need for 'systems of geographical signification' to be 're-written by contemporary art practices' (Rogoff, 2000: 13), and have issued subsequent calls for the participation of local and regional knowledge in cultural production. Boaventura de Sousa Santos has discussed the 'discomfort of the Western hegemony' and the 'exhaustion of North Europe' in which established practices become engrained, and at times, obsolete (2013). He identifies a need for 'South-South connections' to be made. Although de Sousa Santos is referring to Europe as 'the North', his argument

can also be relevant to North/South regional relationships *within* Europe. A good example of how this can be done is provided by Franco Cassano in his book *Il pensiero meridiano (Meridian thinking)* (1996, 2005).

Nikos Papastergiadis and Meredith Martin (2011) discuss the wide propagation of the Biennale as an example of the proliferation of an established 'Northern' model, without sufficient critical reflection, and call for an epistemological enquiry that values the relevance of the local over the homogenisation of the global. Paul O'Neill (2012) is also critical of the growing 'Biennale culture', as a 'homogenising force' that is instrumentalised as a promotional tool for city branding. Irit Rogoff describes an 'epistemological order', 'that masks fundamental shifts in identity formation' and expresses a sense of urgency to 'attempt to re-write those relations so that they actually reflect contemporary conditions' (2000: 2).

It is within the context of these 'shifts in identity formation', together with the changing political structures of the new 'EUROMED partnership', that this thesis questions the proliferation of large-scale cultural events such as the Biennale. It does so within the context of curatorial studies, an area of activity presented in this thesis as something more than a discipline dealing with the process of mediation between artist and audience. Here curatorial studies is viewed as a discipline that works through art and with artists to deliver ideas to the public sphere, actively participating in the public sphere by creating opportunities for creative development. Though curatorial studies as a field covers many aspects, these are the fundamental ones explored in this thesis. In particular, this research is concerned with curatorial practices which address cultural 'identities' located in both national and transnational arenas.

This research contributes to the discipline of curatorial studies, an emerging academic discipline ² which is still establishing its boundaries and

² Since the first international curatorial studies programme funded in 1987 in Paris by l'Ecole du Magasin, many curatorial courses have appeared in Europe, Asia and Australia (examples include the Curatorial Knowledge PhD research programme led by Irit Rogoff at Goldsmiths, University of London and the Curating Contemporary Art programme at the Royal College of Art). Various institutions and Biennales offer summer curatorial courses and workshops such as the School for Curators and Critics (established 1997 in Ljubljana) and the Summer School for International Curators at the Gwangju Biennale (established 2009). The Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College (CCS Bard) in the US is the longest-running example of an exhibition, education, and research centre which has been dedicated to the study of art and curatorial practices since the 1960s.

methodologies, and undergoing a process of redefinition. This thesis challenges traditional definitions of 'the curatorial', with a multidisciplinary understanding of curatorial practice. It uses tools appropriated from social science, anthropology and cultural studies. Curatorial practice is already, to some extent, multidisciplinary, but this research aims to further connect geopolitical developments and curatorship; in particular, it aims for a 'located' model of curatorial practice that actively benefits the culture of host regions.

III. Research Questions

In challenging the relevance of the large-scale exhibition format for the South, this project aims to develop alternative, 'located' curatorial models. Its specific research questions are therefore concerned with the possibilities of *how* such practices can operate: the ways in which they can break away from existing practices and remain independent and 'context-responsive' (O'Neill & Doherty 2011) and, furthermore, *the extent to which* this is possible in the given circumstances.

- How can the curatorial re-imagine the 'epistemology of the South' beyond the exhibition, in the context of the Mediterranean region?
- What kind of curatorial models can enable the engagement of local knowledges in the production of culture?

Here Puglia will be used as an exemplar in order to explore methods of art production fostered by EU policies within the Euro-Mediterranean Regional Development Fund (ERDF) areas. Questions will therefore be addressed using the specific example of Puglia, with the intention that the processes employed may be applicable, to some extent, in other Mediterranean regions.

To move beyond the existing (and extensive) discussion of the Eastern European relationship to Western European culture, the research initially considered the role of curatorial practice in this relationship and, more specifically, how this might be better employed to counter cultural hegemony

and more effectively represent and foster a diverse European culture. The crux of the issue is no longer *what* exactly those exhibitions and events, relating to Eastern Europe, were trying to tell us, but rather *how they were doing it*; that '*how*' is what is interesting to consider currently within the Mediterranean region. This question of '*how*' refers, essentially, to the curatorial strategies and illu which form the base of these processes of cohesion.

The importance of this '*how*' is found in the fact that the most popular formats, methodologies and tools (such as Biennales and large-scale exhibitions) supported by the European Commission Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)³ have been created and promoted in the 'North' and consequently selected and used by curators globally. These formats and methodologies are framed in this research as obstacles to the distribution and implementation of more Southern, context based and responsive practices, which this study considers as potential positive inputs to the development of a curatorial 'epistemology of the South' (as defined by de Sousa Santos, 2013).

IV. Methodology

The project uses a range of methods for addressing the questions outlined above. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the elements of the methodology.

³ Though a statistical study of the formats supported by the EACEA is not available, a deductive consideration of available data has been used to reach this conclusion. The nature of the 'strands' that comprise the EACEA Culture Funding portfolio require projects to be defined as a network, exhibition or festival/biennale. The festival in particular has two dedicated strands: 1.3.6 and 1.3.6a (for more info see http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/culture/funding/2010/selection/selection_strand_11_2010_en.php)

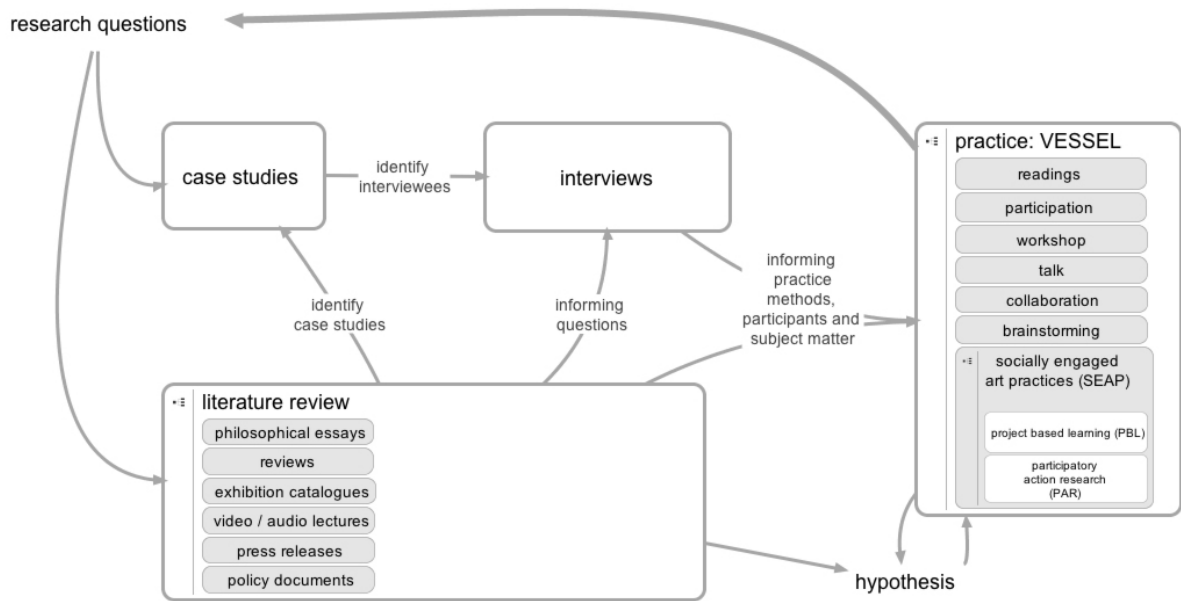


Figure 1. Methodology by Viviana Checchia.

The initial research questions for this study emerged from my own prior practice and experience of working in regions that were to be included in the ‘new Europe’⁴. This led to a review of literature concerning the development of artistic and curatorial practices in the ‘former East’. The sources included a close reading of seminal texts, multimedia examples, exhibition catalogues and policy documents in which key issues were located. This review informed my selection of case studies and helped to define the topics of subsequent interviews/conversations⁵.

The case studies were important in identifying appropriate participants for these conversations. The conversations and literature review informed the practical methods devised (all the methods used in the practice-based element included both formal and informal dialogical exchanges which are

⁴ From September 2009 till September 2010 I worked in the Slovak Republic and collaborated with the National Gallery of Slovakia in Bratislava. During the same period, I collaborated with an emerging private gallery in Romania called Sabot.

⁵ The interviews were semi-structured but all involved active protagonists in the Western/Eastern Europe contemporary art exchange. Interviews were presented to participants as conversations and recorded. Though these interviews/conversations played a role in this research, they are not presented here as supporting material. In fact, these interviews/conversations helped shift the context of reference from the initial Western/Eastern Europe framework to the current North/South Europe relationship. Once this shift had taken place, it was felt that further reference to them was unnecessary, as their content is not relevant to the further development of this PhD project.

described in detail in Chapter 4). This cyclical process allowed the research questions and hypotheses to be refined through an iterative process. Furthermore, it is emphasised that the literature review is not presented in a separate chapter but rather discussed throughout the thesis.

The evaluation of the projects was primarily concerned with the extent to which they contributed to the aim of engaging local and international participants in 're-imagining the epistemology of the south', with a critical consideration of the methods and approaches which proved effective in each context. This took place through semi-structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires, close observation and group brainstorming sessions.

Combining these methods in this structure allows a reflexive approach that draws from both theory and practice in order to integrate findings and outcomes into practical innovation that can respond to the specificities of the participants and the location in question. This engenders the kind of 'knowledge in practice' described by Donald Schön (1983). That is, knowledge which results from engagement with real situations, in which the experimental outcomes are defined by what is successful or satisfactory (in this instance, as defined by the participants themselves), 'or by the discovery of new features which give the situation new meaning and change the nature of the questions to be explored' (Schön 1983: 151).

The following section will outline the chapter structure. The progression of this thesis fits the pattern described by Jillian Hamilton and Luke Jaaniste, in which practice-based doctoral research usually consists of an introduction and conclusion plus three main parts: 'situating concepts (conceptual definitions and theories); precedents of practice (traditions and exemplars in the field) and researcher's creative practice (the creative process, the artifacts produced and their value as research)' (2010: 31-32). Hamilton and Jaaniste call this the 'connective model of exegesis'. The model combines *academic objectivity* (conceptual framework) and *personal reflexivity* (commentary on the creative practice). This hybrid model provides a dual orientation, allowing the researcher to situate his/her 'creative practice within a trajectory of research' while considering his/her 'personally invested poetics' (ibid: 31-32).

V. Chapter Structure

This thesis has four chapters; the first presents, and provides a rationale for, the research questions. It also locates the research questions in both geographical and theoretical contexts. The second provides an in-depth critique of what has already been produced within contemporary art through the use of the Biennale format and argues against any short term format and approach for being any appropriate for a 'subaltern' context (as the one illustrated in Chapter 1). The third chapter tries out ideas and potential models already existing in the context under study. These examples of alternative practices are used as references in the fourth chapter, that contains an account of the practical element of this research.

Chapter 1 presents the research questions, clarifying their terminology and broadly discussing their rationale, context and theoretical focus. It then outlines the political context in which the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was launched and developed, as well as that of the specific region of reference, Puglia. This starting point outlines the regional cooperation framework, within which the main policy focuses are issues such as democracy, civil society, human rights and cultural dialogue in the Mediterranean.

The research questions open a critique of existing practices, leading, via a survey of possible solutions, towards the practical proposal of Vessel, which seeks models of practice that can effectively enable local culture to flourish independently of larger cultural hegemonies. Vessel is a long-term curatorial research project founded by Anna Santomauro and myself. Vessel's production is collaborative, but the research element and theoretical understanding is driven by myself (the project is described in detail in Chapter 4).

The argument starts with an interrogation of existing cultural production projects, considered in terms of their *geo-oriented* profiles and their connections to EU agendas. The chapter reviews EU cultural agendas and objectives, and explains the resulting dynamics that cultural projects must operate within. This defines the context within which specific projects/events

were selected for case-study analysis. The chapter questions current EU cultural and economic strategies and suggests that they may be misguided. That is, while they aspire to create equal involvement in the construction of a shared European cultural 'identity' through the provision of facilities, opportunities and funding, in practice they have perpetuated a state of dependency (Lister, 1997), not only financially but also methodologically and culturally, between stronger and weaker economies, the so-called 'Western' and 'non-Western' countries or, to be precise, especially after 2008, between Northern and Southern European countries (Guerrieri, 2012).

In Chapter 2, the level of analysis shifts from the geo-political context to a more specific situation: the position of art practitioners involved in the above situation, and the outcomes produced (O'Neill & Doherty, 2011). Curatorial practice is proposed as a potential site for intervention, as it holds a key position within the field of visual culture, standing between arts practitioners and cultural policy initiatives. Since the exhibition format is popular and has been envisioned by the EU cultural agenda as one of the most effective instruments for creating a dialogue between different geographical areas, Chapter 2 challenges this understanding of the format and the ways of production embedded in it.

This chapter reviews the literature surrounding different models of contemporary curatorial practice, research and intervention, as well as the profile of curators working in the South and the most commonly adopted exhibition formats. The literature review gives an account of how, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, a series of curators ambitiously aimed to make Eastern European art appeal to a Western audience, creating shows that, first of all, tried to adapt non-Western European art to Western European scholarly narratives and methods (Voinea, 2006; Kazalarska, 2012). Appealing to the authority of authors such as Mari Carmen Ramírez (2008), this chapter will also analyse the exhibition processes of the 1990s, when there was an apparent lack of interest in questioning and articulating different ways of arriving at statements and solutions with regard to the representation of more

context-related art to a global audience. The analysis includes contemporary examples related to the South/Euro-Mediterranean area.

Chapter 3 presents a series of alternative curatorial approaches coming from the South and related to the four theoretical pillars of the self-reflexive approach: geography, time, process and epistemology. Starting with the methods used to investigate the case studies, the chapter traces connections between theory and practice. The chapter moves through close readings of the alternative case studies and comparative analysis, to the use of self-reflexive practice.

The main practical contribution of this research is presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 4 is at the heart of the thesis: it presents the methodologies underpinning both the approach to case study analysis and the practical research. This involves the curatorial proposal put forward and practiced through Vessel. Vessel is a project created to focus on the re-discussion of curatorial practices (beyond the exhibition), in the (subaltern) Euro-Mediterranean zone; as such, it became the main tool for conducting the practical side of this research. It challenges mainstream (Northern-derived) geographically-oriented curatorial practices, by curating *knowledge* rather than *objects*, and *contexts* rather than *topics*. Vessel is therefore presented, in Chapter 4, as a self-reflexive model of located curatorial practice that is appropriate for located curatorial engagement.

The conclusion addresses the capacity of curatorial practices to cultivate local epistemologies. I propose the outcome of the Vessel research project, and associated case studies as a set of curatorial methods and considerations for a 'located' model of curatorial practice. I argue that, in order to respond to specific contexts and enable the cultivation of regional culture (by way of form, content and meaning) in a manner that looks ahead to the long-term, the curator can employ means which are self-reflexive, geo-oriented, iterative and participatory (without hierarchy between different stakeholders). This curatorial model is documented and presented here as one that is capable of

facilitating genuinely situated and responsive cultural production, that originates from those who are already stakeholders in the region.

Chapter 1- Conceptual framework for the curatorial development of *situated knowledge* in the Mediterranean basin

Introduction: Northern Form for Southern Content

This chapter locates the research questions in both geographical and theoretical contexts. It begins by outlining the regional geopolitics (section 1.1) with which the research is concerned, discussing the reasons these regions are currently of interest (section 1.2), and why a re-evaluation of curatorial practices relating to them is necessary. It continues listing and unpacking the research questions (section 1.3), describing how they relate to specific contexts. The final section defines in more detail the terminology used in the research questions, and situates it in relation to theoretical understandings of the topic.

This chapter provides the conceptual framework which underpins the critical understanding of the contexts presented in this study, and leads into the argument presented in Chapter 2. These concepts are relevant to the geographical areas explored in this research, as well as the formats under scrutiny: the large-scale exhibition and Biennale (see Chapter 2).

1.1. Framing the context: The European Union Political Context

This section of Chapter 1 gives an overview of the geo-political context to which this research refers. The context is illustrated on a macro scale as well as on a micro scale. The geo-political context of the European Union is the greater context this research operates within, whilst the region of Puglia, in Italy, is the specific context in which the research is applied.

This thesis is concerned with Europe during the period from the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) to the present day; specifically, with the current geopolitical position of the Mediterranean basin, and its place on the European agenda. One of the strategies used by the European Union (EU) to foster social and economic development during this period has been to invest in 'cohesion' and 'inclusion' of different areas, which includes the allocation of funding for cultural development, mainly through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) (for a more detailed account of these policies, see Appendix A).

During the 1990s, the focus fell on the East/West relationship, as a consequence of the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) when the EU gradually 'included' Eastern European territories (Scott, 2006). Those territories were previously subject to strong ideologies, which resulted in a developmental gap between East and West. The EU filled this gap by operating within the area through similar policies to those currently applied in the Mediterranean basin. From 1993, the enactment of the Treaty of Maastricht underlined one of the most important recognized aims for EU action: cultural co-operation. This provoked the initiation of pilot programmes following a set of criteria and conditions: to encourage artistic creation and cooperation, to promote better public access to European heritage, and to improve artistic and cultural cooperation between professionals (European Commission/culture, 2013).

This EU cultural agenda of cohesion and enlargement, which originally broadly concerned the East/West areas, has now become more defined and targeted towards specific regions. Furthermore, current imbalances in Europe are no longer based on ideology but on economy, and the relationships in question are more relevant to North/South dynamics (see section 1.2.4 for a more in-depth discussion of these issues concerning the Mediterranean region).

Since the introduction of the Euro in Southern Europe in 2000, and the integration of southern regions into Europe, the area has suffered a loss of competitiveness and built up large account deficits *vis-à-vis* the North with no apparent sign of abatement (De Cecco, 2012; Guerrieri, 2012). Germany and

Italy are typical of this trend, see figure 2.

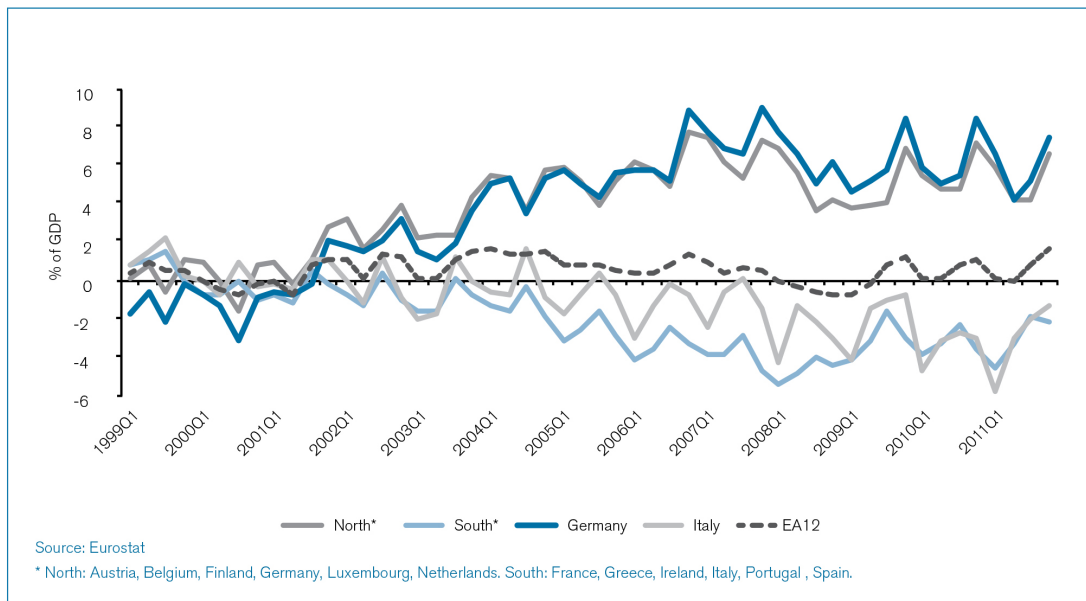


Figure 2. Data from Guerrieri, P., *Intra-European Imbalances: the Need for a Positive-sum-game Approach in International Economics*, (2012) London: Chatham House (p.2) (EA12 refers to the 'Euro Area' comprising the 12 countries included between 2001 and 2006).

This trend continues today. However, 'for many years, very little attention was paid to these imbalances. The global financial crisis of recent years has put an end to the easy financing of these deficits and has revealed many weaknesses in the euro architecture' (Guerrieri, 2012:1). It is against this backdrop that the EU has developed the cohesion and enlargement policies that include the cultural agendas with which this research is concerned.

The Euro Mediterranean partnership (EUROMED), or Barcelona Process, was created in 1995 as an outcome of the Conference of Euro-Mediterranean Ministers of Foreign Affairs held in Barcelona during the Spanish presidency of the EU. It constitutes a series of attempts by European countries to establish or fortify relations with their North African and Middle Eastern neighbours (see Appendix A). The re-launch of EUROMED in 2008 (as the Union for the Mediterranean, UfM) incorporated 15 members of the Middle East and North Africa, in addition to the existing 28 members, illustrated in figure 3. This was seen as an opportunity to 'render relations more concrete'

(EEAS/EU, 2012), with the initiation of new regional and sub-regional projects and relevance for those living in the region. UfM projects addressed ‘economy, environment, energy, health, migration and *culture*’ (ibid, emphasis added). As a result, from 2008 onwards, the Southern European countries became a new area of EU interest, and a focus for cultural funding initiatives as part of its ‘transnational integration strategy’ (ibid). The objectives were to create a ‘zone of peace’ and ‘smooth mobility’ which would in turn, have an economic impact and help develop a new market area (Panebianco, 2003:17,27,32,59).

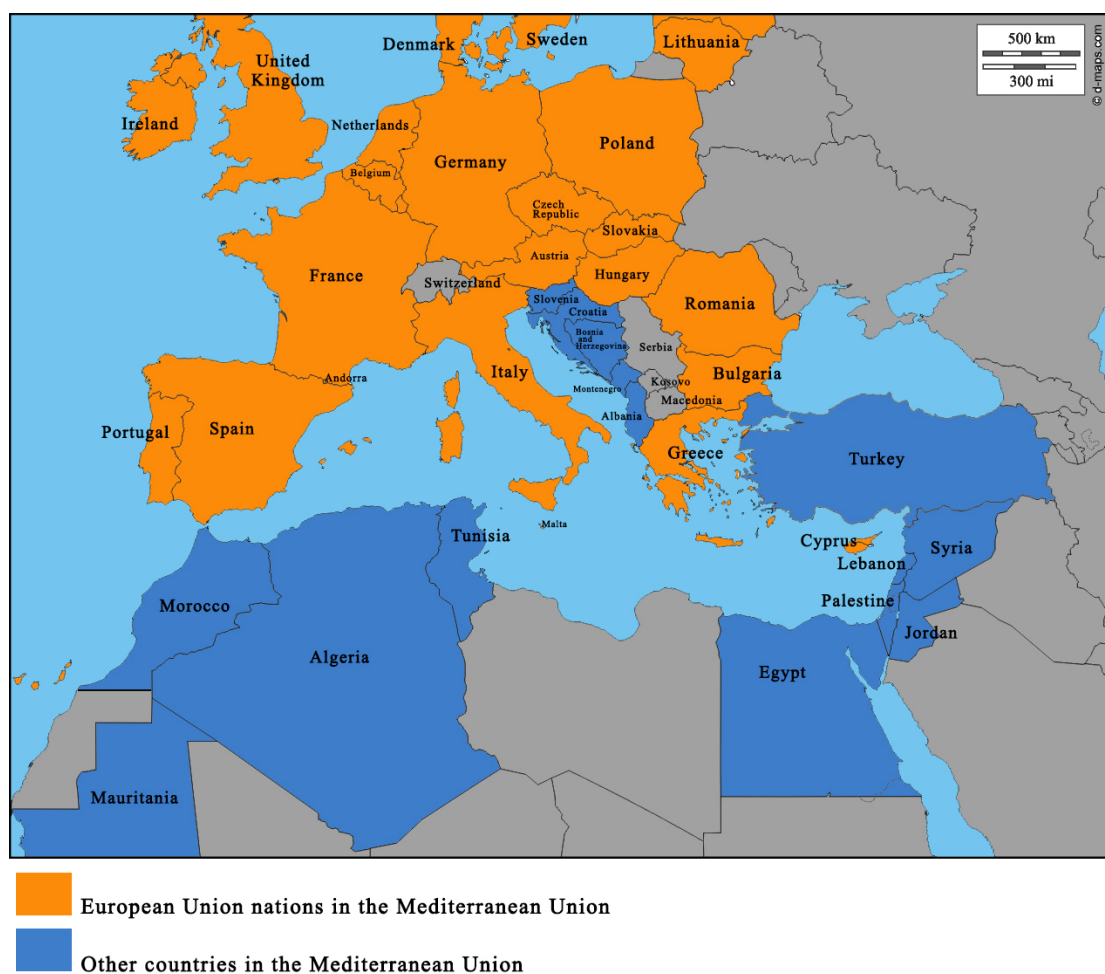


Figure 3. Map of European Union and other countries joining the European Union for the Mediterranean (EEAS/EU, 2012).

In addition to the EUROMED/UfM relaunch, the economic crisis (faced by

Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain) and the 'Arab Spring'⁶ (in countries that had recently become members of the EUROMED/UfM) gave visibility to these areas on the World stage, and they became prioritized as areas for cultural 'inclusion' in the UfM.

Together, these factors (the inclusion of new areas in the UfM, the EU 'cohesion' and 'transnational integration' strategies) are influencing cultural production in the new member regions. This influence takes place through the allocation of funding, not only in terms of *where* the funding is given, but also to *what kind of* organisation, and with what objectives. These aspects are based on existing models, which were developed before the relaunch of the UfM and were thus not designed with a consideration of the diversity of the UfM members. It is, therefore, timely to reflect on the *modus operandi* of cultural production in southern European regions: the relationship between funding bodies and cultural institutions and the relevance of existing models (such as the large-scale exhibition and Biennale).

The regions themselves did gain in relevance, however, only for logistical reasons. Political scientist, Gabriel Popescu explains that, in one way, the EU envisions integration through institutionalized 'trans-border cooperation' in the form of Euro-regions (2006:112). Based on the 'principles of subsidiarity', 'local authorities are seen to be better prepared than central governments to address the needs of the local inhabitants' (2006: *ibid*).

Within this scenario, the curator can play a pivotal role in facilitating culture in these regions, by offering alternative methods and models of cultural development. It is with this premise that the present project proposes to open up a space for critical discourse surrounding an 'epistemology of the South' (de Sousa Santos, 2012; see also 1.3.2), and the *means* by which curators operate within geopolitical frameworks. That is, to question the influence of the curator on regional culture, and propose ways in which they might operate

⁶ The 'Arab Spring' is a revolutionary wave of demonstrations, riots, and civil wars in the Arab world. It started the 18th of December 2010 in Tunisia and spread throughout the Arab world.

in the present funding climate in the South of Europe, given the recent political developments described above.

As discussed by the social scientist Harlan Koff (2005) and writer Slavenka Drakulić (2013) Puglia (my home region) is a crucial region within the Mediterranean and, since 2008, has becoming increasingly relevant to the transnational integration strategy. Puglia is not only part of the EUROMED, it is also part of a union co-funded by the ERDF and constitutes an emblematic location of the Mediterranean and the South. Puglia plays an important role in social and political events: the region represents the most popular destination, together with Sicily, for the arrival of asylum seekers from some of the protagonist countries of the Arab Spring⁷. Since the early 1990's, Puglia has become one of the officially designated 'frontiers of Europe, where illegal migrations are a daily reality. Therefore the region can represent a sort of microcosm of the European migration regime⁸' (Koff, 2005: 401). In terms of cultural development, it has become a transitional territory of complexity.

⁷ 'The Schengen area – the EU's zone of passport-free travel, which benefits 650 million travellers annually – is in trouble. The most pressing concern is how to secure Greece's porous frontier with Turkey, the largest source of illegal immigration into the EU by land. But political tensions between Schengen members have arisen on other fronts, too. In April 2011, France temporarily re-imposed border checks with Italy, after the political unrest unleashed by the Arab Spring led to a rise in uncontrolled migration from Tunisia to the small Italian island of Lampedusa and to Puglia. The number of arrivals was large but manageable, eventually peaking at around 48,000 migrants. Nevertheless, Roberto Maroni, Italy's then Interior Minister, demanded a major intervention from other EU countries to help deal with the influx, claiming that a "human tsunami" was underway from North Africa.' (Brady, 2012: 275)

⁸ 'In 1991, 10,000 Albanians arrived on a single ship to the city of Bari, creating fears of an 'invasion' similar to those found throughout Europe. Like elsewhere, this mass invasion never materialised. Instead, smugglers changed their tactics and they have continuously brought small groups of migrants to Puglia on high-speed rafts. Over the course of a decade, thousands have arrived on Puglian shores, twenty or thirty at a time. In 1996 alone, Italian authorities intercepted 21,000 illegal migrants in the region' (Miletitch 1998: 6, cited in Koff, 2005: 401).



Figure 4. Puglia Region. The EUROMED zone is shown in green (top left).

In 2007, 'the European Commission approved an Operational Programme for Puglia for the period 2007-13' as part of the Cohesion Policy (European Commission/Regional Policy – InfoREGIO 2013). The aims of this were 'promoting full convergence of the region in terms of growth and employment, while ensuring sustainability' (2013: *ibid*). These aims were considered to be both consistent with 'transversal macro-objectives' and 'of fundamental importance to Puglia'.

Concerning cultural development, there is one objective that is expressly addressed by the European Commission's 'priorities', as follows:

Priority 4: Promoting the potential of natural and cultural resources to improve the attractiveness and development of the region. The main *aim of this priority is to attract more tourists*. This will be achieved by integrating environment and cultural policies and the tourism industry.

The priority will focus on innovative projects aimed at raising regional competitiveness by directing those working in the tourism industry towards product and market niches with the greatest value added; *the aim being to attract more foreign tourists* to the area and to encourage out-of-season tourism. The emphasis will be on promoting an integrated image of Puglia in terms of hospitality and the quality of services offered.

In *promoting new forms of tourism*, the regional strategy will focus on promoting the environment, the ecosystem and biodiversity. (European Commission/ Regional Policy – Inforegio, 2013, emphasis added)

We can read here, that although priority 4 is addressing cultural development, the stated aims are oriented to the tourist industry, and the presentation of a particular 'image of Puglia', to tourists. The terminology used here is economic, rather than cultural (for example, terms like competitiveness, product, market niche, value, promotion, services). While this policy, in itself, is not necessarily counter to cultural development, it does represent the main source of cultural funding for the area. It is therefore important to consider the cultural (as well as economic) impact of such strategies, and how, therefore, the promotion of local culture may seem to take a back seat to the economic priorities. At the same time, as noted, this is the main, if not only, source of funding for culture in the area.

Furthermore, Priority 7, *Competitiveness and attractiveness of cities and urban systems*, 'will support initiatives focused on enhancing the historical, cultural and environmental resources of Puglia's cities and urban areas which might risk being abandoned' (European Commission/Regional Policy –

Inforegio, 2013). Again, we can see that cultural objectives are being conflated with economic ones, rather than being pursued for their own sake.

These policies have affected cultural production within the region. Both organisations and independent practitioners have been encouraged, through funding incentives and stipulations, to follow these objectives and priorities. In a country and a region where few other public sources of funding exist and private investment in culture is very poor, EU support has become the main source for cultural production.

The ERDF funds are directed towards cultural events that could be attractive, entertaining, and tourism-related, such as:

- festivals
- 'party style' events
- exhibitions about folk traditions, music etc.
- tour exhibitions about Puglia and its artists
- mainstream artists (e.g. Kounellis, Pistoletto, Arte Povera etc...)
- public art in remote villages
- theatre, plays & musicals both in Italian and dialect⁹

While these activities constitute positive contributions to culture, when considered as a whole, it is possible to ask if there might be something missing.

Cultural theorist Nikos Papastergiadis and art historian Meredith Martin (2011) invite us to reflect upon the current tendency, in which culture offers an international spectacle (e.g. the Biennale and the festival), and in doing so,

⁹ Several examples: BJCEM (Biennale of Young Artists of Europe and Mediterranean) in 2008 held with a budget of over 3 million euro; Festival Valle d'Itria - 30.000 euro; Borgo D'arte (Bovino) - 11.500 euro; Premio LUM per l'Arte Contemporanea - 60.000 euro; Puglia Arte Contemporanea - Pino Pascali Ritorno a Venezia - 250.000 euro; Mostra Caravaggio in Lecce - 32.400 euro; Mostra De Nittis in Paris - 32.000 euro. The following link offers full documentation of recent contemporary art projects produced in the region and their allocated budgets: http://fesr.regione.puglia.it/portal/pls/portal/FESR.DYN_DOCUMENTO_VIEW.show?p_arg_names=id_documento&p_arg_values=2.

gives precedence to touristic and economic development (Papastergiadis and Martin, 2011: 53). The authors do not exclude the eventuality that, by 'functioning as a symptom of the larger commercialisation of culture, the proliferation of Biennales *might* engender multiple sites of critical engagement towards global processes of capital flow and cultural exchange' (Papastergiadis and Martin, 2011: 46, emphasis added). However, the implication here is that we need to be mindful of these processes in order to ensure culture remains critically engaged, rather than being swept along with, or even instrumentalised in service of, purely economic growth.

At a curatorial practice level, these funding priorities act as an imperative to improve project managerial skills and to prioritise the creation of popular events. In this way, economic priorities seem to have taken precedence over primarily cultural considerations. However, this moment of international attention to Puglia and the Mediterranean zone might also be harnessed for cultural emancipation, to encourage a *local epistemology* to flourish, and perhaps to promote tourism and local economic prosperity as a possible outcome.

The following section will help the reader to translate this geopolitical framework into a conceptual framework of reference. The concepts explored in the following sections have been applied to the Mediterranean area in an effort to render more explicit to cultural producers the consequences that EU policies can have on local cultural development.

1.2. Conceptual Research Framework

This section of Chapter 1 expounds the conceptual framework of the research. In so doing, it offers a critical understanding of the context and the issue at stake. Although the concepts referred to in this chapter are derived from other disciplines such as geo-politics and social sciences, for the scope of this research they have been re-appropriated and used in reference to curatorial development within the EUROMED. I have distilled the key concepts to five

main features related to the overarching conceptual framework: hegemony, homogenisation, normalisation, subaltern and Mediterraneanism.

Hegemony is the common aspect and therefore the first term to be introduced. The idea of hegemony itself represents the engine that drives the argument. Hegemony is here described and conceived of as a power dynamic applicable to places or geographies, their cultural production, knowledge, disciplines, formats and practitioners. It is as if to say that the idea of hegemony relates to the “how, what, who, and when” of the epistemology. As Ali Mazrui, an Oxford University scholar from Mombasa, explains in one of his essays, hegemonisation is always accompanied by homogenisation (2001). This is the reason why these two terms have been presented together one after the other.

Homogenisation is applied here to an idea that cultural production responds to the Western canon and enters into standards established by the system, which is mainly a western system. While Mazrui associates homogenisation with the phenomenon of globalization only, in this research, it is also matched with the idea of normalisation, the third concept.

Normalisation is a term adopted in this field by curators when talking about Eastern European art development after 1989: here it is applied to the current Mediterranean situation. Furthermore, the concept of normalisation is presented in this research as one of the negative effects of the EU development policies. The idea of the ERDF is to improve the cultural level of the regions included and *normalise* them to the level or standard of non-ERDF EU members. This means, in Gramsci’s terms, that there is an elite ruling and a ‘low rank’ being dominated (Gramsci, 2005; Ives, 2004).

As a result of this designation or labelling of regions by other geographies, these ‘subaltern’ localities are denied an active role in contemporary knowledge production, due to the cultural hegemony activated by external forces (e.g. EU policies and funds, mainstream formats, curators

and event-producers). This connects with the way de Sousa Santos uses the term *subaltern cosmopolitanism* to refer to counter-hegemonic practices and the consequent struggle against neo-liberal globalization.

Mediterranean(ism) is the last term, and the synthesis of all the preceding terms when seen in the specific context of this research. It outlines notions of the 'West' and the 'Mediterranean', as described by Edward Said (1978) and Jurica Pavicic (2012), in relation to the concept of 'Mediterraneanism'. Furthermore it enriches the definition of the Mediterranean basin from the one in use, by relating it to the application of Said's definition of Orientalism within Europe itself - specifically within the Mediterranean basin (Schneider, 1998; De Donno, 2010).

1.2.1. Hegemony and Homogeneity

In this thesis, the term hegemony has connotations: a geopolitical and imperialist idea of domination, perpetrated by a stronger party to the detriment of a weaker one, while a cultural dynamic and monopoly in knowledge distribution (on both an academic and community level) exists, as well as an internal dynamic of the art world where the mainstream rules. This means hegemony is used to describe geopolitical relationships (here, North/South dynamics) as well as the tools and formats (such as the large-scale exhibition and Biennale) employed to achieve it within the art field.

The first, oldest and most eminent voice defining and theorizing the concept of hegemony has been the one of Antonio Gramsci, Italian writer, politician, political theorist, philosopher, sociologist, and linguist (1891-1937). Gramsci devoted several pages to the concept of hegemony in his book *Prison Notebooks* (1931-1937). In his words, hegemony resides in the predominance of one social class over others. This is realized not only through political and economic control, but also through the ability of the dominant class to impose its own way of seeing the world so that those who

are subordinated by it, acknowledge it as 'common sense'¹⁰. This common sense is nothing else but the natural introduction to what Gramsci called *cultural hegemony*¹¹ (Gramsci, A., et al., 1971: 7-8). His theory of cultural hegemony describes how states use cultural institutions to maintain power in capitalist societies¹².

The EU uses cultural hegemony to maintain power and control. Among the strategies and funds used to this end, the most explicit are those of the ERDF. The fund is meant to help undeveloped regions to reach the standards of the *developed* ones. It is clear that one of the objectives that this hegemony aims to achieve is to equalize the standard of the Euro-Regions, or to *homogenise* them. Mazrui sees a continuous and immediate correlation between homogenisation and hegemonisation (2001: 98). In his view, the more time passes, the more the hegemony of the centre influences people to be more and more alike across the world. The strategy stands in increasing similarity, which creates homogenisation¹³. In its very naming (European *Regional Development* Fund) as well as in the nature of the source of ERDF funding, this programme provides a perfect example when speaking of hegemony.

¹⁰ Alvarado and Boyd-Barrett quote Geoffrey Nowell-Smith on the notion of common sense as being, '... the way a subordinate class lives its subordination' (1992: 51). For Gramsci, though, '... common sense is not something rigid and immobile, but is continually transforming itself' (cited in Hall, 1982: 73).

¹¹ In this thesis the definition of 'hegemony' that Gramsci provides in the *Prison Notebooks* (1931-1937) is combined with the further development of his theory and his definition of 'subalternism' within the formalisation of his essay '*Some Aspects of Southern question*' (1926).

¹² While Lenin held that culture was a sort of a satellite to political objectives, Gramsci believed cultural hegemony was fundamental to the attainment of power.

¹³ The examples and arguments Mazrui uses in his paper are useful here for a better understanding of what we should refer to when speaking of hegemonisation and homogenisation. For this reason I will introduce here the full argument presented by Mazrui. Mazrui states that: "With globalization there have been increasing similarities between the societies of the world. But this trend has been accompanied by disproportionate global power among a few countries. By the twenty-first century people dress more alike all over the world than they did at the end of the nineteenth century (homogenization). But the dress code, which is getting globalized, is overwhelmingly the Western dress code (hegemonisation). Indeed, the man's suit (Western) has become almost universalized in all parts of the world. And the jeans revolution has captured the youth dress culture of half the globe. By the twenty-first century the human race is closer to having world languages than it was in the nineteenth century, if by a world language we mean one that has at least three hundred million speakers, has been adopted by at least ten countries as a national language, has spread to at least two continents as a major language, and is widely used in four continents for special purposes (homogenization). However, when we examine the languages that have been globalized, they are disproportionately European—especially English and French, and to lesser extent, Spanish (hegemonisation). Arabic forwards a strong claim as a world language, but partly because of the globalization of Islam and the role of Arabic as a language of Islamic ritual. (...)The educational systems in the twenty-first century are getting more and more similar across the world—with comparable term-units and semesters, and increasing professorial similarities, and similarity in course content (homogenization). But the role models behind this dramatic academic convergence have been the educational models of Europe and the United States, which have attracted both emulators and imitators (hegemonisation)"(Mazrui, 2001:98).

The most adherent definition found, when talking about this double phenomenon (hegemonisation and homogenisation) in relation to art, is normalisation¹⁴.

1.2.2. Normalisation

Normalisation was defined in the East/West Europe context in 1999 by the Montenegrin curator Bojana Pejic, and further investigated in 2006 by the Croatian collective What, How and for Whom (WHW). When Pejic used this definition in the catalogue of the 1999 exhibition *After the Wall*, she referred to the normalisation of Eastern Europe, reporting an ongoing process at that time, following the so-called 'period of transition' (Erjavec, 2003: 1) from 1989 to 1991. While this transition was 'a stage of the journey that was also travelled by most of the countries in what was once popularly known in the West as the Communist bloc' (ibid), normalisation represents a longer process, beginning in the 1920s and ending around ten years ago when the East had been normalised and the western horizon started to move (the premise of this research states that it moved towards the South, more specifically towards the Mediterranean basin).

The curatorial collective WHW, conscious of these dynamics, discussed the term normalisation in 2006, during a project given the same term as its title. In a press release distributed by e-flux, they announced:

The term normalization connotes concepts such as standardization, conformity, and control. It is of immediate interest in connection with for instance the discussion of the *enlargement* of the EU and of the political and economic development in the Balkan States. However,

¹⁴ Normalisation is a socio-political practice which aims to convert economic and political systems. However, this raises questions as to who decides what is normal, and what normal means, according to which standards and measures. One of the ways in which sociological theory considers normalisation, is in relation to the work of Michel Foucault (1975), especially his ideas expressed in *Discipline and Punish*. In this context, Foucault uses the term normalisation as a tool composed of a range of idealised norms of conduct. In this sense, Foucault explains the use of normalisation as a way of exerting control within society, of applying the most powerful weapon, which he calls 'disciplinary power', without intervening with visible force or violence of any sort. This 'disciplinary power' developed in different contexts (such as schools or factories), then becomes a prevalent aspect of social structure in modern and contemporary societies.

normalization can also be seen as a mechanism of discipline, deeply ingrained in the social structures of the Nordic countries, and a common condition governing how we as individuals are produced by the society we are part of. *What are the consequences of the social standardization promoted in connection with the enlargement of the EU, and what are the effects of the EU as a normative system?* Is normalization about eliminating difference and, in that case, what are the cultural and social implications of this? How do normalization processes work in relation to gender, ethnicity, and social hierarchies, and how do they affect human relations? Informing the exhibition is a wish to nuance our conception of what normalization means and to challenge the positive function the term often has in political discourses and public debates. Focusing on diverse issues, the works deal with the implementation, the practice and the consequences of normalization both as a political tool and as a social disciplinary phenomenon. With this presentation of both thought-provoking and humorous reflections on the subject, it is hoped that Normalization will point to other ways of understanding the implications of one of the governing control mechanisms in our time. (WHW, 2006 – my emphasis added)

This extract from WHW's press release shows the relevance of 'normalization' as a key concept in research surrounding East/West cultural identities. WHW are not only addressing the concept of normalisation, but also creating a direct connection between normalisation and the effects of the actions of the EU, emphasising its influence on new European cultural production. This draws attention to the cultural effects of this long period of European normalisation.

Such awareness was perhaps not possible for Pejic's project in 1999, at the dawn of this new European era. A sharp difference is noticeable between what was stated by WHW in 2006, and what Pejic said in her text and exhibition in 1999. WHW are problematising the normalisation, and evaluating

it within a certain geographical context. They are conscious of, and discuss, the fact that normalisation is not an entirely negative process. On the other hand, Pejic's opening text includes a quote by Akos Szilagyi which discusses the desire for normality:

We want to be a normal country, with a normal economy, a normal political system, with a normal lifestyle. Normal - one among many. Normal - that is something comprehensible, something in which you do not have to believe, but which you can live. No poetry, no sacrifice, no miracles. A normal country - that is a kind of place and a kind of time where not frantic and magnificent ideas, not absurdities nor utopias nor demi-gods, crazy monsters, wise leaders, rule any longer, but rather the one and indivisible world norm does. Because to be normal is promising. Because the future belongs to the normals. S/he who is normal is accountable. She is taken into account. S/he can be counted upon. S/he counts. S/he can be part of the normal world order of the global financial economy, S/he can take part in it. Normals of the world unite! This is the latest - already postmodern - version of abnormality in Russia. *Fiat normalis, pereat mundus!* (Szilagyi, 1997: 138)

Using this position as a starting point is a serious statement for a curatorial text: it declares this aspiration for normalisation! However, this pretention of normality can be associated with a manoeuvre to avoid the so-called 'otherness': if I am normal, I am like the others, and if I am like the others, I am with the others. Possibly this was a good tactic to avoid a second exclusion after the communist enforced one, which isolated the cultural 'East' for a long period.

This PhD project begins by asking questions such as: What processes act to normalise art from the Mediterranean regions under development or other places outside the major (Western) canon? How was and is this done, with which tools, and by whom?

1.2.3. Subaltern

First used by Gramsci, the term *subaltern* is derived from his work on cultural hegemony, which identified social groups excluded from established societal structures. Above all, it related to political representation, in which people have a voice. The subaltern is a subject or a group which is not part of the hegemony - socially, politically or geographically. It is the excluded, the discriminated, the *Other*. As the scholar and poet Louai El Habib says in his research paper 'Retracing the concept of the subaltern from Gramsci to Spivak: Historical developments and new applications', throughout the history of the subaltern concept, its definition has remained one of the most difficult and slippery to identify (2011).

El Habib's paper reaffirms Gramsci's use of the term, which he interprets in the following way: 'The subaltern classes refer fundamentally in Gramsci's words to any "low rank" person or group of people in a particular society suffering under hegemonic domination of a ruling elite class that denies them the basic rights of participation in the *making of local* history and *culture* as active individuals of the same nation' (El Habib, 2011: 5, emphasis added).

Furthermore, for Gramsci this term is more class-related: the subaltern classes have an equally multifaceted, articulated history as the hegemonic classes. The difference does not lie in the development or level of complexity, yet the latter is officially accepted and distributed. One reason this happens is related to the hidden unity that subaltern history has, together with its episodic totality: even when the subaltern breaks with the established system, they finally have to submit to the authority of the ruling group. Circumstances deny the subaltern access to the means by which they might control and manage their own representation; consequently they lack access to the social and cultural institutions of their own state (ibid).

Although this thesis acknowledges the class implications inherent in this term, the core point of its argument has no connection and reference to the class-

related connotation, but rather with a more geographical and *situational* understanding of *everything that does not fall under strict class analysis*, but is excluded by a hegemonic force.

Professor and critic Gayatri Spivak, in her seminal essay *Can the subaltern speak?*, reconsidered ‘the problems of subalternity within new historical developments as brought by capitalistic politics of undermining revolutionary voice and divisions of labor in a globalized world’ (Spivak, 1988: 68). She disapproved in the first place of Gramsci’s assertion of the autonomy of the subaltern groups (El Habib, 2011: 6). Yet, Spivak adopts the notion of subaltern essentially because ‘it is truly situational. Subaltern began as a description of everything that does not fall under strict class analysis. This is so, because it has no theoretical rigor’ (Spivak, 1991)¹⁵.

Finally, the most suitable of all definitions related to the focus of interest and the context of reference for this research, is the concept of *subaltern cosmopolitanism*, as theorised by the professor and sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2002). For the historian Ranajit Guha (1982) and Spivak (1992), the subaltern is the lower class, on the margins of society; this is also the case in the work of Gramsci (1937), for whom this word is synonymous with the proletariat. In his book *Toward a New Legal Common Sense* (2002), de Sousa Santos uses the term *subaltern cosmopolitanism* to refer to counter-hegemonic practices and the consequent struggle against neo-liberal globalization – he uses it particularly when discussing the struggle against social exclusion. For de Sousa Santos, interchangeable with *subaltern cosmopolitanism* is the term *cosmopolitan legality*, which he uses to describe a framework for equality in relation to difference and wherein the subaltern are oppressed people living at the margins of society. In this understanding, the context, time, and place determine – situation by situation – who the

¹⁵ On the other hand, as a key originator of subaltern studies, Spivak explained during the *New Nation Writers Conference in South Africa* (1992), it is preferable to avoid wide definitions that allow many subjects to fit into them and instead one should concretely specify the phenomenon in question, and why this should be related to the subaltern. This was one of the most evident differences and disagreements between Gramsci’s theory, definition and use of terminology and Spivak’s one: Gramsci was much more inclusive and not *situation-related*. In her famous paper *Can the subaltern speak?* (1988), Spivak gives a specific definition of the subaltern that is connected with a contemporary context and situation.

subaltern is. The subaltern refers not only to individuals, but can also be a place, an object, a narrative or a language. This short, yet precise, definition of subaltern cosmopolitanism, evidently suggests that to deal with it (context, place, narrative etc.), it is important to find specific practices and suitable formats to set against the conventional strategy in use for the major subjects (context, place, narrative etc.). The assumption, on which I also base my practice, is that the exhibition format has often proven not to be the most appropriate format to address subaltern geographies (see Chapter 2).

I would like to draw a parallel reading of this subaltern analysis, in order to apply it to the subaltern geographies: if we allow that the only option for a subaltern context is to develop the episodic, sporadic format of the exhibition, then its cultural production will never grow strong enough to develop anything other than the 'hegemony'. In one way or another, the subaltern geographies' cultural production will have to submit to the authority of the ruling hegemonic production. This dynamic denies access for the subaltern geographies' cultural production to the means by which they can control their representation, and consequently insufficient access to social and cultural institutions which form part of hegemonic production, and surely no chance to create their own, subaltern social and cultural institutions.

It is important to define, as precisely as possible, the specific meaning that the word subaltern will take within the development of this research, given that this word is full of significance, and often associated with post-colonial studies. The 'subaltern geographies' do not correspond to a homogenous entity, they still include an elite, who incorporate the hegemonic position and can be successful at passing themselves off as members of the hegemonic group, while being removed from the interests of the disenfranchised culture of subaltern communities. My interest lies in the potential for non-elite communities to participate in cultural production in ways that are meaningful for them.

1.2.4. Mediterranean(ism)

The Mediterranean referred to in this thesis is one of the ‘social imaginary’, in the manner of the Italian sociologist and politician Franco Cassano (2007).¹⁶ Cassano recognizes the ‘creative and symbolic dimension of the social world through which we, as human beings, create ways of living together and of representing our collective life’ (Sultana, 2012: 22). Several scholars, including professor of Cultural and Post-Colonial studies Iain Chambers, see the Mediterranean basin an ‘in-between’ place where the global North meets the global South in the new ‘space of flows’ (2008). It is a ‘crossing’ place for Ronald Sultana, director of the Euro-Mediterranean Centre for Educational Research at the University of Malta, who describes it as ‘an assemblage of networked individuals who ask uncomfortable questions, and who, despite all our personal limitations – intellectual, physical, but above all moral – nevertheless still strive to engage with the world as it is, in order to imagine a world as it could and should be’ (2012: 22).¹⁷

This thesis recognises Chambers’ use of Gramsci’s ideas relating to the relationship between North and South. His argument about how the ‘Mediterranean experienced European modernity under the boot of colonization and how northern progress came in a direct relationship to southern impoverishment’ (Hazbun, 2008: 566), is relevant to our discussion of the cultural and political systems surrounding artistic and curatorial practice in the region, and the relationships between the North and South (both Global and European). Specifically, we can observe that the Northern Biennale model (discussed further in Chapter 2) has been adopted in the South, driven by funding initiatives to ‘develop’ targeted regions, due to this dynamic of southern impoverishment. Therefore, I propose the Mediterranean basin as a possible space for curatorial initiative and criticality, rather than an

¹⁶ This thesis intentionally ignores the definition developed by Giuseppe Sergi in 1901 about ‘Mediterraneanism’ as a theory related to the Mediterranean race as the most perfect race: any reference to race-based definition is not considered valid in this research project.

¹⁷ Chapter 3 and the Conclusion of this thesis, will address how Vessel aims to imagine a world ‘otherwise’, ie. one starting from the South, from the Mediterranean itself.

unquestioning recipient of northern help accompanied by northern models of cultural practice (this argument will be expanded further in Chapter 2).

These external views of the South, fostered by European funding, can be seen as an internal European phenomenon comparable to 'Orientalism', as defined by Said, in that it constitutes a geopolitical-cultural state of dependency, resulting from colonialism. Said defines the notion of Orientalism, describing the exoticisation of the 'Other' by those foreign to them (1977). He refers to the 'enlargement of horizons'. This colonial phenomenon is also described by Marjorie Lister as the 'dependency phenomenon', in which certain regions are placed in a position of need (1997). The concept of *Mediterranean(ism)/Southernism* is therefore used, in this thesis, in a similar sense, with reference to the contemporary art field.

In a similar vein to Said's analysis of Orientalism, the Croatian critic and writer Jurica Pavicic dedicated several books, novels and essays to Mediterranean culture, and specifically to the South-Eastern Mediterranean basin. Pavicic explains how Northern European directors, writers and artists have defined an idealized and romanticized profile of the Mediterranean basin, its culture and history, from an external standpoint, and how this has been subsumed into mainstream representations of those regions, and perceptions of their culture (2012).

I am not suggesting that only an indigenous narrator can achieve authenticity in delivering the story of a place, rather that stereotypes can be easily formed when they are not the result of a sustained period of close observation and research, which is easier for an indigenous interested observer. At the same time, the identity of a region can also benefit from an outsider's viewpoint when there is an appropriate degree of immersion in the location and understanding of its nature.

As Pavicic makes clear in his paper, there are many Mediterranean(s). He describes at least two: a Catholic-European Mediterranean and a Muslim-African/Asiatic Mediterranean. He also distinguishes two further

Mediterranean(s): a Mediterranean of ancient culture and interesting history illustrated in books and films; and a Mediterranean of problems, corruption and despair depicted every day on TV. The full richness of the present reality of the Mediterranean area remains undefined, but is still an intense and interesting present that includes issues shared by other geographies. The Mediterranean area remains a great cradle of culture, albeit one highly veiled by stereotypes and partial concepts of it.

This thesis addresses the current Mediterranean basin situation, challenging the form and format of coming to terms with this: from an internal rather than external position, using a collective rather than an individual answer. It also moves away from representation, questioning the format of large-scale exhibition and temporary events strongly supported by EU policies. I do not wish to argue that the Mediterranean basin is marginal in relation to the EU, but that the EU is operating in a way that treats particular regions of it as such¹⁸, thereby creating a state of dependency. This thesis applies these concepts to interpret areas under development¹⁹ at the centre of the current EU agenda.

The thesis follows Chambers' ideas of a *Mediterranean as modern Europe's anti-modern other*, which is a persistent image of the Mediterranean, seen as a frontier of Western civilization between African poverty and Islamist zeal (Chambers, 2008). This is particularly relevant to those regions receiving the ERDF, since declared in need of development, with the philosophical definition of the *subaltern* (de Sousa Santos, 2002) and a sociological understanding of the *South* (de Sousa Santos, 2013). This means that the Mediterranean basin and the ERDF entitled regions are, in this thesis, conceived of as southern subaltern geographies.

¹⁸ Mohamed Tozy (2013) carried out a survey about the Mediterranean Basin as both popular imaginary and as reality (the survey involved people from the EU territories, Euro-Mediterranean area as well as from EU areas of Enlargement). He choose to analyse survey data while avoiding preconceptions as well as mechanisms that artificially increase the contrast between Northern Europe and the Mediterranean. The results show an area at the risk of generating a neo-orientalism.

¹⁹ Specific Euro-regions forming part of the cohesion plan, including Puglia.

The concepts defined here: of cultural hegemony, normalization, the subaltern and Mediterranean(ism), will be applied in the following sections of the thesis, which will address the issues outlined in section 1.1, regarding the adoption of Northern models of cultural practice. The following section will frame the research questions with reference to these terms.

1.3. Framing the Research Questions

- How can the curatorial re-imagine the 'epistemology of the South' beyond the exhibition, in the context of the Mediterranean region?
- What kind of curatorial models can enable the engagement of local knowledges in the production of culture?

The cornerstones of these research questions are, firstly, the shift between the supremacy of the exhibition and the relevance of the context; secondly the geopolitical specimen and thirdly, the re-definition of the curatorial related to the latter. Starting from these three pivotal points, the questions proceed through ideas of hegemony and homogeneity, and connect them with the way in which the exhibition format operates. Once the large-scale exhibition is acknowledged as a hegemonic format, including the ways it intervenes within different localities, the questions put forward then imply a possible alternative to be tested: the idea of focusing on the situated knowledge (related to the concept of the mainstream versus locality and context). In parallel, the questions refer to the definition of the South as a philosophical and sociological concept in need of consideration within this research project as well. This organically opens up the question of the curatorial, which, together with its practice and methodologies, can otherwise address the area and its knowledge.

The following sub-sections will unpack the research questions by exploring the keywords contained in them: curatorial practice, the epistemology of the South and situated knowledge.

1.3.1. The Curatorial

The designation of 'the curatorial' is quite a slippery one, since it is still under definition. Within this thesis, for sake of clarity, I refer to the conclusions reached so far by the practice-led PhD programme in Curatorial Knowledge instituted in 2006 at Goldsmiths, University of London. These findings have been collected in a book titled *The Curatorial, a Philosophy of Curating* edited by senior lecturer Jean-Paul Martinon (2013)²⁰.

Just to exemplify, and with no intention to create a binary understanding, it is helpful here to mark the distinction made by Rogoff and Martinon in the preface of this book: a distinction between curating and 'the curatorial' (2013: iv-x). While curating is a set of professional practices relating to exhibition making, 'the curatorial' relates to the process of making and the production of knowledge. The difference exists between staging something, and being or creating something. As a process it encourages another way of thinking or sensing the world as well as producing knowledge and finally another way of 'curating'.

In the text *An Exhausted Curating*, part of the same book, the PhD candidate Leire Vergara explains that the first thing to do when discussing the curatorial would be to overcome the limits of curating and its domain of visibility: to go beyond the exhibition (2013: 74). This approach encourages curatorial practice to expand into different fields of knowledge and create new ways for thinking. In her conclusion, Vergara proposes the creation of 'a moment of disruption' as a way to move beyond the binary definition of curating and the curatorial, to 'alter the conventional flow of curating' (ibid).

²⁰ In the case of this book, I would like to underline its recent publication date: in 2013, the 3rd year of this PhD study.

The role of the curatorial, in the context described above, can potentially be instrumental in ensuring that critical engagement (as Papastergiadis and Martin note) continues in regions such as Puglia, which find themselves in a state of transition due to political developments, despite the overarching economic agenda. In this sense, this project seeks to reconsider the role of the curator as a key actor, with the ability to enable cultural discourses to remain critically engaged with the social and political moment.

The complexity of this set of conditions (created by the EU) can transform the curator into a cultural administrator, a 'surfer', as termed by the Director of the research centre for Arts in Society at Groningen University and sociologist of art Pascal Gielen (2013), who has to carefully navigate the intricate bureaucratic and logistical requirements of these subsidies, as well as the constraints imposed by local interests. This means that the curator in question (working in this geopolitical zone), needs to invest great energy in administration before conceptually and practically addressing cultural development and its processes.

In practical terms, this means that they will be devoted to achieving a material outcome (and likely using existing models in order to do so). The nature of the funding priorities dictates that the project has to be brand new and cannot be a continuation of a project already started; it has to include specific partners, (usually new organizations who have not previously collaborated); it has to adhere to a specific timetable (see Appendix A for a broad discussion of these constraints). This creates a short-term approach, which prioritises the achievement of outcomes over the development of approaches and processes that are capable of responding to the specific location.

Cultural operators, and specifically the curators interviewed for this study, find themselves in a position to choose a role within the ERDF framework: to respond to the parameters, to connect ideologically with the sponsor. If they choose to operate outside of these parameters, they are unlikely to receive funding.

1.3.2 From Southern Theory to the Epistemology of the South

The Euro-Mediterranean zone is addressed here as a learning context in the manner of Sultana (2012). He identifies a global South composed of the Mediterranean population and all population groups excluded from the benefits of neoliberal globalization. He views this context as presenting possibilities of opening up new spaces of dialogue about what he named as 'other educations' and 'education otherwise' and what, in this thesis, will be referenced as 'other curation' and 'curation otherwise'.

By transferring what Sultana says about the position of the educator, we can defend the position of the curator as a listener to the global South. Just as Sultana believes that the geographical area of the global South can deliver a different system to that of the North (a globalized one), this PhD research project states that the geopolitical area of EUROMED, as part of this global South, can deliver a different system, one that allows both curators and collaborators to be learners.

The northern zone of the Mediterranean, where Vessel is based, and from where this research starts, as measured under the Western European parameters of modern progress, has become, according to Chambers, 'the backwards, underdeveloped southern fringe of Europe, whose ruins and beaches are a place to experience a 'time out' from modern, metropolitan realities' (Chambers, 2008: 145). The Mediterranean zone has become the *anti modern other*, or, as previously identified, the 'subaltern'. This does not imply that the Mediterranean zone is a minor or peripheral zone, but that a hegemonic agent, in this case the EU, has created a dynamic of subalternism towards this specific area. The hegemonic agent did so by treating it as an area of territorial enlargement and a region under development (Lister, 1997) as well as promoting the region as a beautiful location for leisure time. The EU has done this on a financial level, by creating a process of dependency, and at a more conceptual level, by building stereotypes and emphasizing

previously insignificant or anecdotal commonalities within the area of enlargement²¹ (Chambers, 2008).

The Southern question clarifies the subordinate group referred to in this thesis: the Southern Italian people (to which Puglia's people belong). As Gramsci explains, historically the gap between the North and the South divided Italy. While Northern Italy was the land of Dante, the Renaissance, Leonardo and Michelangelo, the South was the land of *dolce far niente*, sweet idleness, strange religiosity, pre-modern culture, brigandage and idolatry. The South has developed enormously since the last century, but it remains in a position of subordination that nowadays is both national and European, since the EU has declared the South of Italy an area in need of development (European Commission/Regional Policy/Atlas 2007, 2013), and therefore a privileged recipient of the ERDF.

At stake in the aforementioned book, and discussed in the chapters to follow, this thesis' position of contextualising the South is a case study that relates broadly to the hegemony within Europe. This position is then connected with art dynamics, expounded in the foundation of the art world, and related consequences: the creation of a state of dependency, a position of inequality for the subaltern, and waves of homogenisation.

What de Sousa Santos (2013: 43) accounts for is an 'epistemological diversity of the world'. In order to achieve it, the epistemologies of the South should be part of cultural production as much as the epistemologies of the North. de Sousa Santos does not describe it as a pure claim for equality, but as a need for diversity and for a better development of the world. Furthermore, de Sousa Santos makes a claim for the acceptance of the fact that theories

²¹ For the cultural sector, the EU strategy has promoted transnational cultural projects in which the *leitmotif* is either to glorify the similarities within the countries involved, or to motivate the participants to go beyond differences and to enrich themselves through these differences (Cohen, 2003). By doing so, the EU ignored the minor narratives within this *subaltern* context, and consequently, the creation of any deep process of research, in favor of a horizontal phenomenon of superficial temporary sharing which gives precedence to the mainstream narrative that some of the Mediterranean countries may have in common. These consequences are embedded in the process itself: if we are trying to match and orchestrate together different entities under an idea of unity and homogeneity, we are looking for commonalities - for common characteristics, as opposed to peculiarities or specificity, which potentially would enlarge the gap of differences (Leontidou, 2010).

are 'situated' and, therefore, 'theories produced in the global North are best equipped to account for the social, political and cultural realities of the global North' (de Sousa Santos, 2012: 45). It goes without saying that the same would be valid for the (global) South: theories from the South would account for realities of the (global) South. This means that, first and foremost, it is necessary to open up a space in which these theories can be created, distributed and promoted.

Though, in de Sousa Santos' opinion, the West/Global North 'claims the right to the dominant view of the world' (2012: 45), it is time for the South to reappropriate its own view of the world. Once this happens we will discover how different these two standpoints are. This will give the South an opportunity to better respond to the 'political needs of radical social transformation' (de Sousa Santos, 2012: 45); this 'social transformation' will finally neutralise the imbalance between the North and the South.

Conclusion

This chapter introduced the focus of this thesis and its research questions. It presented the changing geo-political context of Euro-Mediterranean regions 'under development' and the effects of new funding policies on its cultural processes. The EUROMED is described as a meeting point of the North and South, a region rich in cultural diversity. The chapter described the region's political, geographical, social and cultural landscape, and discussed this in relation to four core concepts: *hegemony/homogeneity*, *normalisation*, the *subaltern* and *Mediterranean(ism)*. Here, I identified a need to rethink curatorial practice in these terms. In particular, I recognise the Biennial as a *hegemonic, normalising* model creating *subalternism*, when used in the context of the European 'South' - specifically in regions under ERDF development. That is, European funds are instrumental in shaping the cultural profile of these regions, and therefore it is important to consider the ways in which they do this.

In order to consider more carefully the issues outlined above, the following chapter will analyse the Biennale/large-scale exhibition model of curatorial practice, in order to assess its impact on the regions it is used to represent and on the practitioners involved. I will consider the Biennale as a global (and 'glocal') phenomenon, which supports the development of the mainstream and can be instrumentalised as a device for touristic promotion. In order to consider this, I discuss cases in which Biennales or large-scale exhibitions operated in locations whose local authorities sought to develop economic interests in tourism. I consider the curatorial practices used in these events in relation to the funding structures that enable them.

Chapter 2 – The Biennale and large-scale exhibitions as global and local formats

Introduction

The Mediterranean is a vibrant area and a great source of diverse knowledge, art and culture (Cassano, 2005; Chambers, 2008; Pavicic, 2012). The aim of this project is to develop curatorial models that can cultivate and value such diversity, while avoiding the dangers outlined in Chapter 1. That is, that diverse cultures might be subsumed into the mainstream by hegemonic models originating in the more ‘developed’ North. Specifically, Chapter 1 scrutinised the effects of European development funds on cultural practices.

Chapter 1 identified one potentially problematic effect as the proliferation of the large-scale, temporary international exhibition; the ‘Biennale’ having been the most prestigious exhibition format since the nineties. Biennales are large-scale events which, ‘because of their site-specificity [...] may refer back to, produce or frame the history of the site and communities’ collective memory’ (Martini & Martini, 2011: np). This chapter critiques the use of the Biennale and/or large-scale exhibition format.

Here I present a literature review and selected case-studies in order to assess the political and economic factors motivating the use of this exhibition format, and its effects on host regions in the Euro-Mediterranean. In doing so, this chapter lays the groundwork for a presentation of alternative models in Chapter 3. This chapter’s critique is not concerned with bi-annual exhibitions per se, but with large-scale international events or ‘mega exhibitions’ as distinct from group shows typically hosted by museums. Curator Elena Filipovic notes, in her text *The Global White Cube*, that these can be distinguished ‘thanks to their lineage to the Venice Biennial’, defined by their

characteristic ‘temporality and spectacularity’ (Vanderlinden and Filipovic, 2006: 65). That is, they are short-term, temporary, public facing, widely publicised, and highly visible, even imposing. Some are geographically located (e.g. Documenta) others nomadic (e.g. Manifesta).

The first section (2.1) describes the global development of this phenomenon, including a review of recent publications that critique of this kind of exhibition format in relation to globalisation and ‘glocalisation’. I assess historical and current approaches to exhibition-making practices associated with what is described as a stereotypical model of cultural consumption of art, mainly imposed by the ‘mainstream strategies of predatory capitalism’ (a phrase defined and extensively used by Camnitzer, 1995). In other words, there are market forces driving the branding and presentation of regions and their local cultures, and I will discuss how this has changed over time. One factor in particular – touristic development – is identified as a significant influence on cultural consumption due to economic interests. It is often in the interests of the tourism industry for large-scale temporary exhibitions to occur, and here I will review debates around whether this is, in fact, in the best interests of the regions at stake.

In relation to the concepts outlined above, three case studies are considered in section 2.2, each of which is an example of a large-scale temporary exhibition which addresses geographies. First of all, *Les Magiciens de la Terre*, a large-scale exhibition about global inclusion held in Paris in 1989, at the Centre Pompidou and the Grande Halle at Parc de la Villette. This exhibition was one of the first to include artists from around the world, rather than solely European and American ones, and was the most influential exhibition in terms of a global and inclusive understanding of contemporary art. The second case study, *Manifesta: The European Biennial of Contemporary Art*, is a nomadic European response to the fall of the Berlin wall whose stated aims are to, ‘critically incorporate social and geopolitical issues while analyzing notions of place history, identity and urban concerns’ and to focus its research on the periphery of Europe’ (Hedwig Fijen, 2012:np). The third case study is Manifesta 8, which focused on the ‘Region of Murcia in Dialogue with northern Africa’ in 2010/11, and was part funded by the

European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). In each case study, I will consider the (changing) role of the curator as an intermediary between funding agencies, practitioners, institutions and audiences.

2.1 The Biennale and the large-scale exhibition as a phenomenon

The following sections offer a brief overview of the creation, development and distribution of large-scale exhibitions worldwide, connected with a critical reading of the latest examples of this sort of exhibition within the Mediterranean basin. By drawing a broader picture of the development of the large-scale exhibition format, this section helps to build an idea of the impact of these exhibitions within the Mediterranean area.

It is relevant to underline that most of the publications to which this chapter refers, in order to articulate the argument concerning the Biennale 'effect', are recent (2012 and 2013). Although there have been several publications and events related to the Biennale, the more recent ones take a deeper and more critical approach. This chapter will take advantage of recently written materials, relating them to the issues raised by the Mediterranean basin: an area yet to be analysed under the gaze of curatorial studies.

2.1.1 The emergence of the Biennale and the large-scale temporary exhibition format

In his recent book *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions that Made Art History: 1962-2002*, Bruce Altshuler, Director of the Program in Museum Studies at Harvard, gives an overview of the development of the large-scale art exhibition from the nineteenth century to the present (2013). He concludes that the most noticeable effect of this has been the inclusion of new geographies in global art development. Until 1973, apart from the Sao Paulo Biennale joined by the Biennale of Sydney, large-scale exhibitions and

Biennales took place essentially within the Euro-American context. However, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the breakup of the Soviet Union, followed by a significant ideological change and economic development in China and the economic growth of other Asian nations, brought up new demands - economic, political, and ideological - and led to 'the expansion of the international exhibitionary system' (Altshuler, 2013: 18). During the years between 1989 and 2005, the number of large scale international exhibitions increased dramatically, with new examples born in every continent (see figure 5).



Figure 5. 'Global Positions of Biennales', 1989-2005 by Rafal Niemojewski in Vanderlinden, B. and Filipovic, E. (2006) *The Manifesta Decade: debates on contemporary art exhibitions and Biennales in Post-Wall Europe. Manifesta*

In theory, Altshuler explains, this new global Biennale phenomenon equally included all places and practitioners of the world, but in practice, it became an easy way to 'expand tourism, improve physical and cultural infrastructure, stimulate foreign investment, and promote the work of national and local

artists' (2013: 20). This is why and how these new Biennales appeared in almost every region, supported by sponsors who saw in them a source of income (a sort of Guggenheim effect of the Biennale). In addition to this aim, there was the motivating factor of local practitioners' aspirations to garner international acclaim.

In *Contemporary* magazine's special issue on curatorship (2005), curator Isabel Stevens provided a list of eighty large-scale temporary exhibitions that had been held around the globe between 2005 and 2006. This data testifies, at least quantitatively, that the Biennale format is now a default exhibition model all over the globe (see section 2.1.2, 2.1.3 and 2.1.4). Paul O'Neill, curator and director of The Centre for Curatorial Studies (CCS) Bard, in his latest book *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, argues that the use of the Biennale has reached such a global extension that it 'has become a homogenizing force, a model to be copied rather than to be subverted': he explains that it is the preferential model for cultural policymakers who seek to utilize its capacity as 'a promotional tool for nations and city branding' (O'Neill, 2012: 51). The main argument of this chapter responds to the final part of this statement: how a model can be adapted or even challenged instead of copied when dealing with the issues of different contents, contexts, time-frames and audience.

Filipovic explains, in her text *The Global White Cube*, that the initial ambition of these large-scale exhibitions was to offer an alternative to conventional museum exhibition formats (Vanderlinden & Filipovic, 2006: 66). In this respect, in his 2009 book *The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude*, Gielen identifies the beginning of the 1970s as the period in which the function of the museum started to be eroded by the fast emergence of temporary exhibitions and Biennales. He argues that this introduced a 'structural amnesia in the field of art' creating a critical loss of depth (2009: 31). Both periods designated by Filipovic and Gielen give an idea of how fast the rise of this 'Biennale phenomenon' was.

Filipovic adds another objective: to enable more experimental cultural production in local contexts with scarce or weak art institutional backgrounds. However, '[t]he proliferation of biennials in the 1990s rendered them new privileged sites for cultural tourism' due to their 'bombastic proportions' (Vanderlinden & Filipovic, 2006: 66). She points out that this connected the exhibitions directly with market interests, in spite of their political or social focus. Similarly, the curator Zoran Eric in his text *Globalisation and Art Exhibitions* underlines that, though there can be a taste of 'local flavor', these Biennales are all indifferently large-scale events where the 'art market has a major presence' (Eric, 2006: 9-11). This means that, suddenly, the very same *local* passed from being characterized as scarce, forgotten and provincial (a status perpetuated by the global *mainstream*) to having a fast paced, market-oriented dynamic which local processes must accelerate to keep pace with. Again (as discussed further in the following sections), this acceleration was operated by those who were implementing a *mainstream*.

We can see from these discussions that what began as something intended to act as an alternative model, counter to the existing hegemonies, actually continued to reinforce certain hegemonies and could even be instrumentalised for private economic gain (as will be discussed in case studies to follow). The 'local' knowledge and cultures continued to be inert, following global and national trends rather than driving their own. This is not an isolated problem. As noted above, the Biennale format is being adopted around the world, and is also engaging with themes of globalisation. The next section will describe the Biennale as a global phenomenon.

2.1.2 The Biennale as a global phenomenon

The curator Henry Meyric Hughes²² regards the Biennale as 'an enduring expression of global readjustment' (Hughes, 2006: 26). That is, he states that

²² Active since 1968, Hughes has been general Coordinator of the Council of Europe Exhibitions and Honorary president of the international association of Art Critics, co-founder of the European Biennale of contemporary Art, and President of the Manifesta Foundation. Hughes also worked for the British Council in Germany, Peru, France and Italy as the Director of Visiting Arts and Director of Visual Arts. He was also formerly Director of the Hayward Gallery, and the British Commissioner for the Venice Biennale and the Sao Paulo Biennale. He also acted as an

Biennales have established networks that can validate and globally distribute contemporary art. Similarly, Eric describes the ‘proliferation of biennales’ as a manifestation of the process of globalisation within the realm of contemporary art’ (Eric, 2006: 10).

Curator (and former editor of *Art Forum* and director of *The Kitchen* in New York) Tim Griffin describes the Biennale as a format which ‘assumed the unique position of both reflecting globalism [...] and taking up globalism itself as an idea’ (Griffin, 2003: 153). He believes this is valuable because it establishes ‘a new curatorial class able to bring artists together from wide-ranging geographic and cultural points’; it ‘altered the kinds of visibility afforded artists and so fundamentally changed the conditions of artistic discussion, ultimately forwarding the position that no show could, or should, presume an all-encompassing thesis – at least not in conventional terms and form’ (ibid).

Here, it is important to distinguish between ‘globalisation’ and ‘globalism’. O’Neill describes globalism as: ‘an ideological push towards a *greater degree of diversity* residing in wider social and cultural networks (O’Neill, 2012: 148, emphasis added). However, he specifies that the Biennale is, in contrast, a phenomenon of ‘globalisation’ which, he says, ‘has certainly contributed to the significant rise of Biennales, with neoliberalism as a dominant variant [...] in the name of economic free trade’ (O’Neill, 2012: 148). In other words, the Biennale acts as a homogenizing force, acting globally as a result of economic interests, rather than as a force for greater diversity.

The social cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai has defined globalisation as the central problem of current global interactions: a process created by the tension between ‘cultural homogenization’ and ‘heterogenisation’ (1996). If, on one hand, globalisation disrupted the old geographical hegemonies of the art centres and revealed the diverse global scenario, on the other, it created a homogenizing tendency in which Biennales are more and more alike. Hughes

holds that by operating in this way, Biennales have become a 'self-sustaining artistic ecosystem, at once removed from the major established institutions and the geographically restricted commercial markets' (Hughes, 2006: 26). Hughes sees the Biennale as running counter to established cultural institutions in this way. However, others would argue that the Biennale is not, in fact, 'self-sustaining' (many rely heavily on public funds such as the ERDF, such as Manifesta 8 as we will see later in section 2.2.3), and that by operating in the realm of the global free-market, Biennales act as homogenising agents that perpetuate existing cultural hegemonies. As O'Neill argues, globalisation, instead of enlarging the cultural spectrum, is shrinking it, and leading the world towards a mono-culture (O'Neill, 2012: 148).

In Eric's view, the Biennales 'are becoming as alike as if they adopted the logic of multinational companies which disseminate their commodities worldwide, always adding a touch of a local flavour to the product to improve the prospects of marketing it within a local context' (Eric, 2006: 10). In fact, this 'local flavour' is an important feature of the Biennale. Althuser notes that this 'concern for the specificity of local conditions within the context of globalization' - what some refer to as the 'glocal' - 'became a major theme of international biennials in the first decade of the new century' (Althuser, 2013: 21).

Sociologist Bruno Latour argues that the global and the local are not really separable. He describes instead 'shorter and less connected networks' and 'longer, more connected networks' (Latour, 1993: 122). In light of this, no Biennale can ignore either local or global contexts: the question here is who benefits from the Biennale? For Eric, despite the added 'local flavour', any Biennale would have a similar 'flavour', linked to the global cultural economy. In other words, globalisation effectively decreases the distance between locations, in both time and space, while increasing the level of economic global interdependence. Any local diversity represented is carefully measured against global marketing concerns (which, as we will see in section 2.1.4, are connected to the tourism industry).

To be clear, I am not arguing that the Biennale is an entirely negative phenomenon. The curator, writer and publisher, Thomas Boutoux (Vanderlinden and Filipovic, 2006: 202) points out that this globalisation is helping to overcome the Eurocentric worldview previously held in the art world (as will be discussed further in section 2.2.1). This is in agreement with Griffin (above), who argues that the format is best placed for artists to address global issues, while including in the debate the standpoint of the 'peripheral centres'. As curators Bruce W. Ferguson, Reesa Greenberg and Sandy Nairne note: 'the location of an international exhibition constructs a map of the world from the perspective of both the city and the country that sponsor it, underlining any notions of an equality of nations' (Ferguson, et al., 2005: 47-62). In this sense, the 'time and space compression', described by the distinguished professor of anthropology and geography David Harvey, can have a positive effect on the art world as a whole (1989: 240). What I argue here, is that the effects *on the host regions themselves*, are not as beneficial as we are led to believe. They are therefore not necessarily instrumental in 'developing' the regions targeted by the ERDF (this will be discussed further in section 2.2.3 in regard to Manifesta 8, which was an ERDF funded Biennale).

2.1.3 The Biennale as entrance to the mainstream

In his text *Access to the Mainstream*, artist Luis Camnitzer (1987) calls the integration of the local within the global 'assimilation', meaning the result of a successful colonisation within the 'mainstream' (what I refer to in this thesis as 'normalisation', see section 1.2.2). For Camnitzer, the 'mainstream' denotes a specific social and economic class. He describes a 'reduced group of cultural gatekeepers' and 'a select nucleus of nations', as a 'self-appointed hegemonic culture' (Camnitzer, 1987: 218). Camnitzer's vision specifically concerns the commercial art market, rather than the publicly funded art sphere this thesis is concerned with, but his concept is nevertheless relevant. His ideas are similar to O'Neill's (above), with reference to globalisation as a homogenising agent that perpetuates existing cultural hegemonies.

At the base of the *mainstream* Camnitzer identifies some indispensable elements:

- colonialism as a force affecting both internal and external colonies;
- values instilled by educational institutions that separate peoples from their identities;
- the market's fetishisation of the success of the individual over the building of culture (Camnitzer, 1987: 218).

He describes how, through these elements, the market becomes a tool for homogenisation and the 'mainstream' the host for the homogenised 'international style', an instrument that is 'useful for political hegemony and cultural expansionism' (ibid).

Camnitzer goes on to explain bluntly this mechanism of subordination and colonisation active within the art and cultural context:

Since this cultural expansionism included a growth of the market, it was easy for these conditions to be accepted as guidelines by the market. As a consequence, ethnic and national artists belonging to *subordinate cultures* could only be successful in this market if they worked within an acceptable formal repertoire, while the expression of ethnicity and/or nationality had to remain confined to content. This residual ethnicity allowed their products to be perceived as slightly exotic, enough so as to maintain a satisfying self-image of openness and pluralism on the part of the market. The same residual ethnicity would signal the "roots" of the author in the artist's community of origin. Yet, the community's pride would turn on the fact that their artist "made it in the art world" rather than on the artist's cultural contribution to his or her community. Artists like Romare Bearden or Fernando Botero, for example, are more respected in their communities for the prices they command in the market than for any possible changes in vision they may have introduced to their national or ethnic constituents. *A clear symptom of colonization is the*

tendency to see the shift from subordinate to hegemonic culture as a sign of progress and success (Camnitzer, 1987: 219 - emphasis added).

Though this is a long quote I have retained it in its entirety as it is important to present here Camnitzer's full argument with his own words. Camnitzer explains that subordinate and peripheral artists will remain underprivileged as long as their market/s (collectors) remain underprivileged (1987). Hence, they hold internationalisation as a status symbol, and aspire to selling to international markets.

Again, although Camnitzer is referring to the commercial art world, the same argument can be applied to the Biennale phenomena. Not only is there a parallel situation with the use of international cultures, but this is still driven by economic interests, characterised by an aspiration for international 'markets'. In the case of the Biennale, these 'markets' are not international collectors, per se, but international tourists. As previously mentioned, host regions' tourism industries have a vested interest in the Biennale.

2.1.4 Biennale as a touristic device

As discussed in Chapter 1 (section 1.1.2), connections have long been present between large-scale exhibitions and the tourist industry – ERDF policies even conflate the two activities. As mentioned in section 2.1.1, Stevens (2005), Filipovic (2006) and O'Neill (2012) note, the format is desirable for cultural policymakers with a vested interest in city branding, who seek to use it as a promotional tool. O'Neill further underlines the strong and ambiguous interrelations between culture and location which, in his opinion, become 'marketable aspects of the global tourism on which biennials depend' (O'Neill, 2012: 68).

Gielen²³ states that the art Biennale is no longer a device for the promotion of the 'nation-state' and its 'nationalism' (Gielen, 2009: 9). Previously, this political agenda was one of the priorities. Now, this agenda gives way to a *competition* between potential host cities and locations. The result of this new tendency, in Gielen's words, is an exponential rise of the number of Biennales worldwide. This boom goes hand in hand with the politicians', managers' and sponsors' positive support towards these events. Such enthusiastic support is suspect in Gielen's opinion. It fits the neoliberal 'creative cities' marketing strategy. It is motivated, not by a genuine interest in cultural or social impact, but in order to compete with other cities around the world, and thus become more appealing to tourists.

In his text *The International Biennale, as a Place of Encounter*, Hughes (2006) lists common characteristics to which most Biennales aim:

- 'periodicity' (they are events happening every two to five years);
- their 'inter- or transnational' profile;
- 'privileging work by young artists';
- 'spectacular, entertaining and media-orientated';
- with a 'deliberate relationship to the political, social and urban context';
- '*allied to tourist initiatives* and serve as instruments for leveraging funds out of government for the improvement of the local cultural infrastructure'

(Hughes, 2006: 26 - emphasis added)

Hughes acknowledges that, since they tend to be held in 'peripheral centres without an art market or sustained institutional activity throughout the year, they tend to be allied to tourist initiatives' (ibid). In other words, Biennales are held with international touristic objectives in mind, and the characteristics listed here are devised to attract such an audience.

²³ Gielen's article *The Biennale, A Post-Institution for Immaterial Labour* was featured in the journal *Open Cahier on Art and Public Domain*, in their 2009 special issue (No.16) devoted to *The Art Biennial as a Global Phenomenon – Strategies in Neo-Political Times*.

The justification for holding these events is the improvement of cultural infrastructures. However, it is clear from Hughes' commentary that there would not be an alternative audience in such 'peripheral centres' for such large-scale exhibition formats. Also, because of the international audience, such events are necessarily short-term. Therefore, any 'improvement' in the cultural infrastructure is not necessarily in the interests of local art audiences (or even local artists), but in the touristic industry, and, as art historian and writer Gilane Tawadros notes, for the development and 'regeneration' of the cities themselves (1994). This is another reason for the proliferation of such events. Considering Biennales as commodities that benefit the tourist economy and city development, curator and Director of MAXXI in Rome, Hou Hanru argues, in his text *Towards a New Locality*, that this model creates a dependency on the tourist economy and consequentially a loss of critical distance (in Vanderlinden and Filipovic, 2006: 57).

Papastergiadis and Martin offer examples of the dynamic of capitalisation and culture (including the Liverpool Biennale) (2011). In their opinion, Biennales are propagating exponentially because of the connection between culture and economy. While, until 1984 there were only three Biennales and very few large-scale exhibitions taking place, by 2008, new Biennales were launched every week, accompanied by 'great expectations that culture would advance economic growth' (Papastergiadis and Martin, 2011: 46). They mention the first Venice Biennale (in 1895) as an event partially motivated by the need to remedy the decadence dominating the city at that time: in a scenario where mercantile power had been lost, the Biennale represented a chance to promote the city as a 'locus of modernity' and simultaneously promote its museum-based past (ibid). In this context of crisis, the Biennale model was conceived. Its periodic, contemporary format and the curatorial focus on location were devised as a means of positively influencing the city, both culturally and economically.

Filipovic explains that the ambition of these large-scale exhibitions was, and remains, to represent their region, host city, or nation, even though after the end of the event their locations lose visibility again, and go into a 'temporary

hibernation' (2006:77). This applies to cities like Venice, who regularly hold Biennales, but one-off hosts may be positioned on the map for a year or so only (e.g. Murcia, Trento, Rovereto, Fortezza are still not part of a mainstream network, even after Manifesta's experiment, to be discussed in section 2.2.2 and 2.2.3). In the wake of their designated year of 'Biennale City' or 'European Capital of Culture', regions are often left with little of cultural value.

In order to create a cultural event which is better placed to develop the culture of the region itself, it can be possible to address the region thematically. That is, there are exhibitions which seek to address themes of 'cultural geographies' through the work they commission or select. The following sections review examples of such shows.

2.2 Case Studies: Large-Scale exhibitions and geographically oriented Biennales

In her book *The Global Art World Inc.: On the Globalization of Contemporary Art*, art historian Charlotte Bydler lists three types of Biennale (2004). One type is focused on national representation, for example, Venice or Sydney Biennale; another type is politically oriented and focused on a specific theme, like Havana or Dakar Biennale; and the third type is based on a 'flexible production and event-orientated variety of the 1990s and 2000s, such as Istanbul Biennale and Manifesta' (Bydler, 2004: 151). This research refers to events with a temporary timeframe and regional geographical focus, which fall under the third type defined here.

Manifesta is a good example of this kind of event, being a nomadic European Biennale whose stated aim is to 'critically incorporate social and political issues, while analyzing notions of place, history, identity and urban concerns' (Fijen, 2012: np). I will discuss Manifesta in general, evaluating the extent to which it achieves this aim, with regard to the issues outlined in the previous section, and using Manifesta 8 in Murcia as a specific example.

However, before discussing *Manifesta*, I will discuss the earlier exhibition 'Magiciens de la terre' (held in 1989); the first large-scale temporary exhibition in Europe to display 'non-Western' contemporary art with the explicit aim of incorporating 'the critical thinking which contemporary anthropology provides on the problem of ethnocentrism, the relativity of culture, and intercultural relations' (Martin, 1989: 153). This event received a great deal of criticism and was highly influential for the development of subsequent large-scale temporary exhibitions that sought to engage with local geographies or expose 'local flavour'.

2.2.1 The case of *Magiciens de la terre* and its legacy

The first example that expanded the conception of the large-scale exhibition in a worldwide (rather than Euro-American) context was *Magiciens de la terre* (hereafter, *Magiciens*), at the Centre Pompidou and the Grande Halle at Parc de la Villette in 1989. The exhibition was originally proposed as an alternative to the traditional Paris Biennale (Martin, 1989).

Magiciens was made by art historian and curator Jean-Hubert Martin as a response to the earlier American show '*Primitivism*' (1984) at The Museum of Modern Art in New York. Martin was critical of that exhibition, and wanted instead to present a more balanced image of the diversity of cultures worldwide. He states:

[a] basic idea of our exhibition is to question the relationship of our culture to other cultures of the world ('culture' here is not an abstract generality – it describes a set of relations that individuals have with each other and with which we interact) [...] Our first concern is with exchange and dialogue, with understanding others in order to understand what we do ourselves (Martin, 1989: 155).

To this end, Martin showed fifty Western artists and fifty 'non-Western' artists (from Africa, Australia, Latin America, and Asia). O'Neill describes this as a

'pioneer' event: 'the first large-scale international group exhibition to have raised the issue of inclusion of contemporary art and artists from non-Western centres of production' (O'Neill, 2012: 56). However, Martin was widely criticized for seeking to represent some form of 'primitivism' or 'exoticisation'.

In O'Neill's opinion, *Magiciens* opened the path for a model of curatorial practice that went beyond established Western centres of art production. Since 1989, when related to large-scale exhibitions, curatorship has primarily focused on a trans-cultural approach (2012: 51-52). Curators of this kind of exhibition have worked in favor of cultural globalism as a productive setting for more inclusive exhibitions, in which globalism itself was often a central theme. *Magiciens* is still a pivotal example within curatorial debates around Biennale culture²⁴, as well as a popular influence in the work of many curators²⁵. In 2014 the Centre Pompidou held a 25th anniversary commemorative exhibition (with accompanying reference book, documentary, a summer university and international symposium), reinforcing its influence and popularity. The Tate Modern also held a major series of events *Magiciens de la Terre: reconsidered*, which acknowledged the influence of *Magiciens* on ethnographic film and contemporary discourses around globalisation.

The Cuban curator and critic Gerardo Mosquera holds that '[p]luralism can work as a prison without walls' (2011:13). In other words, as Papastergiadis notes, 'the recruitment of artists from diverse countries is *not the solution* to

²⁴ From e-art now newsletter, 30th January 2015: 'A global geography of art has emerged since the late 1980s. During the interval of a three-day symposium, a diplomatic scenography will be imagining alternative geographies of art. Many would agree that a new international geography of art has established itself since the late 1980s. A global shift that has been described by the art theorist Joaquin Barriendos as the 'Magiciens effect'. Often portrayed as decentering the once predominantly European-American canon (with its accompanying cultural politics), the shift really seems to be reengaging with a universal geopolitical language: 'global art as a postcolonial lingua franca offered to the world by the West'. This geoaesthetic regime appears to be based on a crucial paradox, which together perpetuate asymmetries and hierarchies at the heart of this new globalized narrative : on the one hand, it is characterized by the fragmentation of narratives, the opening up to postcolonial studies, situated knowledge and epistemologies of the South; on the other hand, it is marked by a return of meta-narratives, of the global museum (as new form of the universal museum), a redeployment of world art history as methodology. So global art has failed – what comes next? What geoaesthetic regimes can we invent and deploy for the future? What institutionalizing gestures can we initiate to provoke a new shift? Finally, what museums and institutions can we reimagine? The symposium will be using a diplomatic scenography, opening with a space for statements and complaints, and following with diplomatically negotiated proposals, during which we will collectively work on inventing other contemporary geoaesthetic regimes, acknowledging the power of fiction and thought experiments to produce scripts and scenarios that act as performative operators of possible.'

²⁵ Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Catherine David, Okwui Enwezor, Charles Esche, Hou Hanru, Vasif Kortun, Gerardo Mosquera, Gilane Tawadros, and Robert Storr, and others.

the problems of exclusion and appropriation' (2010: 10 emphasis added). Mosquera gives the analogy of Borge's desert as a labyrinth; the 'desert's incommensurable openness, from where it is difficult to escape. Abstract or controlled pluralism, as we see in some Biennales and other "global" shows, can weave a labyrinth of indetermination confining the possibilities towards real, active diversification' (2011: 14).

O'Neill believes *Magiciens* influenced (perhaps intentionally) the subsequent curatorial use of topics such as: margin and centre, identity and difference, local and international (2012: 56). He says the effect was that it also problematised the dominance of contemporary art from a Westernised geo-cultural perspective, and the position of the 'curator-as-anthropologist' due to its post-colonial approach (O'Neill, 2012: 21). So, although there were still serious issues with the curatorial approach, in that the western-centred, post-colonial attitude remained, nevertheless, this was a pivotal step towards dialogue concerning non-western perspectives and curatorial approaches to them. As the South African painter Gavin Jantjes pointed out, at the time, *Magiciens* 'revealed that the Eurocentric gaze has distinct and daunting problems when fixed upon the 'cultural other', its achievements and methodologies' (Jantjes, 1989: np). He also stresses that '[t]o imply that quality in the cultural arena is signified by everyone exhibiting together is both illusionistic and historically unsound' (Jantjes, 1989: np).

Similarly, curator Catherine David (2003) believes that, despite good intentions, the exhibition, in fact, perpetuated misunderstandings, prejudices and preconceptions related to 'centre and peripheral modernity'. She argues that it is not possible to make a binary opposition between centre and periphery, or at least that we should not continue to create narratives that support this dual narrative (Meyer, et al., 2003: 154-155). As in Latour's (2011) understanding, there is no global or local, only networks.

These combined critiques created a new scenario. It was in this context that curatorial practices emerged which sought to engage with cultural geography, with more careful consideration of what it really means to practise

geographical inclusion. Manifesta is a good example of this, as it is a response to the European unification of territories: 'a context of profound political and cultural transition' (Vanderlinden and Filipovic, 2006: 65).

2.2.2 The case of Manifesta

Manifesta is a nomadic European Biennale based in the Netherlands. It was first held in Rotterdam in 1996 and aimed to reflect the changing role of contemporary art and its relation to its audience. This represented a response to the demise of the *Paris Biennale des Jeunes* which was an important event during the sixties and seventies. Manifesta started as a response to the fall of the Berlin wall. Its original aim was to create a new dialogue within the 'New Europe' and to discuss geopolitical reconfiguration.

Hughes (one of the founders of Manifesta), considers Manifesta a positive example of the 'new model' of international Biennales. In his opinion, Manifesta took its 'curatorial independence' and 'administrative continuity' from Documenta; its 'inclusiveness and, in a negative perspective, an antipathy to nationalism, competition and prizes' from Venice (Hughes, 2006: 27). He describes how Manifesta began with a new context; a 'new geography, a new generation of artists and new approaches to curating art and communicating with the public' (ibid). It aimed to provide 'a platform for minority cultures' and in doing so it insisted 'on a high degree of responsiveness to local contingencies' as well initiating debates in the 'cultural and geographical margins' and pushing towards 'transnational collaborations' (ibid).

There is certainly a possibility that Hughes uses here a different acceptance of 'context' as well as 'local' than the one illustrated in this chapter, but it is still difficult to reconcile how a nomadic platform can be context focused and within its nomadism capture 'local contingencies' and even address 'minority cultures'. That would be possible only by considering the 'local contingencies' and 'minority cultures' as something far less complex than they are, or if the 'responsiveness' mentioned is intended as representation.

When this thesis considers the event-based nature of the Biennale and its global and glocal profile as problematic, the nomadic essence of Manifesta is certainly the most troubling of its aspects. Assuming that Manifesta's genuine ambition is to be mobile and activate at times in different locations which otherwise would remain out of the contemporary art map, the result of its nomadism is unfortunately far from the positive premises Hughes propounds.

This aspect of nomadism, as well as the geographical understanding used by Martin for *Magiciens de la terre*, is the pivotal point of the argument exposed in this thesis when speaking about geography. This style of geographical engagement is here argued as lacking local embeddedness, due to an understanding of the local as an exchangeable venue with some 'local flavour' that is graspable in a short time. These characteristics represent the geographical antagonistic forces from where the practice proposed within this research project took shape. The research practice is operating by responding to the pitfalls of this sort of 'local' curating within the Biennale format.

The second problematic aspect of the Manifesta format is the use of time. Once again Hughes explains the reason why Manifesta operates as a temporary event rather than a long-term platform. He explains that Manifesta's will is 'not to become too embroiled with any specific social or political situation for more than a limited period' (Hughes, 2006: 27). So, contrary to what this research project is wishing for the local, Manifesta does not want to enter too much into the local 'tissue'. As already mentioned, due to the complexity of the local profile, as of any other profile, I argue that local culture requires time to be perceived, analyzed, digested and addressed.

Furthermore dealing with a 'specific social or political situation' would necessitate the activation of a different process and would require the curators to structure their practice in a more locally focused, rather than globally oriented, manner. This would probably necessitate a shift of practice from a process developed for the creation of the exhibition towards a socially and politically oriented practice in which process would work more on the local itself than on the exhibition. Even before that, to 'become [...] embroiled'

would also mean to give importance to a local 'situation' and consider the relevance of its narrative and its epistemology.

Finally, this does not seem to be the central interest of Manifesta in the first place; instead it seems preoccupied by the global impact of this event. That is why Manifesta invests heavily in being a flexible organisation able to fit the profile of any of these geographies. Furthermore, Manifesta focuses its attention on the global by inviting international curatorial teams to respond every time to a different temporary host, its socio-political situation and its urgencies.

This brings with it a problem of sustainability: Manifesta activates suddenly and creates for a short time a high level of activity in these 'geographical margins' and within 'minority cultures' which are not used to this and sometimes are not able to keep it going beyond the event for a long period of time. This model develops a process of 730 days maximum, with around 300 days of curating, activating the local system for approximately 200 days. Then it leaves this 'minority culture' without a proper knowledge or methodology to carry on using the cultural investment made in their context, other than the potential expertise on how to realise a Biennale. Programming 100 days - the usual length of a Biennale exhibition - is something different from working on the constant development of a cultural local context.

In her last interview, Hedwig Fijen, the founder of Manifesta and director of the Biennale Foundation states:

Manifesta's origins and European passport Manifesta originated from a desire to unravel the complex nature of the DNA of contemporary culture in Europe, by proposing *an artistic event which could critically incorporate social and geo-political issues, while analyzing notions of place, history, identity and urban concerns. Context and flexibility have been the keys from the start.*

Every two years Manifesta is substantially reinvented, *embedding itself in a new host region, within an extremely limited time-frame.* It

is important to note that as a nomadic event, Manifesta often *focuses its research on the periphery of Europe*, in close dialogue with established art circles. *At these borderline zones, we investigate political climate*, cultural identity, *geopolitics*, technology and *the status of Europe itself*. We look at how artists might be able to work creatively with the translation of these changes. *Based on this research, a host city is selected*. As a dynamic, transparent and elastic initiative, we closely watch social and political developments throughout Europe. (...) We are now locked into a globalised, fast-moving, morally degenerating and financially obsessed period in post-industrial Europe. We have virtually dismissed the previous definition of “United Europe”. We are keenly aware of the lost potential of Europe, where Culture is no longer the master key, divided instead by monetary discrepancies. The rift is no longer between the east and west, but the *north and south*. This is the current context in which Manifesta takes place. The relevance of the biennial is *based on its site-specificity*; wherever Manifesta turns up, it focuses on social artistic resources and connotations which might oppose the existing infrastructure, but which constitute new models of exhibition-making (Fijen, 2012 - emphasis added).

This long quote is relevant to better understand the glossary Fijen is using when presenting Manifesta publicly in her own words. This is a summary of Fijen’s words in the last statement to be circulated on the Manifesta website and various social networks in 2012, immediately before the opening of the Manifesta 9 in Genk, Belgium. As Fijen makes clear in this statement, Manifesta changes location every two years. Manifesta ‘focuses its research on the periphery of Europe’ to ‘investigate political climate’ and ‘the status of Europe itself’. After this research Manifesta chooses the location and invests its energy upon it. This is the way Manifesta works on ‘site-specificity’.

The reality is different, though. Manifesta opens up a bidding process every two years²⁶. Any city based in any European country can take part. An essential requirement to take part in the call is to offer a minimum of three million Euro funding. The city that offers the largest budget and greatest facilities wins the bid. The funds are therefore offered by a local sponsor (private or public) and they cover not only the costs for the Biennale, but also for the Dutch office which moves every two years to a different location. I learned these details from first hand experience: in 2012, while Manifesta was taking place in Genk (Belgium), with the support of Viktor Misiano, chairman of the Manifesta board and member of Vessel scientific committee, my Vessel colleagues and I took part in the bid with the city of Bari. We had two meetings with the Puglia Regional council to discuss the possibility of hosting Manifesta edition 10 (which subsequently took place in Saint Petersburg) in Puglia. Puglia was initially taken into consideration because the Puglia Regional Councilor of 'Mediterranean cultures' showed an interest in the event and declared the availability of three million seven hundred thousand or four million two hundred thousand Euro to support the event. When, in the final meeting the same Councilor shared with us, Misiano and Fijen the proposal for a budget of just two hundred and fifty thousand Euro, at least initially, the candidature of Bari immediately fell down. We interpreted this as quite a distinct sign of the budget's relevance in Manifesta's choice of which 'periphery of Europe' it will move to every two years.

Looking back at several editions of Manifesta around Europe, starting from its third edition an interesting correlation can be observed between the location chosen and European Union (EU) developments, as well as the involvement of EU funds and policies. When Manifesta took place in Ljubljana in 2000, it

²⁶ Figures: I have few references other than my own experience. The independent curatorial office Latitudes, based in Barcelona, followed the case of Manifesta 8 from its beginning. This is an extract from the report that resulted: 'Hot on the heels of Manifesta 7 which took place throughout the Trentino-South Tyrol region of northern Italy this summer and autumn, the applications for host city for the 8th edition of this European Biennial of Contemporary Art - Manifesta 8 would take place in 2010 - closed a little more than a month ago. According to the Polish newspaper Gazeta, the contenders in what increasingly feels like an Olympics-style bid, are ... Gdansk, Poland; Riga, Latvia and Murcia in Spain. The same paper reports that the Polish bid was somewhat short of the 3.3 million Euro price tag. In contrast, the southern Spanish city of Murcia, doubtless keen to shake off its image of golf resorts and vegetable growing, is seemingly very flush with money for contemporary art. Rather improbably, the city already has something of a track record for bringing home major projects and attracting some big names. And as many in the arts seem to be cutting budgets in credit crunch times -- not least the State-funder SEACEX who recently announced a 22% cut in its provision for Spanish artists abroad -- Murcia seems to be spending and investing in contemporary art more than ever.' (Latitudes, 2008: np)

was during the moment of Slovenia's incorporation within the EU. When Manifesta was hosted in San Sebastian (Basque Country, Spain), the EU was present to provide money to activate a cultural policy in tandem with tourism 'as a tool for economic development, and a counter to terrorism' (Hughes, 2006: 27). Strangely enough, after the 9th edition in Genk, Manifesta moved to two important 'peripheries of Europe', interesting 'borderline zones': first Russia and now for the 11th edition, Switzerland. Interestingly enough, these are two very rich countries able to cope without EU assistance in staging such an event.

Support from the European Commission has been crucial for the development of Manifesta in several locations, as well as for giving this event more exposure on the internet, digitising its archive and producing its journal (one of the few journals devoting all its issues to curatorial practice). Unfortunately, though, due to the crisis the EU and Euro-Mediterranean area are still facing, it is not easy to find successful participants to bid, even when they receive EU funding. So, a Manifesta on the 'periphery of Europe' is becoming more and more difficult to make.

2.2.2.1 Summary of Manifesta case study: geography, time, process and epistemology

With its ten editions produced all over Europe, Manifesta represents a substantial case study, presenting at least ten examples of how to deal with 'the local'. A summary of the problematic components encountered within the general format will be helpful to analyse Manifesta 8 Murcia in particular. Furthermore, these components represent the pivotal points on which the practice took shape, precisely as a response to what the local is lacking from the use of this format. Overall the format is the problem, together with its use of geography, time, process and epistemology. Both the large-scale exhibition and the Biennale are event-based formats. They are meant to be global rather than local; temporary, spectacular and based on an international common epistemology.

Simply by following their nature, these events are used to and meant to deal with geography as if it were simply a venue, rather than a custodian and a source of knowledge in its own right. They rarely deal with cultural processes already activated on site or local cultural production offered by local institutions. Often there is no connection with the local itself; rather the local is used as a venue for the reproduction of a global topic that may never before have presented itself in that location. In this understanding, novelty seems more urgent and relevant than embeddedness.

The temporary timeframes of the events can be seen as a symbol of a fast, consumer society, even where culture is concerned. A flashing event, spectacular and short, is more common than a contemplative, long situation. The time the practitioners need is the time of production and the time the audience need is the one of fruition. Time is a determinant component for creating this fascinating 'acceleration' of the event and consequent rapid 'hibernation' of the site.

Certainly all these conditions already affect the process beyond these events, as well as the processes of practitioners involved (such as curators). Above all, in the case of Manifesta, as the Foundation invites international curators to deal with 'the periphery of Europe' for a short while, this mechanism already creates some boundaries around how the local is to be curated within this situation. Most of the time, the curators start with some general ideas to develop, no matter what context are they working in (such as informal education or labour in the post-fordist society, to give some examples). At other times they try to deal with the situation they have at their disposal but, due to the short time and the lack of local embeddedness, they end up picking some rather superficial or stereotypical understanding of the local they are working within. As a result, this sort of curating, and therefore this sort of event, allows the audience to discover very little about the location in which the event occurs, merely updating the audience with the latest work of some popular artists from another part of the globe.

The curator, then, does not really get to engage with the place, and their curatorial practice is oriented towards the production, promotion and distribution of this global, short-term event. This results in a missed opportunity for the local, the curator and the audience to discover in Naples something different from in Nice. As a result, this process guarantees the hegemonic power of the Western knowledge that keeps circulating within the art circle, no matter where the event takes place, and simultaneously ignores the existence and relevance of local knowledge which potentially could enlarge the visions of all concerned, offering the local, the curator and the audience unique experiences.

This research project is specifically interested in edition number 8 of Manifesta, due to the nature of the mechanism activated and its relevance as an exemplar case for the Mediterranean contemporary art system. Manifesta 8 was held in Murcia, Spain, and was mainly supported by the ERDF funds for culture and tourism described in Chapter 1.

2.2.3 Case study: Manifesta 8 – Murcia

In 2010, two years after the re-launch of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), Manifesta took place for the first time in the Mediterranean area and for the first time connected with a continent which is not Europe, but Africa. The host cities were Murcia and Cartagena in southeast Spain. The Biennial was accompanied this time by a sub-theme in its title – ‘a dialogue with northern Africa’. The Foundation declared on several occasions its interest in the area due to the current geopolitical situation. Though this detail was never mentioned, either publicly or to the participants, it is perhaps relevant to know that some of the financial support they received (for instance the EU Culture Programme fund) requested a multi-national collaboration with some of the countries of the geopolitical area Murcia Region is part of, the Euro-Mediterranean area and North Africa responded to this scope.

Manifesta 8 counted 14 venues, of which four were media spaces. Five of these venues were historical buildings refurbished for the occasion. Under the

banner of collaboration, Manifesta Foundation invited three independent curatorial collectives to collectively curate this edition of the Biennale. Ultimately, each collective developed autonomously its curatorial project. The collectives were ACAF – Alexandria Contemporary Arts Forum, CPS – Chamber of Public Secrets and tranzit.org. Though the Foundation was keen to underline the presence of collaboration within the curatorial projects as well as in different interdisciplinary projects, the theme did not appear very explicitly in the outcomes.

ACAF curated a project entitled *OVERSCORE*. They explained on the Manifesta website and in the catalogue that the project's aim was 'to conceive, build and implement a curatorial interface which firstly outlines those elements hindering the emergence of complexity in art, and then to describe the strategies for projects seeking to embody it' (Manifesta, 2010: np). So this was more of a project on the curatorial practice itself, with no implication whatsoever for the location in which it took place.

From the same sources we learn about CPS's project for Manifesta 8 called *¿The rest is history?* This aimed to be a series of transmissions using artistic methods and the strategies of negotiation 'to explore the specific geographic and socio-political structures that define reality today, and its history' (Manifesta, 2010: np). Once again, this appeared to be a project about strategies connected with geo-socio-political structures, but not specifically addressed to the region of Murcia, though certainly adaptable.

Finally, Tranzit.org's project was entitled *C.T.D. Constitution for Temporary Display* which intended to reflect upon the idea of the construction of the show itself and even distance itself from Manifesta 8's motto 'in dialogue with northern Africa' due to its different vision of the word 'dialogue'. Once again this was a reflection of Manifesta itself and its format and expressions. All this tells little about why the event was hosted by and based in Murcia. How could the Murcian cultural scene be enriched by this event?

The Minister of Culture and Tourism of the Region of Murcia, Pedro Alberto Cruz, had some ideas in this respect, and he exposed them eloquently in the

foreword of the Manifesta 8 catalogue. His intentions and ambitions can be summarised in one word: tourism²⁷. As Cruz illustrates, the three central factors that convinced this young politician to invest the majority of the 2009-2010 Murcia cultural budget on Manifesta were, firstly, the possibility of benefiting from Manifesta's trans-European network, secondly, the chance to improve local networks, infrastructure and professionals, and thirdly, the perspective of becoming a 'hallmark in the international realm of cultural tourism' (Cruz, 2010: 11).

Minister Cruz sounds confident when he talks about the effects of Manifesta on the various cities that held this event in previous editions: they now are 'significant points of convergence, often more efficient and relevant to cultural innovation than their legislatively endorsed counterparts' (ibid). This would mean that Rotterdam, Luxemburg City, Ljubljana, San Sebastian, Frankfurt, Nicosia, Trento, Rovereto and Fortezza have all become relevant cultural centres, and even after Manifesta moved on they remained an active ring of the broader European network activated by the Biennale. Unfortunately this is not the case, but evidently this is what the Manifesta 'brand' means to the ears of councilors and ministers like Cruz who are ready to offer all, or almost all, of their budget to this Foundation in order to be positioned on the map and converted from 'peripheral centres' to 'cultural centres'.

Cruz clearly believes in the potential of Manifesta both as a networker and a connector: by hosting Manifesta, the region of Murcia has the rare opportunity to connect with the rest of Europe and to be part of a 'conceptually receptive network' which will continue, in Cruz's opinion, after the event. The reason Cruz is so keen to support this network is because the network itself 'implies a number of magnificent benefits for the local fabric of society and related issues' (Cruz, 2010:11). He is also certain that this network will exponentially increase cultural exchange and will officially include the Region of Murcia in

²⁷ 'The establishment of the Region of Murcia as a new centre for contemporary culture in Spain, now gains full recognition in the staging of Manifesta 8. It consolidates our policies and gives sense to an attitude not intended to be interim, but structural and permanent. To date, Manifesta 8 is the most significant international artistic event to be celebrated in the Region of Murcia, a unique occasion with a strong touristic impact. Apart from the strictly cultural output of the biennial, the ability of Manifesta to energize the economy and diversity of a given area is a proven fact from which, obviously, the Region of Murcia is also delighted to profit' (Cruz, 2010: 11).

the prestigious system of promotion and diffusion that goes under the name of 'Manifesta Branding'. This belief that the Region of Murcia would become visible and recognized by hosting Manifesta, as well as being able to exchange knowledge as part of its network, implies that the region, its culture and its value occupy an inferior position, in need of assistance from this superior, hegemonic outside force. I would argue that the Region of Murcia exists and is culturally valid with or without the approval of a global or foreign network.

This analysis of case studies reveals a strong interconnection between the format chosen and the curatorial practice in use. The formats critiqued seem to preclude deep engagement with the host culture, therefore converting the 'local' in a missed opportunity for the local itself, the practitioners operating within it and the audience. Any particular format brings with it a way of dealing with the local, using time, activating processes and acknowledging local epistemology. This means the format itself can have a strong impact on the curatorial practice and shape it for the benefit of the formats' related outcome. Within large-scale exhibition formats, geography, time, process and epistemology are all addressed in service of the accomplishment of the outcome (the exhibition). I argue here that, should each aspect be dealt with in its own right, they might themselves become good parameters for production.

Conclusion

The previous case studies attempted to draw out relationships between the use of the large-scale exhibition and Biennale formats and the 'local' in terms of the hosting or receiving geo-cultural regions. What this section now examines is how curatorial practice is shaped by the processes of the large-scale exhibition and Biennale format. This becomes a cyclical dynamic: the format affects the curatorial practice; the curatorial practice interacts with the components of the format such as geography, time, process and epistemology.

Therefore curatorship has played (and continues to play) a significant role when operating through the construction of large-scale exhibitions and Biennales which, according to O'Neill, represent a 'political tool'²⁸ in the hands of the curators' (Morland and Amundsen, 2010: 1). This is the result of the most evident and important transformation taking place within contemporary curatorial practice over the past twenty-five years, which sees an increasing curatorial involvement both at an international and transnational level under the guise of Biennales and similar recurring exhibitions (O'Neill, 2012: 51). Thus, between the economic dynamics illustrated in the introduction and Chapter 1, and the diffusion of the large-scale exhibition or Biennale as preferential formats, a set of conditions has been created that influences the way in which curators operate in the current scenario. These conditions will now be described in order to connect them to the argument as well as to the proposal that will be presented in Chapter 3 and 4.

In his aforementioned text *The Biennale/ A Post-Institution for Immaterial Labour*, Gielen devotes an entire section to the concept of 'the good idea' (2009: 11-12). This 'good idea' is the first parameter for the curatorial skills requested for curating a Biennale. The curator or curators of the Biennale should have a 'good' as well as 'innovative' idea for each Biennale they

²⁸ 'The way to use this tool, to *wield their power*, was through the exhibition and especially through the political exhibitions: even the political exhibition cannot be contemplated, as a new phenomenon in art the way in which this political involvement and concern was expressed was new' (Morland and Amundsen, 2010:1).

curate. This has become one of the reasons for the involvement of progressively younger curators employed for Biennales²⁹. Surely this element makes the Biennale format and its associated curatorial practice less sustainable, since it is in constant search of novelty.

The 'good idea', then, needs to be formalised in an outcome, since the Biennale is outcome-based. The outcome then represents the core of the Biennale. The outcome is a large-scale exhibition generally lasting one hundred days. The exhibition includes between fifty and hundreds of artists from all over the world, sometimes the same artists in several Biennales. The exhibition can take place in one or more venues.

The curatorial practice relating to this sort of event will consequently be outcome-based and short-term oriented. The Biennale machine is activated between a few months and one year before the event opens to the public. During that period, the curator or the curatorial team makes one or two field trips to check the venues and meet some local artists. The 'good idea' generally comes before these visits, meaning that the visits are already conditioned by what the curator is looking for and what s/he wants to express. The curator then needs to make a list of local and international artists s/he wants to invite. The good idea gets shared and announced publicly together with the names of the artists.

The description of this process makes clear how central the 'good idea' is, and how irrelevant the 'local'. Following the aforementioned process, such an event can happen anywhere, simply by having an available location, a consistent number of international 'Biennale artists' - some local practitioners may or may not be involved. It seems local geography, or time or epistemology, is irrelevant. The curators act mainly as managers, selectors and exhibition makers. For them to work in one or the other context would probably mean to struggle with some local strategies that need to be normalised within the Biennale format and perhaps to discover some different

²⁹ The first edition of the Bucharest Biennale even used this element for marketing reasons: they promoted the Biennale as the European Biennale with the youngest curator of all, Felix Vogel who was 21 years old at the time.

night life or 'local flavour'. This format allows no time for research, for deep analysis or for the possible re-discussion of the outcome itself. The process and its timeline remains pretty linear: from the 'good-idea' to the 'good show' no matter what is in between.

For instance, translating this to the specific case of Manifesta: Fijen, together with the board, analyse the bid, agree on the best location and start a selection process for the curator; the curators present their 'good idea' and their artists, the board select a curator/curatorial team, the curator makes up to two visits to the site to select locations and to meet some local practitioners, the curator moves to the place for the forty days prior to the opening and may reside in the location for sixty days in total. The local is there to provide a budget and a set of venues and facilities and to perhaps get the privilege of some 'touristic' visibility for a while. The curator is there to produce the exhibition, promote the exhibition and prepare for the next opportunity to be displaced somewhere else for another large-scale temporary exhibition. Again this sounds totally unsustainable: the curator has to move around, cope with different languages, different lifestyles and working methods just to accomplish the outcome, but she/he gets almost no introduction to the local context and learns very little from this constant touring. On the other hand, for local curators and artists involved, this represents acceleration, a great amount of stress for this spectacular, short-duration event and, for those not involved, a huge amount of frustration.

In this scenario, where the global development of contemporary art and cultural processes has obtained very poor results for the local and its practitioners, there should be some alternative to be explored. The next chapter will present various examples of geographically-related, time-based, process-oriented and epistemologically-situated curatorial practices already happening within the Mediterranean basin. These examples are relevant as a response to the deficiencies encountered in the preceding analysis of the large-scale exhibition and Biennale format. They are also the pivotal references for the practice presented in Chapter 4 and the proposal put forward with this research project. This chapter is a bridge between the first

and the second part of the thesis. The next chapter links the argument and its case studies to the practice of this research and its theoretical and practical references.

Chapter 3 – Other curatorial formats made in the Mediterranean area

Introduction

The previous chapter made clear that the Biennale model is not adequate to activate cultural development in the current European cultural policy climate. Specifically, it cannot cater for or ‘develop’ the diversity of local cultures present in the Euro-Mediterranean (EUROMED) region. Regarding the Biennale format, we can identify four points of consideration that are problematic, if we consider its aim as seeking to engage with local contexts: geography, time, process and epistemology.

Concerning the use of *geography*: if locations are treated as static or fixed entities, this does not allow room for their dynamic and changeable nature. Also, the intention to use the Biennale as an instrument for touristic rebranding can, in fact, have a negative influence on the host region. Concerning the use of *time*: fixed deadlines are artificial and not usually conducive to local timetables, which often follow a more organic schedule, leading to an acceleration of cultural (and other) production which is neither sustainable nor beneficial to creativity. Concerning the use of *process*: if the emphasis is on product (over process), engagement with the exhibition will be limited. Concerning the use of *epistemology*: if the ‘place’ is treated simply as a venue, the benefit to the locality is questionable. There may be some short-term benefits to the local infrastructure or tourist industry, but there will be little in the way of lasting cultural impact.

The following section will offer further discussion of these issues: geographies, time, process and epistemology. Here I review theoretical discussions to explore ways in which curatorial approaches might engage with the ‘local’, as well as practical examples of projects that do so. The projects reviewed here are not necessarily chosen as examples of ‘best practice’, but examples of unconventional approaches, from which we might learn. Those involved

demonstrate flexible approaches to local engagement, seeking to accommodate and cultivate local epistemologies, and their efforts represent experiences significant to this research. I go on to connect these theoretical and practical analyses to the Vessel curatorial project: its conception, development and achievements (see section I and V of the Introduction and Chapter 4).

3.1 Geography: a living experience

In their book *Locating the Producers*, O'Neill and founder Director of Situation³⁰ Claire Doherty (2011: 3) explain how cultural policy documents present places as fixed entities, for example as discussed in Chapter 1, in the touristic rebranding of places, to which art practitioners are invited to respond with 'good idea(s)' (Gielen, 2009). Geographer Doreen Massey offers an alternative approach to conceptualising geographical 'space', as 'a mutable location'. Instead, she sees it as a 'living experience' (1991, 2005):

...a constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus [...] Instead, then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated movements in networks of social relation and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, or a region, or even a continent (Massey, 1991: 315-323).

For Massey, concepts of 'places' 'spaces' and 'geographies' are all fluid things in a constant state of change, always with something new to be discovered. Massey underlines the conception of space as a plurality of trajectories which coexist contemporaneously. This plurality is the essence of

³⁰ Situations is a public art commissioning programme embedded within the University of the West of England in Bristol and an organisation recognised for the distinctive and surprising ways in which it has engaged audiences. (see <http://www.situations.org.uk/>)

space: if we have no plurality we have no space and vice versa - they are co-constitutive. Finally, Massey stands for recognition of space as a constant work in progress. Viewing space itself as the result of interrelations, it follows that it would be impossible to see these relations as static or fixed. They need to be carried forward and worked on; they are never finished.

In a series of international lectures and symposia on *Rethinking Context in Contemporary Art* hosted at Situations (Bristol) since 2003, context specificity was discussed in order to challenge the orthodoxy of site-specificity. Many formats, whether large-scale exhibitions, international Biennale exhibitions, public art regeneration initiatives or off-site gallery programmes, were growing increasingly place-related; this progressive attention to a sense of place started to be visible even in comparative disciplines such as human geography and contemporary archaeology (O'Neill & Doherty, 2011: 2). Art critic and curator, Lucy Lippard called this the *genius loci* in her book *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*, referring to a response to the rootlessness of modern society (1998): it is striking that in a hyper-nomadic society, this sense of belonging to a place or context gains increasing importance and visibility within art projects.

Conceptions of geographical space are relevant to the making and understanding of public art, site-specific projects and community projects. Space, in this sense, includes a complexity of aspects: history, politics, philosophy, social discourse, representation, community, culture, landscape etc. The space Vessel is concerned with is the local: the site of knowledge through which culture is constructed. This concept of the 'local' privileges the culture and ideas of a place over its materiality or physical borders. Local, here, does not only refer to the location of the 'event' but also to the culture it owns (this can also be understood in terms of 'situated knowledge', which will be discussed further in section 2.3.4.).

In his book *Spatial Aesthetics: Art, Place, and the Everyday*, Papastergiadis suggests that we should understand 'place' as being 'constitutive in the production of contemporary art' and also that '[w]e need to develop new

models for discussing art that are made from the materials that are available in the place of its encounter' (2006: 15). It is in response to this need that Vessel aims to develop new models of art and cultural processes that focus on local discourses, and make them central to cultural processes. For Vessel, in fact, the place itself provides the raw material to work on and with. In this way, Vessel aims to overcome what Massey sees as 'one of the effects of modernity the establishment of a particular [post-colonial] power/knowledge relation' (2005: 64). That is, it aims to include regions and localities that would be marginalised within existing cultural frameworks.

This 'local' is part of what Massey calls 'the geography of knowledge production', that is, the relationship between certain scientific practices and 'the social and geographical structures in which they are set' (2005: 15). In other words, there are certain modes of curatorial practice that acknowledge their situation. One curatorial example whose use of geography is in keeping with the ideas outlined above is the project *Liminal Spaces* (2004-2008), curated by Eyal Danon, Galit Eilat, Reem Fadda and Philipp Misselwitz. This project refers to the concept of the 'borderline' and their approach to geographies prioritises 'situated knowledge' and values local communities as a resource. *Liminal Spaces* investigated geographies in an experiential way, through a practical navigation of places and their communities.

3.1.1 *Liminal Spaces*: a geographical curatorial project

Liminal Spaces is a curatorial project ideated by Galit Eilat and curated by Eyal Danon, Galit Eilat, Reem Fadda and Philipp Misselwitz, with the advice of Khaled Hourani. The project aimed to challenge the dynamics of the occupation of Palestinian territory along the Israeli border. This was actively developed through a series of discussions, meetings, research, and site-specific work, using art as a means of navigating the challenges of freedom, deprivation, and mobility.

I chose this project as an example of a curatorial intervention that responds to a very specific and sensitive geographical context. It differs from the majority of artistic projects addressing the conflict, or 'peacemaking', as it recognizes the inequality of the situation, and the occupation as an injustice. That is, the project does not approach the two sides as equal partners, but acknowledges the position of the Palestinians as occupied and the Israelis as occupiers. It therefore represents an example of a project which works with and responds to the complexities of the particular geography of its location, providing an opportunity for the artists to engage meaningfully with it, rather than arriving with a predefined format or approach³¹.

Though the time frame and context of reference seem limited to a short period and a precise physical 'local', the project is very complex. The aforementioned eight months covered the time from the official launch through the period of public engagement, but the project started long before it was named. In early 2004, the Artists Without Walls group initiated a project which saw Palestinian and Israeli artists gather together and voice their criticism of the construction of the Separation Wall, which physically bisects some Palestinian villages situated along the Green Line.

At that time *April 1st* was chosen as the title for this project. The central idea was to find a strategy to cross this boundary, if not physically, then at least metaphorically. The artists decided to install two video cameras, facing outwards from each side of the wall. They then connected each camera to a video projector. The projections delivered simultaneous images from the other side of the wall, which was inaccessible at that moment, allowing local residents to observe the other side of their own village.

This represented an event taking place in one location, for a few hours. It was mainly addressed to an Israeli audience who were largely unaware of the social impacts of the wall. This event created an opportunity for reflection, exchange, and dialogue which constituted the basis for *Liminal Spaces*.

³¹ The sensitive matter of this conflict has been the subject of a large number of artistic and curatorial projects, however a full discussion lies beyond the scope of the current thesis, which deals specifically with this project as an example of innovative curatorial approaches.



Figure 6. *Liminal Spaces* project, Collage of images from the website <http://liminalspaces.org/> .

Liminal Spaces was intended as a temporary platform for the discussion of urgent questions coming from both the art practitioners involved and the local communities the project was concerned with since its embryonic phase. The questions were related to the potential impact of art projects made by Israeli and Palestinian artists, as well as the basic human rights of people living in the area.

Liminal Spaces was composed of three chapters, of which two were held in Palestine and one in Germany. The format chosen was a series of seminars. The first seminar was in March 2006 and consisted of hikes and tours starting in the morning and lasting until midday. The tours/seminars were guided by scholars, professionals and activists from different backgrounds. The organisers rented a space five hundred meters from Qalandiya checkpoint, in which they would gather after each tour for further discussions, lectures, talks and presentations. After this first phase, a decision was taken by the

organisers and the participants: they would finalize the project in three exhibitions to be hosted in three locations: Ramallah, Holon and Leipzig.

In October 2006 the project continued with a second phase hosted in Leipzig. This occasion offered the opportunity for a different geographical engagement: reflecting from afar upon the same geography they had previously had direct contact with in Palestine. This phase demonstrates the relevance of distance within certain projects. They strategically covered this distance by discussing a topic simultaneously relevant to both the 'local' under scrutiny and the hosting place and institution: the Museum of Contemporary Arts in Leipzig. The discussions were oriented towards the responsibility that institutions and practitioners have towards issues like human rights, occupation or apartheid when working in the Middle East as well as in Central Europe. Though these two areas appear very different, they both face urgent social issues that can productively be addressed through art, through activities in which institutions and practitioners should be involved. Relevant topics were discussed during this seminar, such as Israeli occupation policies, the peace agreement and the vanishing social-democratic principles in a post-Fordist era (for more information see the *Liminal Spaces* website).

Whilst in Leipzig, the curators and participants of the project realised that the majority of the projects that were in production for the exhibitions were still, to use their expression, 'half baked'. They continued working on the exhibition, only to realise during the conference, that an exhibition was not necessary as an end point for this project, since the conversations that they were having were themselves starting points for a more complex process. Thus, a decision was taken: the curators and participants of the project would not commit to the creation of a final outcome. One of the reasons this emerged while in Leipzig related to a lack of understanding of the project demonstrated by the museum. The curators reported that they sensed a gap between the intentions of those involved who had been exposed to the reality of the location, and those who had not. In practical terms, this resulted in

differences of understanding and intention between the participants and the museum staff regarding how to manage and present the project.

For instance, in the use of geo-political terminology: the museum would not accept the use of the word 'occupation' in any communications, instead proposing the word 'conflict', which the curators felt would create misunderstanding and send a false message. In this case, we see that the production of a temporary exhibition would not have suited the timescale, process or epistemology connected to this curatorial project. The curators realised halfway through the process that the projects for the exhibition were unresolved: the timeframes were not matching, the partners involved had a different understanding of the project and potentially would have presented a message which was not the final result of multiple encounters and conversations, but a stereotypical understanding of the geography as an area of 'conflict' and not an area of 'occupation'.

The third and final phase took place in Palestine almost eighteen months later in October 2007. The format was the same, with morning tours and afternoon sessions, though the villages visited were different. The focus remained on the occupation of the territory, though seen from a broader perspective related to a colonial understanding not analysed during the previous phases. This phase was also a time for drawing conclusions and making future plans. In this final stage, the curators of the project, together with the rest of the participants, recognised the methodologies that they had designed along with the development of the project. Thus, they were able to crystallise the various ways in which they related to the 'local', both physically and mentally, and consider how these approaches can create different knowledges and understandings. Despite achieving some positive results, namely the engagement of local and international groups with the issues raised, the project remained a one-off experiment and was not developed further.

Core elements of the *Liminal Spaces* project are significant to this research: its strong geographical relation and focus. The project took place in, mutated alongside and was led as much as possible by the vibrant and changeable reality of the locale it was connected to. The process itself helped the

participants to discover that the development of such a project depends upon the creation of a platform for knowledge-sharing and network activation. As such, this case study is relevant as a response to the geographical approach previously discussed in connection with the large-scale exhibition; it also forms an important reference point for Vessel.

Though the analysis of this case study stresses its geographical aspect, process, time and epistemology are also important. This will hold for each case study: though they will be analysed in relation to one specific component, they each display elements related to the rest of the components.

3.2 Definition of terms: Duration and time

The question of time in this research project departs from the profile of the large-scale exhibition and Biennale based on a temporary framework. Referring this to the broader debate about the nature of time, what is at stake theoretically is the impossibility of 'slicing up' time. When discussing time, both philosophers Henri Bergson (1911) and, later, Constantin V. Boundas (1996), offer the understanding that a continuum cannot be broken up into 'discrete instants' or an 'aggregate of points'. Movement cannot become static. In her text *Spatial disruption*, Massey underlines the 'impossibility of reducing real movement/becoming to stasis multiplied by infinity'; the impossibility of history as the result of a succession of slices (1997: 222-223). In Massey's understanding, these slices cannot produce 'becoming'.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the timeframe of a Biennale or large-scale exhibition can be seen as a slice, or multiple slices, interrupting the 'real' flow of local time. They generally take place over a short period, including between five and eighteen months³² for their creation, plus around one hundred days for the public event. This scarcely helps the 'local' to develop on a long-term basis while simply obliging the context to accelerate and adapt

³² The periods mentioned are either those I have personally experienced or those that are generally publicly announced in official press releases. For instance, I started to work on the Athens Biennale in May 2013 and we opened to the public on the 29th of September 2013; for the case of Qalandiya International Biennale (Ramallah), I started work in May/June 2014 and we opened the exhibition on 22nd of October 2014.

in order to host a short-term, large-scale event (Gielen, 2013: 30, 41). As a result, time does not move organically, instead being sliced and accelerated.

It is not only the flow of time which is important, but the typology of it. In this regard it is interesting to consider the point of view offered by O'Neill in an interview entitled *The Politics of the Small Act*, particularly as it comes from a curator who has devoted his theory and practice to academia and to the development of projects within medium-size art spaces (Morland and Amundsen, 2010: 8, 9). O'Neill maintains that academia allows him, 'time for reflection that the constant state of production can disable' (ibid: 8), while his practice gives him the opportunity of operating in 'response to immediate conditions and to local constituencies' (ibid: 9). O'Neill emphasises the importance of two different time conditions which are not prioritised within the exhibition-making time frame: the 'time for reflection' which is, I would say, a moment of deceleration, rather private and not necessarily spectacular, and the 'local time', a time of direct response to a certain context, a time made of urgencies and emergencies difficult to contemplate and follow through in one hundred days only.³³

Since 2011, Vessel's practice has proposed and tested a combination of this 'time for reflection' and 'local time'. In order to achieve this, Vessel rejects the 'constant state of production' that can 'disable' reflection; maintaining instead a constant state of reflection that at times becomes more private and at others more public. Vessel also attempts to follow local time by giving the project the rhythm of local urgencies (though these are sometimes difficult to follow). Time within this practice is circular: there is no point of departure and arrival but a constant flux between theoretical reflection and local re-

³³ Even though O'Neill appears to greatly support an approach which would be long-term and context-related, he objectively considers in the same interview the equally important role that the Biennale format can constitute, even though it may not be beneficial for local development: "In general, I would say that really good biennials and large scale exhibitions show us things we would not have seen otherwise. They open up new organized networks, enable curatorial and artistic positions to confront one another, and they provide a level of access to the unknown, the far away and the unexpected. They also enable a common point of reference for us to consider. Feedback loops are generated through the continual exchange of travelling spectatorship, but whereby travel becomes one of the determining conditions for the production of art, the question is what happens if you choose to stay – to remain embedded and engage with what is immediately apparent, significant and relevant to the situated context and its audience" (Morland and Amundsen, 2010: 9). O'Neill states the relevance and importance of the Biennale, its participants and its works for the so-called 'international art world', a global entity spread into the world at large, but he wonders what happens to the ones who stay, who do not travel and circulate globally but are locally, rather than globally, based.

discussion. It is also cyclical since there are a set of operations that are repeated in succession.

This section will present a case study to explain how time can be instrumentalised within a curatorial project. The time proposed in this section is that which O'Neill and Doherty have defined as 'durational' (2011). They define 'durational' as a series of 'processes to public art curating and commissioning [which] emerged as an alternative to nomadic, itinerant and short-termist approaches in recent years'. While O'Neill and Doherty explored projects³⁴ based in England, the Netherlands and Denmark, where they encountered such 'durational' forms of practice, this research project focuses on the specific case of the curatorial endeavour within the South and its epistemology still scarcely operating in a 'durational' way³⁵. The 'durational' proposed in this research by Vessel is an open process, at some times more loose than at others, often a cyclical time of self-reflexivity without a pre-designated end point.

The following case study, 98weeks, was not defined as a curatorial project, but I have chosen to interpret it as such. When Marwa Arsanios and Mirene Arsanios founded it in 2007 they defined it as a research project, devoting its attention to a new topic every 98 weeks. For the purpose of this section, the question of whether the case study was defined as a curatorial or research project is largely irrelevant: the founders are also acting as curators in the definition of this thesis, in that they are intervening between the artists and their political context. What is salient is the way in which this research project worked on and used time in a different way than was demonstrated in Chapter 2 (section 2.1.4, 2.2.2 and 2.2.3.).

³⁴ There are some other important differences between this research and that conducted by O'Neill and Doherty concerning the 'durational': first of all, their research is interested in the relationship between the durational and public art commissioning; secondly, the projects refer to artist projects (though curated by a curator-producer and with context-specific commissions). These are two important differences, since their research still includes material outcomes and obviously needs to focus not only on the position of the curator but also on that of the artist.

³⁵ In May 2014 during a private conversation with Paul O'Neill I discussed possible reasons why these examples are not emerging in the South as they are in the North. Together we concluded that the conditions and policies designed for this sort of modus operandi to flourish are not present.

3.2.1 98weeks: A temporal curatorial practice

98weeks was initiated as a research project in 2007 and later as an art organisation which became a project space during the period between 2009 and 2014. The project space opened in Mar Mkayel Nahr neighborhood in Beirut but was forced to close suddenly in October 2014 due to gentrification and development in the area. Though the physical space no longer exists, the 98weeks programme is still running in different venues around Beirut.

The project space was an open platform for local and international artists, hosting shows, discussions and an archive built by the 98weeks research project itself. This archive contained local and regional publications from different periods, as well as artist books. Though all that happened in the space was important for the development of the project, its participants and its audience, this section will focus on the use of time and the various topics and formats deployed during each '98weeks'.

98weeks synthesises the aforementioned 'time for reflection' with 'local time'. It intends research as 'an open-ended activity, involving collaboration and an inter-disciplinary approach to art making' (98weeks, np). This means that multiple 'researches/projects' have been initiated by 98weeks, some without specified end points and others that recede and re-activate at times. 98weeks works through various formats including workshops, talks, screenings, seminars, reading groups, publications and exhibitions. These activities occur over a long period of time, and in so doing they allow their participants time to receive the information discussed, digest all that was said and experienced during these activities and eventually sediment the knowledge shared.

For each research period activated, 98weeks departs from the geography it inhabits, the Middle East – Lebanon and more specifically the city of Beirut; the moment from which they look back and forward; and the knowledge that belongs to this place, its past and its future. All this is mediated by a process of open-ended and continuous research. Although they sometimes produce

publications or broadcasts, they do not plan their work towards any final production and do not emphasise the urgency of accomplishing a final outcome. Three main projects have been developed since 2007: *Beirut Every Other Day*; *On Publications* and *Feminisms*.

Beirut Every Other Day was a series of workshops initiated in parallel to 98weeks itself: the first research focus of 98weeks. The workshops explored various ways of relating to Beirut's urban space. This space is, and has historically been, a contested one, with various issues related to its urban planning and regulations that are very confusing and unpredictable. The main idea of activating this urban observation was to gain an understanding of how the city works through its 'spatial politics' (98weeks: np). The questions posed ranged from relations between the inhabitants and the city, to the present legacy of and locations devoted to the city's history, to the role of art in this analysis of the city.

On Publications was a series of events on language and text connected with 'publications'. The research departed from various historical arts and culture publications made in the Arab world since the 1930s, some of them still running and others defunct. The publications were analysed through talks and seminars, sometimes contextualising them in the period they were initiated, whilst at other times creating a comparison with newer publications and artists books. As a result of this research, 98weeks launched *98editions*, a small press for experimental writing, as well as a web radio titled *Our Lines Are Now Open*. The radio was about the 'poetics and politics of language' and the podcasts remain available online.

The latest research project, called *Feminisms*, looks at the way feminism has been represented throughout history and how it was related to issues such as post-colonialism. Many questions were considered, starting from the current place of feminism in relation to other social issues in the Middle East, and continuing to consider the connection between feminism and art as well as writing. In so doing, this project reaches at least twenty years back in time and connects this past with our present.

By using this time-process of looking back and looking forward, 98weeks cyclically re-activates topics that were previously in focus during different decades but were later replaced by other urgencies or trends. This use of time, geography and process lays the ground for a different epistemology, one that does not look merely for a 'good idea' but tries instead to recuperate and reappropriate knowledge already produced decades or even centuries ago. As a final result, this way of producing culture and harnessing the cultural processes connected to that, offers us the possibility of performing a sustainable holistic and ecological curatorial practice, one that recycles and builds on what has already been done.

3.3 Definition of terms: Process

In section 3.1, about geography, and section 3.2, about time, some elements of the discussion of what process comes to mean within this research project have already been introduced. Process includes both the local and the 'durational': a continuous engagement with geography and an open-ended trajectory. In this section process will be defined in relation to this research project and the tools and methods of its practice. This conception of process is founded on participation and collaboration, and largely experienced through dialogue.

In O'Neill's opinion, participation, the first component of the process listed here, creates at least two relevant shifts in what we can call the production of culture. In his essay *Three stages in the art of public participation* O'Neill explains how participation changes the meaning of the audience and the format when applied to a cultural project (2010: 1). Thanks to participation, and the engagement that comes with it, the 'passive' audience is turned into an active participant and the format is no longer an 'outcome-focused' project, but rather is an outcome, an end product, in itself. By means of the project being a participatory process based on the 'durational', it is already an outcome.

In the *Introduction* to her book *Participation* the scholar and curator Claire Bishop refers to this shift as a 'social turn' in which the emphasis is now placed on 'temporal processes of engagement with people' rather than on 'art as product' (2006). O'Neill sees the participants as 'actors with their actions being part of a cumulative process of engagement with both imaginative and tangible potential' (2010: 4).

Collaboration is strictly related to participation and therefore to process. It is experienced mainly through dialogue. By default, collaboration requires some ability to engage with this dialogue and manage this immaterial co-production. The sociologist Scott Lash stresses the relevance of 'inter-subjective communication' and sees in the use of process, participation and collaboration a 'way out of the productivist system which makes us passive receivers rather than active producers of meaning' (1996: 112-129). Lash supports the idea of a plural experience, in flux and shared with others, rather than an individual and immediate experience based on pure representation.

The concept of process will be expounded further in Chapter 4, when the use of process within Vessel will be presented. Vessel not only uses process in the different aspects that have been introduced so far, but also adds to it a self-reflexive dynamic. Process becomes the outcome and also the way to work on the curatorial practice itself, to test it and to question the process.

The next case study presented here is Intermediae, which experiments with the production of socially engaged art projects based on process and participation. The project and laboratory is run by a curatorial team and by the community. Intermediae is working in the neighborhood of Legazpi in the city of Madrid, Spain. Since they started they have initiated several programmes; some of them completed, some interrupted, and others which have been ongoing since 2007 and will probably never end until Intermediae itself ceases to exist.

3.3.1: Intermédiae: A process based project

The best definition for Intermédiae would be that of a laboratory. Within it, the curatorial team keeps experimenting with ways of producing culture, including different audiences and shaping Intermédiae itself as an organisation. Intermédiae 'actions' are directed to the Southern neighborhoods of the city of Madrid, especially Legazpi, where Intermédiae opened its doors in 2007. Conceived of as a laboratory, not a museum, Intermédiae operates with creation as a means of exploration, research and experimentation. Process and participation are the formulas for its development. Intermédiae is a lab where experiments take place collectively with the community as part of the process of creation of the organisation: the curatorial team, together with the local community, attempts various formulae of development. It aims to collectively project a different model of a public institution.

In the paper *Exploring the politics of collectivity*, presented during the second symposium of Giant Step³⁶, the co-founder of Intermédiae and PhD candidate Maria Bella explains the first step Intermédiae had to take in order to start this process (2012). Intermédiae did not subscribe to the usual 'identification of the art center as an exhibition space and/or event launching machinery.' The aim was to stimulate a cultural experience based on process rather than on 'event' outcome. This different perception of time and place experienced as a long-term and embedded process was intentionally chosen by Intermédiae to be as beneficial as possible for all people involved within it. Maria Bella uses a specific word connected to the process-based nature of Intermédiae: 'continuum'. This organization will therefore exist as a perpetual 'becoming'.

Intermédiae borrowed its definition of process from the philosopher and theorist Pedro Auyon (2007). In his words 'process' refers to the 'relation and

³⁶ Giant Step is an international series of symposia related to the discovery of the place of the cultural institution within contemporary culture. Giant Step sought to explore the "ideal institution" and create a conversation on the institution as a critical, public, participatory space that mediates between international discourse and local area needs. Giant Step included two internationally established institutions, Van Abbemuseum and MOSTYN | Wales, and two less strictly structured institutions, Vessel and Galeria Labirynt. Giant Step was supported by the European Cultural Foundation – Collaboration Grant.

the dynamics of change and assumes, in our way of seeing things, a vivid sense of experience' (2007: np). Though Pedro Auyon has a theoretical approach towards this notion, as a philosopher and a theorist, he underlines the relevance of the use of process as a 'reality' beyond the distinction between theoretical and practical. Process is 'indivisible both from an idea of reflecting upon the becoming as well as from the idea of becoming itself, since it is possible to believe that any becoming is subsumed within the passing of events' (2007: np).

The knowledge and experience Intermediae has accumulated during its seven or eight years of existence results from 'the cultivation of processes' rather than exhibitions. In Intermediae's use, process becomes a learning state. This resembles the way Vessel is adopting the use of process (see Chapter 4 section 4.3).

3.4 Definition of terms: Epistemology

In all the terms and examples analysed so far, discussion has focused on format more than content. Certainly the 'where', 'when' and 'how' of cultural processes influence the 'what' and vice versa. The 'what' represents a pivotal contribution to the production of knowledge. As for the format, the content of contemporary cultural production tends to be rather global but, as explained in both Chapter 1 and the section 2.1.2 and 2.1.3 of Chapter 2, the global is nothing other than the Northern hegemonic/colonial culture.

Though the ideas and references presented in this section are addressing the global North and global South, I argue that these ideas can be related to areas that would not be described under this geo-political definition. For the purpose of this research the South is translated as the Mediterranean basin (Cassano, 2005). As expressed already in Chapter 1, section 1.2.4, the Mediterranean basin is an 'in-between' place where the global North meets the global South in a new 'space of flows' (Chambers: 2008). So the inclusion

of the Mediterranean in de Sousa Santos' definition of the epistemology of the South would not be that far from reality.

As previously mentioned, in section 1.3.2, the theories developed by de Sousa Santos (2013: 43) account for an 'epistemological diversity of the world'. In order to achieve this, the epistemologies of the South should be as much part of cultural production as the epistemologies of the North. de Sousa Santos does not describe it as a pure claim for equality but as a need for diversity and for a better development of the world. Furthermore, de Sousa Santos (2012: 45) calls for an acceptance of the fact that theories are 'situated' and therefore 'theories produced in the global North are best equipped to account for the social, political and cultural realities of the global North'. It goes without saying that the same would be valid for the (global) South: theories from the South would account for realities of the (global) South, which means that first and foremost there is a need to create a space in which these theories can be created, distributed and promoted. Though in de Sousa Santos' (2012:45) opinion the West/ Global North 'claims the right to the dominant view of the world', it is time for the South to re-appropriate his own view of the world. Once this happens we will discover how different are these two standpoints. This will give the South an opportunity to better respond to 'political needs of radical social transformation' (de Sousa Santos, 2012:45) This 'social transformation' will finally end the imbalance between the North and the South.

The case study presented in the next section is a programme developed by the Matadero in Madrid. The programme, called *Research Groups*, aimed to investigate specific context related issues, departing from the 'local', hence 'situated knowledge'. This case study is used to illustrate a practical attempt at forming an epistemology of the South. It is a proof of the fact some 'situated knowledge(s)' coming from Southern areas of the world, such as the Mediterranean, have been distributed and promoted with some platforms from the North too, in order to give space and relevance to the 'local' knowledge produced.

3.4.1 Matadero Research Groups: a curatorial research project which seeks local knowledge

Matadero Madrid is an institution located in a vast former slaughterhouse in Madrid, which hosts different projects and changing spaces at the service of creative processes. It was created as a space for reflection on the contemporary sociocultural environment. Since 2012, as an alternative to Matadero Madrid's usual exhibition programme, four research groups were created. Those groups investigated locally focused topics (environment, the notion of the colonial, agriculture and utopia) and, so far, their research has been presented only as an informal online presence. Each group was created in a different moment in time and associated with different partners. The research group focused on the colonial, and a second focused on agriculture, will be used here as an example of how the groups were created and operated using situated knowledge as a necessary parameter for the cultural process activated.

The group focused on the notion of the colonial was formed in 2012, as a collaboration between Matadero and the Centre for Postcolonial Studies at Goldsmiths University in London. The idea being to combine differing points of view from groups in two dislocated parts of Europe, as well as uniting different ways of dealing with the chosen topic, such as theoretical approaches and current artistic practices. By matching an English University and a Spanish Contemporary art Centre, the project aimed to cross the boundaries of academia and expand its theoretical achievements into artistic practice without some of the limits academia might impose.

The research group included 24 participants, half of whom were selected through an open call and half directly invited by the organisations involved in the project. The participants met on a regular basis and explored collectively the issue of colonialism. All the meetings were streamed and followed by the participants in both Madrid and London. The participants presented their individual research one by one. From key points of these individual

researches the group shaped the form and content of the course, meeting by meeting. The participants did not exclude public presentations, conferences or any other format as possible outcomes; they simply did not impose this upon the programme as a goal to achieve. The aim, in fact, was to develop a 'local' epistemology related to the chosen topic and to share it with other practitioners in a trans-disciplinary way.

The research group about Ecologies was created in collaboration with the project *Inland* by the artist Fernando Garcia Dory. The topics developed within this group represented a further extension of the issues *Inland* dealt with before starting the collaboration with Matadero. While *Inland* focused on art, agriculture and the countryside, this research group focused on environmentalist thinking, landscape theory, the relationship between culture and nature, rural studies and those forms of art able to engender social change.

In spite of the difference in focus, this research group, like the previous one, tries to combine theory and practice. Similarly to the colonial studies research group, this group is also conceived of as a space for reflection in which the only outcome is the construction of knowledge. Analyses of texts, as well as presentations of various case studies connected with the issues at stake, formed points of departure for the research. The examples used could come from any location in the world, but would be mediated by the local participants and their 'local' knowledge. The participants were selected through an open call. They could be art practitioners, experts on one of the topics, or simply interested in the issues the research group was going to examine. In this case a time frame was imposed: the participants should commit to the project for a minimum of two years. The research consisted not only of the study of texts and presentations made indoors at Matadero, but also of field trips and experimental use of the knowledge acquired.

All the Matadero Madrid research groups focused on knowledge. The shift from representation to process results here in 'situated knowledge'. Instead of the audiences receiving foreign or local information through an exhibition,

they experienced 'situated knowledge' and contributed to it. Through their involvement in the research groups, the participants have become authors of a new, 'situated knowledge'.

Conclusion

The previous chapter explained that the Biennale is a problematic format. While it can benefit the global art world, and the tourist industries of its host regions, it fails to cultivate local cultural activity of those regions. Although there is usually some attention to 'local flavour', this is often used at the service of regional branding, and can compromise the critical depth of the artworks presented. Even the geographically oriented large-scale temporary exhibitions reviewed (in Chapter 2 section 2.1 and 2.1.1) failed to engage fully with local cultural processes, or with local communities, their lives or their concerns. This was largely due to their nomadic, large-scale and temporary nature. My review of the critical discourses surrounding these issues identified four elements of curatorial practice for further consideration: geography, time, process and epistemology.

Chapter 2 further analysed those four elements, looking to the theorists who criticised the Biennale/large-scale temporary model for their recommendations on how curatorial approaches *could* operate alternatively, in order to value and benefit 'the local'. In this chapter I identified and reviewed examples of curatorial practices that offered practical applications of those ideas in the Mediterranean region; ones that sought to break with western-centric models and deal with specific regions in a meaningful and sustainable way.

In summary, it can be said that regarding cultural geographies, it is possible to create curatorial practices that enrich local geographies by acknowledging the diversity of marginal cultures. *Liminal Spaces* did this by inviting practitioners to experience local geographies as a starting point. Regarding the use of *time*: it is possible to operate in a more flexible and organic

timeframe; 98weeks offers a good example of this in their careful tailoring of the timeframe of each project in response to their particular situation, even leaving it open-ended in some instances. Regarding the use of *process*: in order to go beyond the level of representation and deeply engage with local cultures, curatorial approaches can seek to activate processes with which art practitioners and local communities can engage; *Intermediae* is a great example of this. Regarding the use of *epistemology*: instead of simply using 'place' as a venue and arriving with fixed ideas, we can take the opportunity to learn from the place by observing, unpacking, cross-fertilising and engaging with the knowledge and cultural practices already present. In this way, curatorial practices can aim to enable local cultures to flourish, under their own definitions of what would be a successful artistic endeavor. *Matadero Research Groups* can be an example of use of epistemology within a curatorial project. We can take these four aspects as a set of principles by which curatorial approaches can operate, in order to better engage with and benefit regional cultures.

The following chapter will describe how the practical aspect of this research project applies these principles through *Vessel*. It will also provide an evaluation of *Vessel's* projects in the Mediterranean region and offer a proposal concerning self-reflexive curatorial practices.

Chapter 4: A proposal for a self-reflexive curatorial practice for the epistemology of the South

Introduction

Chapter 1 critiqued the application of mainstream curatorial approaches to local contexts; in particular, in regions defined as ‘under development’ and receiving European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) funding. It outlined the need for curatorial practitioners to better engage with regional cultures. Chapter 2 went on to identify the specific problems with existing models which are currently falling short of the goal of ‘developing’ the culture of marginal regions – namely, the influence of economic interests on these initiatives, and the projects’ short-term, temporary and large-scale format. It discussed how these factors constrain the format of cultural projects, such as the ‘international Biennale’, and restrict possibilities for an organic engagement with ‘the local’.

I argue that there is a need for curatorial practitioners to adopt a self-reflexive approach to dealing with ‘the local’. By this, I mean that it is important to be mindful of the forces influencing and motivating cultural production and facilitation, in order that the diversity of local and subaltern cultures is not lost or subsumed by the mainstream. My analysis in Chapter 3 outlined four elements of curatorial practice relevant to such a re-evaluation of curatorial approaches: geography, temporality, process and epistemology. These four elements were accompanied by some exemplar curatorial practices already taking place within the Mediterranean area.

In this chapter, these four elements will be discussed and analysed further, working towards a theoretical framework capable of informing the design and evaluation of curatorial practice. This will be done through the practical component of this research: Vessel, a long-term curatorial research project founded by Anna Santomauro and myself (see Introduction, section V; Chapter 1, section 1.3.2; Chapter 2, section 2.2.2; Chapter 3, sections 3.1, 3.1.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.3.1). Here, I will discuss how Vessel responds to the issues

outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, in respect to the four elements outlined in Chapter 3. That is, Vessel responds to a need in the newly partnered Euro-Mediterranean (EURO-MED) area for alternative curatorial approaches that account for, and respond to, the cultural relevance of the South. I will describe Vessel's approach to geography, time, process and epistemology, and evaluate the practice in regard to these four aspects, leading to more broadly applicable principles. In so doing, I refer to these four elements of curatorial practice for local engagement.

Vessel is presented as a curatorial initiative that seeks to respond to regional contexts, specifically in Puglia (see Figure 7 for a map of Vessel projects in the Puglia Region). Vessel seeks models of practice that can effectively enable local culture to flourish independently of larger cultural hegemonies.



Figure 7. Locations and dates of Vessel projects 2011-2015 by Viviana Checchia.

A conscious decision was taken at the beginning by Vessel members regarding feedback: as part of a fluid approach to the context, the format for evaluation of projects would be flexible, depending on the participants and the type of project. No formal written evaluation would be undertaken by participants in certain projects (many would not have been accustomed to being monitored in this way, and as the majority of projects were not funded, there was little financial obligation to quantitatively monitor their effectiveness). Other projects, such as Giant Step, included some structured feedback mechanisms in the form of open ended questionnaires, which were then published (see Appendix B and J). We particularly valued feedback that was

given spontaneously, as we felt this was appropriate to our open-ended and participant-driven ethos (see Annex B for examples).

More importantly, evaluation of the projects took place in a more informal dialogic and responsive manner, through ongoing discussion, and direct observation of the events themselves. In order to assess the effectiveness of the curatorial approaches employed (in order to re-imagine 'the epistemology of the south') we paid close attention to the quality of engagement between local and international participants. A sense of ownership, on the part of the local participants, was particularly important, especially in terms of content and direction. More tangible measures of success were the longevity and reach of the projects. That is, if the projects gained momentum and were driven by the participants themselves, we considered this to be the most desirable result (more significant than critical acclaim or continued funding).

Section 4.1 presents Vessel's approach to timing and the durational aspects of curatorial projects, with reference to its residency programme. The durational aspects are tailored to the specific contexts (geographical and social). The residency programme is examined with reference to ideas concerning the 'durational', as discussed by Suzanne Guerlac (2006) or Paul O'Neill and Claire Doherty (2011), who argue for a reconsideration of the fluid nature of time in relation to artistic production and experience. The unconventional use of timetables in the residency programme resulted in a different engagement with the place, but also posed some challenges for those involved. This section also introduces the first outcome of the self-reflective curatorial approach: the creation of *Giant Step* (2011-2013). *Giant Step* was an international series of symposia related to the contemporary role of cultural institutions (see Appendix B & J). I go on to describe the way in which this initiative emerged from the collaborative interaction between Vessel's members, committee³⁷, curators-in-residence and participants.

³⁷ The Scientific Committee of Vessel is composed of Viviana Checchia, Galit Eilat, Charles Esche, Ilaria Gianni, Cecilia Guida, Denis Isaia, Viktor Misiano, Dan Perjovschi, Marco Petroni, Roberto Pinto and Anna Santomauro.

Section 4.2 discusses the ways in which the Vessel initiative responded to the geographical context of Puglia. It describes the *Terra Piatta* project (see Appendix D), which brought together international and local artists with the local community in Foggia, to explore development possibilities for a farming area that is experiencing economic decline combined with a lack of governmental investment. The project is presented as a model of curatorial practice that is mindful of these concerns, and its use of dialogic and participatory methods are evaluated in this context. This will be discussed in relation to the ideas of O'Neill, Doherty, Rogoff and Papastergiadis, and Massey (see Chapter 3), who underline the relevance of the locality and the importance of acknowledging 'place' as the location of cultural processes.

In section 4.3, I discuss Vessel's iterative 'process based' approach to the development of its initiatives and subject matter. In doing so I will describe the long-term evolution of the Vessel project, elaborating on the project *Radio Materiality* (2012 – ongoing) a local web radio programme, which invited ten artists to explore the process of creating in place. This project is evaluated with regard to the ideas of Claire Bishop, Grant Kester and Pablo Helguera, who value process over production, in relation to their ideas generally, with specific reference to processes of collaboration, dialogue and social engagement, respectively. Vessel's experimentation with 'open-ended' process has enabled artists to engage with 'fringe' or subaltern (non-mainstream) subject matter and local communities in ways which would be unlikely when constrained by more conventional approaches.

In section 4.4, I will describe the ways in which Vessel aims to base its content in local knowledge. In particular, I will describe *Rural in Action (RiA)*, a series of workshops which brought together international artists and local farmers and farmworkers (see Appendix G). This project is discussed in relation to the ideas of de Sousa Santos, Pavicic and Rogoff, who argue for the value of situated knowledge over 'global' knowledge. In this theoretical context *RiA* is presented as an example of curatorial methods which embrace this situated epistemology, in that it acknowledges and makes visible 'inert',

'fringe' or 'subaltern' aspects of local culture which otherwise stand at risk of being subsumed by the mainstream.

The concluding section draws together the emerging findings of this research and presents them as a model of self-reflexive curatorial practice. This includes examples of methods and formats that can be applied in other situations, and a framework for reflecting on curatorial projects. These are intended to be of use to those seeking to nurture and engage with local cultures, and to be beneficial to the local communities who participate in them.

Introduction to Vessel

Vessel is a curatorial research project legally registered as a non-profit organisation. Between April 2011 and August 2011, Vessel existed as an independent space for contemporary art. It opened in April 2011 in Bari with funding from 'Principi Attivi 2010,' issued by the Puglia Regional Council. Principi Attivi is a grant supported by the European Regional Development Fund. The Puglia Regional Council decided to use this part of the fund to support organisations run by young people, either businesses or non-profits. Principi Attivi guarantees maximum startup funding of 25,000 Euros to be used within 12 months.

This 25,000 Euro sum formed Vessel's first year budget. Only fifteen percent of the sum could be invested in human resources. It is important to underline that this funding did not come from an Art Council and was not addressed to art initiatives. However, this fund offered the only opportunity for Vessel to develop a research project and residency in Puglia. After four years of activity we are still considered ineligible as an art organisation by our Regional Council. In spite of a lack of support and scarce consideration for this alternative practice, Vessel continued its activities, refusing to produce the only thing we would be able to receive support for: large-scale exhibitions.

Vessel is a platform for the development of critical discourse related to current cultural, social, economic and political issues. Defining its practice as politicised, Vessel approaches themes of interest by using the tools offered by art and culture. Vessel is, additionally, a container for a collection of research, an active collaborator with institutions, artists and curators, and a critical lens for discursive practice.

While its interests (exploring first the role of the curator, then the institution, then socially engaged practice and finally the epistemology of the South) have evolved via practice, they have all been investigated in relation to their context of emergence, to their geographies and psycho-geographies and to their imbrication within fixed political ideologies. Above all, Vessel remains

grounded in connection and collaboration with practices that share a similar geopolitical grounding and strategies.

Since its inception, Vessel has experimented with process-oriented, multidisciplinary practices that privilege the process of discussion and knowledge sharing. Rather than focusing on a tangible outcome, Vessel performs a process of discussion. This has led to growth and dynamism through the exploration of different issues relevant within the art world, as well as within a broader societal context. The interests that have evolved during Vessel's activities can be divided into four categories: exploring the role of the curator, institutional critique, social practice and the epistemology of the south.

The first year of practice involved interrogating the purpose, function and connotations of the contemporary curator. In its first summer of activity (2011), Vessel set up a physical residence in Bari and invited curators for month-long residencies (see sections 4.1, 4.1.1, 4.1.2). During each month, curators were invited to explore the territory and take part in collaborative efforts with local artistic and curatorial groups (see Appendix E). In this manner, curators engaged in a dialogical manner with local residents and practitioners without the pressure of a concrete outcome or exhibition. This first phase of Vessel's experience, lasting six months, had a strong influence on the project's overall development. During the residencies, through direct relations with the curators in residence, Vessel could reflect upon its 'modus operandi' and re-address its interests, questions and methodologies.

This phase was pivotal for both methodology and content. After the first two months of Vessel's practice, it became clear that Vessel would be based on an experimental methodology comprised of various attempts and experiments. Vessel would test tools and methods, share them with the curators in residence as well as with local participants, reflect upon each activity immediately after it was experienced, and design the next strategy starting from critical reflection on the previous one. Content-wise, it would operate in the same way.

This methodology was not clear to Vessel curators at the beginning of the project, but emerged during the residency experience. The first focus Vessel proposed to the curators in residence, as a topic of discussion and reflection, was the development of contemporary art after 1989 between East and West Europe. The initial curators in residence did not find themselves at ease with this topic and suggested that Vessel should look elsewhere in time and space. The reason for their discomfort concerned the place Vessel was based in, in addition to contemporary developments in the area surrounding Puglia. For some of them, it seemed more organic for a Southern Italian project such as Vessel to look South, rather than East. Furthermore, the curators in residence believed the effect of the Arab Spring in Puglia was more relevant than thinking about the consequences of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Both in time and space, the Arab Spring was certainly more closely related: it was happening while Vessel was operating and it was taking place next door. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Puglia is one of the preferred regions for arrivals from North Africa, especially in the wake of the Arab Spring (Koff, 2005: 401; Drakulic, 2013).

Though the guest curators were selected following criteria that related to the East-West relationship (by country of origin and Europe-related curatorial practice), the experience of the residency and the critical sharing activated within it was still valid for Vessel's development. This first case made the Vessel team realise that an 'experimental' methodology could be beneficial: even having started from the wrong choice of initial subject for reflection and subsequently having imposed this subject on the curators without negotiation, there was still something valuable that Vessel could learn by practice.

Vessel adopted a self-reflexive approach directly following this first phase. What Vessel was in fact doing was to reflect upon curatorial practice itself and to create temporary platforms, projects, workshops and communities that would focus on this, in other words, that would re-think practice. In this way both Vessel and its participants would operate in a self-reflective mood: they would try something (a curatorial tool, a method), reflect on it, and try again with something similar or different, depending on the results. This way of

working is certainly not innovative in itself, but the fact that Vessel's production consists in self-reflection on practice is unique. The project represents a rare case of curatorial, theoretical and practical encounters whose aim is the curatorial itself.

4.1 Time: duration and long term

The understanding of time is a central aspect within this research project. The timescale of a project influences the process and, therefore, the way of approaching geography and epistemology. The time and rhythm devoted to any activity can have a negative or positive effect on the outcome of the activity itself: too fast, and the outcome is superficial; too slow and engagement is lost. Furthermore, timescale can be related to a specific activity: the time of drawing, or performing, the time for reflection and the time of production, for example. While performing an activity, the subject experiences a form of time and remains unable to experience another contemporaneously. In traditional models, such as a large-scale exhibition or Biennale, the time of production is imposed on the local, but the local is able to experience a different temporal frame of reference - one of observation, analysis, and reflection. This means that the 'local', having never experienced a period of such reflection, might be unable to because it is sucked into the frenzy of the exhibition's production.

In Chapter 2, the time-scale associated with the most popular global art format, the large-scale exhibition or Biennale, was defined as a fixed-term period culminating in a one-off event. I argue that the 'local' might require more time than this fixed term offers, and perhaps less acceleration than that created by the production of a spectacular event. As mentioned in Chapter 2, O'Neill makes a distinction between the 'time for reflection' and 'the time of production' (Morland & Amundes, 2010: 8).

Since 2011, Vessel's practice has proposed and tested an adaptation of this 'time for reflection' to 'the local time'. In order to achieve this, Vessel rejects

the 'constant state of production' that can 'disable' reflection; maintaining instead a constant state of reflection that at times becomes more private and at others more public. Vessel also aims to follow local time by allowing the project to track the rhythm of local urgencies (though these are sometimes difficult to follow). There is no point of departure or arrival, but rather a constant flux between theoretical reflection and local re-discussion. It is cyclical, since there is a set of operations repeated in succession, which bring us to a progressively deeper engagement with the local. In a way, this cyclical time-frame reflects that familiar to the Puglia region, which has had a primarily agricultural economy and way of life for many generations. As described by Ernesto Laclau in *New reflections on the revolution of our time*, this cyclical succession is 'common in peasant communities' while a progressive, linear concept of time is more common to neo-liberal society (1990).

4.1.1 Vessel and time: Residency Programme

Vessel set out to be a long-term curatorial project based on 'time for reflection'. The primary interest of Vessel lies in the development of curatorial practices in Europe and the Mediterranean basin. When Vessel opened its doors as an organisation in Bari, its founders (Anna Santomauro and myself) decided that this would be the initial topic of research and that it would last as long as necessary. Though Vessel had a different thematic focus in 2012 (the institution) and again from 2013 (social engagement) to 2015 (the epistemology of the south), this interest in curatorial practice ran in parallel with these changing themes.

Starting from its first year of practice, Vessel interrogated the purpose, function and connotations of the 'curatorial' in the 'South'. This was a theoretical concern as well as a practical one. Vessel developed parallel paths: on one side, a discursive space for curatorial practitioners to analyse their approaches; on the other, a more practical platform for experimenting with curatorial methods with local publics.

These approaches were a response to the curatorial formats and methods used in the region which were, and still are, mainly conventional and exhibition based. The majority of curators operating in the region were art historians or critics dabbling in curating or, more accurately, exhibition making³⁸. Therefore, the majority of 'local' artists were not familiar with any curatorial profile other than that of critic or exhibition maker.

In its first summer of activity (May - September 2011), Vessel opened up its reflection on 'the curatorial' to international and local practitioners, artists and curators, by setting up a physical residence in Bari (Puglia) and by running an *International Curatorial Workshop (ICW)*³⁹ (see Appendix C). Curators from Belgium, Germany, Norway, Poland, Romania and Turkey were invited for month-long residencies. The idea was to stimulate the 'local' (practitioners and context) through an external point of view. During each month, curators explored the territory and took part in collaborative efforts with local artistic and curatorial groups. The curators engaged through dialogue with Vessel's curatorial team, local residents and practitioners, without the pressure of a concrete outcome that the exhibition process requires. The several conversations they took part in were about the curatorial as well as about the locale in which they were immersed.

This meant an experience of time, both for the international curators and for the 'local' artists. The curators in residence coped with this loose timeframe without a fixed outcome, based on the 'time for reflection', while the artists

³⁸ This link contains a full document of all the beneficiaries of ERDF funds in Puglia: http://fesr.regione.puglia.it/portal/pls/portal/FESR.DYN_DOCUMENTO_VIEW.show?p_arg_names=id_documento&p_arg_values=2 Those related to culture are large-scale exhibitions or biennales/festivals only. They were all curated or organised by curators or cultural operators without a background in curatorial studies.

³⁹ The first International Curatorial Workshop ran from May 28th to May 30th, 2011. The workshop was made up of three groups, each led by a member of Vessel's Scientific Committee. Each group focused on their own respective exhibition case studies and sequentially transitioned into correlating discussion topics. Each group utilized dynamic dialogue to address a variety of topics, including "the role of curator, the research process, the relationship between curator, artist and public, and the inherent responsibility of curatorship". Additionally, a major topic was whether the exhibition was still a viable method or whether new strategies need to be tried. ICW allowed a variety of curators from varying backgrounds, geographical locations, career stages, and focuses to come together in discussion and debate. The wide diversity of participants allowed for a full consideration of all sides of the issues discussed. This was furthermore apparent at the public presentation of the workshop results, which took place at L'Universita E.Di.SU on May 30th, 2011. Curators presented their findings and the audience, made up of the local population, was given a chance to weigh in on the issues discussed. Thus, the specialist knowledge of the curators was moderated by that of a broader section of the population.

experienced a timeframe different to the deadline-focused, production-oriented one they were used to when working with local curators. For the first time, most of them were meeting a curator not for the purpose of an outcome, but for the sharing of a 'time for reflection'. These meetings, trips and studio visits represented new occasions for local artists to experience a 'time of content' expressed through conversation, sometimes more formal, other times less so.

Although the *ICW* 2011 (28th- 30th May 2011) was working within this 'time for reflection', an outcome was produced: the collaborative publication *Not Yet a Manifesto* (2012). During the workshop, the participants were invited to discuss the role of the curator as being in a phase of redefinition. Vessel viewed the curator as a researcher who needs a place both to carry out and present research. The curator uses his or her research as a tool to interact with reality through art, resulting in a reflection upon contemporary society. Several case studies were shared by the visiting professors of the workshop. These comprised varying exercises dealing with secondary material concerning curatorial practices in relation to various context based exhibitions. This elaboration allowed deeper analysis of the curators' research regarding related exhibitions.

After the workshop, without having prefigured any specific outcome, some of the participants, Vessel members and visiting professors stayed in touch. They decided to formalise some of the conclusions of the workshop into an open-ended publication which exists on paper (see Annex A) and online <http://www.katalog-m.com/godsavethe/>. This publication was never defined as completed, even when printed; it was used as a tool for discussion, a starting point for further development of its content.

For Vessel, this first phase of activities functioned as a time of accumulation. The Vessel team collected ideas, feedback, and suggestions and observed the use of time and process by the practitioners involved. In parallel, Vessel

became attuned to 'local time' and its constant flux. In 2008, the cultural councilor of Bari, Nicola La Forgia, publicly declared his commitment to create a space for contemporary art in the city. He indicated a specific venue: an old theatre called the Margherita. It was only in 2010 that the mayor of the city, Michele Emilano, validated this commitment when the City Hall acquired the theatre. Emilano promised that this place would become a museum as important as the museums of contemporary art already open in Rome and Naples.

In 2010, the Bari Arte Contemporanea (BAC) opened its doors as a Kunsthalle in progress. A very ambitious project commissioned the archi-star David Chipperfield to create a Kunsthalle, which included the theatre and several buildings on the adjoining square. The project was made possible by generous support from the Fondazione Morra Greco (a private art foundation based in Naples). The deal signed between the city council and the foundation agreed to co-management of the museum by the two parties. The city council would take care of the structure and funding, while the foundation would offer exhibitions and a turnover of five hundred works of art for the entire existence of the BAC.

When Vessel opened its own doors in April 2011 the BAC's odyssey had just begun. During several dialogic meetings Vessel arranged with local practitioners, it was impossible to ignore their interest in the rise of the BAC. They wanted to speak about it, and they felt they finally had a platform to do so. For the first time Vessel experienced an out-of-sync situation: the 'time for reflection' Vessel was trying to develop was not in tune with the 'local time'. After a few months, Vessel started to focus on the urgency that local art practitioners wanted to share. Vessel's team, together with the curators in residence, began to develop a proposal for a dialogical project on institutional critique, titled *Giant Step*, to be produced by Vessel in collaboration with three other European institutions experiencing similar shifts in their own context (see proposal in Appendix B). The institutions were: Mostyn, Wales; Galeria,

Poland and the Van Abbemuseum, Netherlands⁴⁰. This project started at the beginning of 2012 and was selected for a 20,000 Euro collaboration grant offered by the European Cultural Foundation.

Though Vessel synchronised with 'local time' and current urgencies, this demonstrated that it was not enough simply to begin a shared process with local and international practitioners sharing the same problems and issues. Despite local practitioners' desires to verbalise their discomfort about the creation and development of the BAC project, they were not ready to embrace a healthy and critical conversation about the future of this institution. Besides a lack of dialectical tools, we witnessed a poor understanding of the basic concept of institutional critique. Vessel members (at that time Anna Santomauro, Vlad Morariu and I) decided to initiate a reading group with local practitioners. Morariu chose a text by Brian Holmes for the reading group. Once again, Vessel proved to be out of sync with local practitioners; the text was rather complex and in English, so nobody really read it. As a result, half of the usual participants in our activities deserted the reading group, and the few that were present were unprepared for any conversation or debate. Participation in *Giant Step* revealed itself to be more international than expected, and local practitioners contributed very little to the development of the project, which is still active (see http://giant543.rssing.com/channel/6737025/all_p1.html).

⁴⁰ Each location first hosted a reading group in which multidisciplinary cultural practitioners discussed assorted literature, interviews, workshops and talks related to institutionally critical topics. The reading groups gave a chance for each location to garner the attention and opinion of the local perspectives that surrounded it. In this manner, each institution was better able to accurately gauge the specific needs of the residents in its area. This was followed up with a symposium hosted by each institution. Some of the workshops were more traditionally academic (GS1, Bari), whereas others involved creative workshops (GS3, Lublin) and still others fused a creative format with direct community involvement (GS2, Wales and GS4, Eindhoven). The first symposium, *Giant Step 1: Enter the Artworld? Marginal Establishments, Cooptation and Resistance*, was hosted by Vessel in Bari, Italy (June 12th – 14th 2012). It was centered on issues of confrontation and resistance within marginal geographic areas. Specifically, how does this affect the small institution? How can institutions formulate new modes of practice in resistance to dominant, non-critical institutional discourse? What would the necessary rules be for creating an alternative? *Giant Step 2: The Centre of the Periphery and The Periphery of the Centre* by MOSTYN (Wales), September 21st – 23rd 2012, focused on methods for working with marginal communities. This included a discussion of relevant platforms as well as opportunities for social interaction. A major issue was the divide between local and global interests and how to build a bridge between these ideologies. *The Giant Step 3: And What If... Institution: Alternate Scenarios*, October 5th- 7th, 2012 at Galeria Labirynt (Lublin, Poland) posed the question of the ideal institution to its participants. It followed a multidisciplinary model, taking influences from architecture and psychology, to come up with concrete manifestations of institutional visions. This was juxtaposed with a tour of the local area and art scene. From 1st - 3rd November 2012 the Van Abbemuseum hosted the international symposium *Giant Step: Critical Regionalism – Eindhoven as a Common Ground*. It explored the museum's history within the local community through ongoing projects such as The Transparent Museum and Useful Art. In the wake of these events, Vessel and its partners have reflected on challenges and hurdles arising from, and reactions to, *Giant Step*. This is formally being realised in a publication that includes an analysis from Vessel as well as theoretical propositions from those involved in the project.

This collaborative project had a final outcome, the fruit of the generosity of *Giant Step* participants themselves, plus several extra contributors. The outcome was a book containing a collection of inspiring text about the questions asked by *Giant Step*. Vessel defined this as a publication. Flat Time House (London) hosted the publication launch on the 3rd of March 2015. The launch aimed to reflect on the legacy and viability of this project, three years later. Dave Beech, Claire Louise Staunton, Vlad Morariu, Michele Horrigan and Rachel Pafe gave brief reflections as past participants of the project. This was followed by a critical group discussion concerning the project's issues, efficacy and relevance. The public was invited to take part in this dynamic dialogue. This was a way to use the publication to once more facilitate the initiation of a conversation about the focus of the project, in order to keep the project alive and continue to refer to the publication and the issues it raised.

4.1.2. Evaluation of Residency Programme

The residency programme hosted by Vessel in both 2011 and 2013 proved to be a very effective format, in that the international residency participants engaged well with local participants and there was a clear sense of shared ownership of the initiative. The fact that the curators had their 'time for reflection' in an area they were unfamiliar with, in most cases, represented a very inspiring experience both for the curators and for Vessel members. The curators were able to identify certain phenomena in a different way and with a fresh eye. The overall idea, both for the residencies and for the Vessel project, was to offer the 'local' a different time and, therefore, a different experience. A 'time for reflection' in relation to the context gave the context itself an opportunity to emerge and be engaged with by the curators, rather than the context being appreciated by international curators as a beautiful venue for some large-scale exhibition that locals would visit for a day or two.

The loose format without fixed outcome was uncomfortable for some of the curators who took part in the residencies. Some of them (two out of ten) felt lost and needed to envision an outcome, even a potential one, at the end of this 'time for reflection'. Others (three out of ten) would simply disconnect with the residency experience itself and take this opportunity as a holiday, with the result that the 'time for reflection' was converted into 'unproductive time'. The majority of them (eight out of ten) found this opportunity rare and unique. They embraced it with all their energy and senses: they visited several sites, connected with many local practitioners and projects, some outside the art world, tried food and shared recipes, created some gatherings themselves and remained in contact with the context and its protagonists, as well as with Vessel, even after the end of the residency.

The use of the 'time for reflection' as opposite to the 'time of production', a more global time, also created some problems. Some of the resident curators (two out of ten) expected to attend as many openings in Bari as they would in Berlin or Paris; they were also annoyed by the constant translation needed during moments of interaction with local practitioners. These can be seen as two negative effects of the globalisation of curating: these curators are now used to a cosmopolitan contemporary art system in constant production of events, and they expect everybody to speak the language of globalisation, English.

This different way of conceiving of time created a curatorial approach focused on process. This is valid for the residencies as well as for the overall project of Vessel. By dealing with the local through this 'time for reflection', a process-based dynamic activates naturally and creates a more constant and responsible cultural development. Finally, by operating in the long-term and by being process-based, an important temporal shift occurs: the region is not only activated at certain times, or during certain seasons, but experiences constant intellectual attention.

This shift towards a process-oriented model of curatorial activity had mixed results. Too little structure seemed to be counter-productive for participants,

who were used to a more predetermined format with clear objectives. While this was indicative of the ubiquity of the product-driven model, in practical terms, we identified a need for a certain level of structure in order for the project to be feasible, given the mindset of the curators involved. The balance between structure and open-endedness needed to be tailored to the specific group and context.

After a year of reflection, including the *Giant Step* symposium in 2012, Vessel responded to these events. As a result, in 2013, we added more structure, facilitating the conversation more closely by linking the residency to specific projects, envisioning some (although still intangible) outcome.

4.2 Positioning geographical components

Geography is a complex point of departure in the analysis of cultural processes and the proposal of a curatorial practice for the 'South'. Vessel's interest in geography is concerned with regional cultures and the influence of dominant cultures, such as those located in large, urban and economically powerful geographical centres. As discussed in Chapter 1, de Sousa Santos describes how those powerful cultural influences tend to come from the North (2013). Although he refers to the global North, this is also true for Italy, which has a dominant North, while the 'underdeveloped' South (Cassano, 2014) of the country is culturally 'subaltern'.

Vessel stakes a claim for the participation of those geographies in cultural processes, but with the aim of avoiding any Northern dominance (Cassano, 2014). For Vessel, geography is an 'order of knowledge' in need of critical theorisation, especially in places that are not 'centers of power' (as defined by Rogoff, 2000). Though some geographies have been subsumed by the hegemonic strategies of others, their cultures and epistemologies are still valid, relevant, and able to overcome these power relations and be re-activated. Vessel aims to enable the participation of local and subaltern

knowledge and practices, in both local and international cultural discourses. Currently, this takes place primarily in Puglia, where Vessel is based.

4.2.1 Vessel in Puglia: *Terra Piatta*

The *Terra Piatta (Flat Land)* project (2013 – on going) in particular is an example of Vessel's approach to geography, and was an intervention prompted by news of the neglected and invisible area of Foggia, a local county in Puglia. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the 'local' is part of what Massey calls 'the geography of knowledge production', that is, the relation between certain scientific practices and 'the social and geographical structures in which they are set' (Massey, 2005: 15). For Vessel, this can be understood in terms of curatorial practices. In other words, there are certain modes of curatorial practice that acknowledge their situation, and Vessel seeks to enact those.

The core of the geographical understanding explored in this thesis and practice is constituted by the local and its literacy. The local would be the site and the source for spatial literacy, social literacy and cultural literacy (Miessen, 2010: 39). Acting locally and being context-based is 'not to fetishize the knowledge of those who have historically been marginalized, but to recognize a more democratic idea of literacy' (Miessen, 2010: 39). This is the main aim of Vessel. In this sense, Vessel conceives of Puglia as a place that is mutable, changing and consisting of situated local knowledge and cultural practices that can potentially be fostered and enabled through a participatory practice. In making this (Vessel's) practice, I argue that curatorship cannot simply relate to a context as an insignificant variable (as defined by O'Neill & Doherty, 2011; Massey, 1997; Pearson and Shanks, 2001). Rather, it includes and responds to the context. Consequently this curatorship intends to evaluate alternative, situated approaches.

The overall Vessel project departed from a question of space. We asked how the cultural processes that are used in the region are beneficial to its cultural

development. At first we approached local academies and institutions, seeking access to academic theses about the region, but they proved mostly inaccessible. We encountered some difficulty in attempting to access academic records, as the culture of academic institutions in Italy is not one of full transparency, as would be expected in other European countries. Italian academic archives are not included in the Open Public Access Catalogue, and there is no public mechanism to search for or access theses that have not been published. However, we were able to view a few theses relating to the local heritage and culture, which were given to us directly by students. These were useful, but overall we decided that the best approach would be to approach the geography directly by experiencing it.

The *Terra Piatta* project started in 2011 under the name *Borghi in Rete* (BIR) (Italian for *Boroughs in Network*) in collaboration with architectural collective XScape. It later continued as *Paese Nuovo* (New Country) in 2013, led by the artist Fernando Garcia Dory. This project brought Vessel curators, and its temporary participants, into direct contact with the area of the Foggia province and its residents. In 2011 Marco De Gaetano (founder of XScape) traveled the province meeting residents - local families and migrant seasonal workers (often African asylum seekers and Romanian migrants) - and informing them that the Vessel group (consisting of its founders and curators in residence or short term visitors) would be coming to the province. He also informed the residents that the objective of the visit would be to understand whether there would be a possibility of creating some kind of cultural project in the area, and what they needed to happen. When we returned, residents prepared venues (village halls, private houses, gardens), provided food and drinks, and offered guided tours of the province, showing the Vessel group their villages (see figures 8 and 9). This enthusiasm and investment of time and energy served as immediate proof that the local people were in need of a platform for discussion about social, cultural and political issues.

The Vessel curators and De Gaetano initiated open-ended discussions between residents and guests. The residents had prepared what they wished to discuss and led the initial discussions. After this, the Vessel curators

facilitated a continued dialogue by inviting further questions within the group. In this way, the curators acted as catalysts for the discussion, while the residents drove its content and direction. There were clearly urgent issues to be discussed in this community and its inhabitants were keen to address them. One important action that gave residents time to reflect and prepare was that of informing them in advance; I believe this was essential. At the end of each visit, the Vessel group would summarise what had been said and repeat it back to the participants before closing the meeting. The meetings continued until the residents felt satisfied that they had discussed all they wished to. The summary of each meeting would form the point of departure for Vessel's reflection on the area and help Vessel shape the next step of the project.



Figure 8. Vessel artists and curators in conversation with local residents in Duanera on 27 July 2011. Including Giandomenico Florio, Patrizia Pirro, Marco De Gaetano, Andrea Vara, Vlad Morariu, and Rachel Pafe. Photograph reproduced with courtesy of Vessel.



Figure 9. Vessel artists and curators in conversation with local residents in Duanera, 2011. Photograph reproduced courtesy of Vessel.

From these discussions, the main point of attention extrapolated was the 'state of abandonment'. The area was isolated; there was a lack of services; and buildings were in disrepair. For example, the residents brought attention to the fact that some properties (in Duanera la Rocca) were not serviced by sewers, and the church was inaccessible – the building was locked and grass was growing inside. Also, there were plans to destroy homes to make way for a new railway line (in Segezia), and the home-owners were disregarded in this process. The artists and curators explored these locations together, getting a sense of their condition and distribution in connection with future urban planning (Figure 10 shows the participants at one of the abandoned locations). The issues were not exactly what we could have anticipated; with some issues we could not help. This caused some friction but was also an opportunity to explore and establish a clear purpose for the project and the perimeter of its action.



Figure 10. Vessel artists and curators discussing the geography of the region with Marco De Gaetano in 2011. Photograph reproduced courtesy of Vessel.

Nevertheless, what was of real importance, as an initial result of this project, was the activation of the conversation itself and the fact that it was based on urgencies felt by the residents. If we compare this result with the outcomes achieved by projects referred to by Paul O'Neill and Claire Doherty in their aforementioned book, *Locating the Producers*, it becomes clear that there are important differences to underline (2011; see Chapter 3). O'Neill solely analyses projects from Northern Europe. Specifically, he cites case studies in the Netherlands, Denmark and Britain. These are societies with a stronger welfare state, where people are much more accustomed to verbalising their needs, as they know someone will take account of them. In a place like Puglia, and above all the area of Borgate (hamlets), experiencing an almost total abandonment, any sort of bottom-up strategy is still very rare. That is probably one of the reasons why people in the hamlets area seemed focused on their immediate personal concerns (rather than collective, long-term or

generalised ones), because they were experiencing greater hardship and more urgent problems⁴¹.

Issues arose concerning the leftover ruins of urban sites constructed during the Fascist period in early twentieth century Italy. XScape founder, De Gaetano, directed Vessel curators through the hamlets area, which gave them the opportunity to interact first-hand with local residents. The curators responded by offering constructive feedback, anecdotes and stories of similar situations elsewhere. For example, Raluca Voinea told of Romanian workers who had been laid off, and were motivated by an artistic project to transform their attitudes; the workers began to meet regularly and galvanise themselves in response to the situation.

Workshops with international artists and curators continued with several visits during summer 2011, and then six further visits during 2012. In 2012 Vessel decided to invite one artist (Fernando Garcia Dory) to put forward a proposal responding to the findings gathered during one and a half years' research with the residents. Garcia Dory presented a proposal for a community centre, radio station and newsletter that would enable communication between dislocated communities in the hamlets area of Foggia.

⁴¹ This draws directly on Mincuzzi's 2008 essay "Le Borgate della Capitanata" and Zaccaria's 1998 text "Lavoro nero oggi: il fenomeno del caporalato agricolo in Puglia". While Mincuzzi gives quite a detailed profile of the hard situation that autochthonous inhabitants and migrants are living in Borgate, Zaccaria describes the origin of the gangmaster system in Puglia and how it operates on different levels of development of the agricultural areas of Borgate.

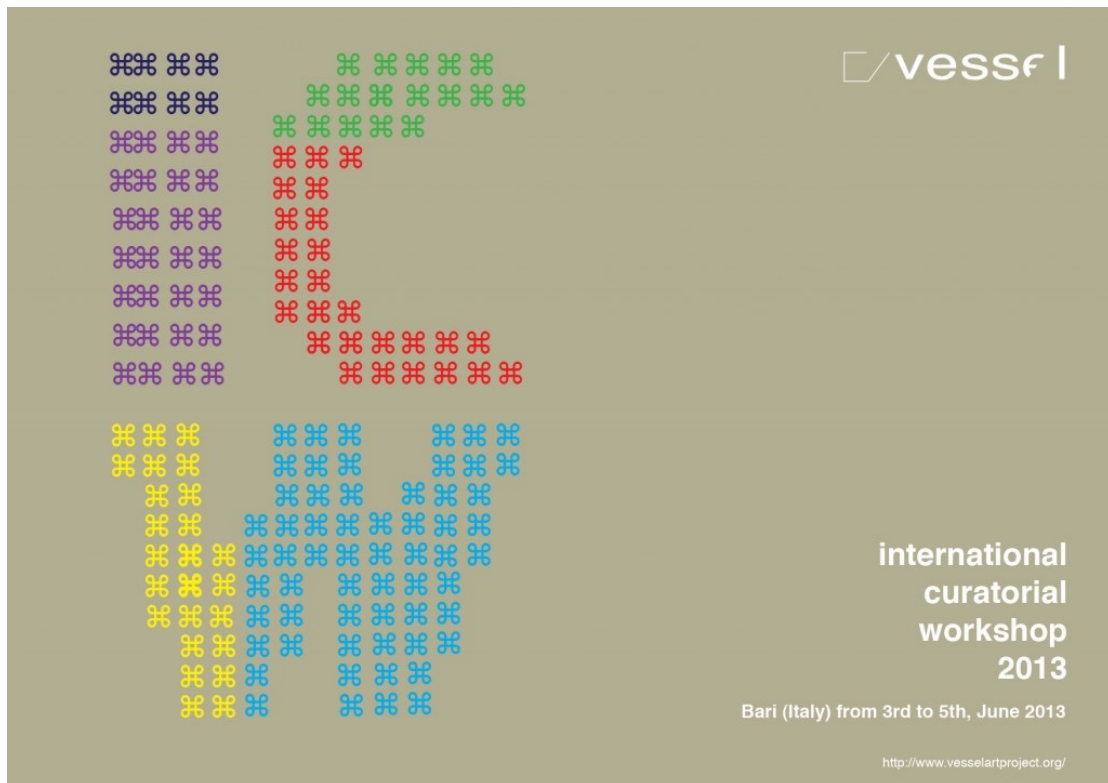


Figure 11. Poster for the *International Curatorial Workshop 2013*. Photograph reproduced courtesy of Vessel.

The proposal (see Appendix F) was circulated in the province, nationally and internationally, creating greater visibility for the project. Although the proposal has yet to win funding, in 2013 it was shortlisted for the *Visible award*: ‘A research project in contemporary art devoted to artwork in the social sphere that aims to produce and sustain socially engaged artistic practices in a global context’, ‘[w]here art leaves its own field and becomes visible as part of something else’⁴² (Visible project, 2011).

As a result of having recognised the needs of the people living in the hamlets, Vessel ran a three-day workshop with independent curators and artists in 2013 (Figure 11 shows the poster publicising the event). The concerns of the hamlets people were legitimate subjects for cultural engagement and therefore the workshop had a focus on socially engaged art practices ‘as a tool to support an alternate system of labor and production’ (see Appendix C

⁴² Visible is a project undertaken by Cittadellarte – Fondazione Pistoletto in collaboration with Fondazione Zegna, curated by Matteo Lucchetti and Judith Wielander.

– open call for the workshop). This event was held in connection with a three-week international residency programme. During the workshop, case studies were provided by Garcia Dory, De Gaetano, and other practitioners. Again, curators and artists toured the region. Figure 12 shows the group visiting Segezia, with an example of the Fascist architecture of the 1940s. The bell tower shown here no longer acts as a monument or tourist attraction, but is emblematic of the time during which the area was considered a utopian ideal (under Mussolini's leadership), in contrast to a present in which the area has become run-down and forgotten, with many low-income immigrants unofficially occupying buildings. Figure 13 shows the same trip, in which the group visited the church of St. Isidoro Agricoltore (the protector of the Farmers), an abandoned building in the small village of *Duanera* with only five households. The church was built in 1953, but has been disused since the 1990s. Originally the church served the local community of agricultural labourers as a meeting place and community centre. As the agricultural workforce shifted from local labour to immigrant workers with lower wages, the village of *Duanera* fell into disrepair, as the immigrants tended to move to larger settlements, such as Segezia.



Figure 12. *ICW* day 1: Vessel group visiting Campanile di Segezia, in one of the localities in the hamlets. Photograph reproduced courtesy of Vessel.



Figure 13. *ICW* day 1: Vessel group visiting Duanera. Photograph reproduced courtesy of Vessel.

After this, the project continued under the banner of *Terra Piatta*, with Vessel continuing to hold workshops and make funding bids (see Appendix D for further documentation of *Terra Piatta (Flat Land)* publicity). *Terra Piatta* was one of nine shortlisted projects for the 100,000 Euro *Che Fare?* Prize. Participation in the selection process for the prize changed the time frame of Vessel entirely, accelerating to a level of production of graphics, images, videos and public meetings that its previous projects had never reached. In order to promote *Terra Piatta*, Vessel produced several graphic projects, some of which are shown below (Figure 14).

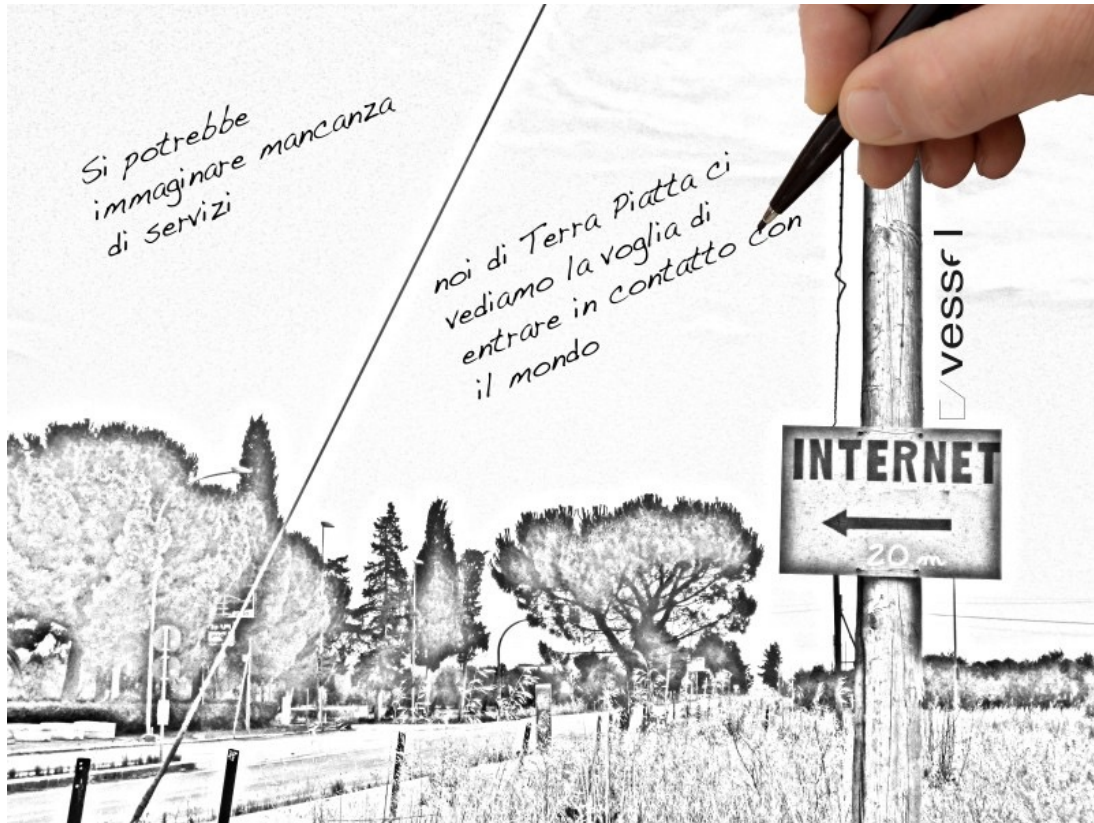


Figure 14. *Terra Piatta* postcard by Bisan Abu Eisheh.

This change in the use of time and production affected Vessel activities throughout 2014. By focusing on the hyper production of images and meetings, Vessel did not have a chance to programme the rest of the calendar as it normally would. In this way *Terra Piatta* became a central project and started to be developed in different phases able to be activated on a DIY level, since the project did not win the prize. So, in this specific case when analysing the process of *Terra Piatta (Flat Land)*, it is noticeable that a great deal of energy was put into activities concerning communications, website and publicity that would, in hindsight, have been better invested in content production.

However, from 2011 to 2015, the mechanism created by Vessel that seeks a direct connection with the 'local' has been fundamental to its activities. In order to embrace the 'local', Vessel connected with its locality, its landscape, its social background, and its history. By going direct to residents, Vessel was not only able to see the issues in a first-hand manner, but was also able to interact with the territory and people in a truly multidisciplinary manner by working in collaboration with artists, farmers, social scientists, architects etc. Approximately 20 farmers were involved. They were invited by Salvatore Lovaglio, a local artist and farmer, to a public presentation of *Terra Piatta* at his studio, after which they spontaneously decided to join the project. The farmers were reassured by Vessel's persistent activity, despite a lack of support, in the area. Ten members of their initial number are now working on a proposal for a future project together with Vessel. They have also created a private Facebook page (for more information see <https://www.facebook.com/groups/borgosangiusto/?fref=ts>) and continue to share knowledge, material and information. They meet on a regular basis in the hamlets.

4.2.2. Evaluation of *Terra Piatta*

The *Terra Piatta* project has been challenging for a number of reasons. The lack of financial support or institutional infrastructure makes it very difficult to operate, especially as we cannot be based in the location. No physical base has been made available for us by the local authorities. Furthermore, as already mentioned, as a self-funded activity located in a poor area with high unemployment, all members are obliged to find their income elsewhere, either in Italy or abroad. This results in remote working on the part of the founders and, consequently, a discontinuous presence of ourselves and our activities in the area (the workshops, for example, occur during sporadic visits).

Nevertheless, it was this lack of cultural institutional presence that brought us to the province in the first place, and we could see evidence that the local communities were receptive and wanted to engage with the development of *Terra Piatta*. Although the province is sparsely populated, and the residents are generally unlikely to participate in or engage with the arts, around twenty people came to the initial meetings with De Gaetano in 2011. The community of Borgate was diverse – some were much more knowledgeable than others. Some were urban resettlers; some local farming families; others were migrant labourers. This presented a challenge in creating dialogue, as we needed to act as a point of contact and translation between different parts of the group.

The issues raised in the discussions went beyond what we could have anticipated. Many issues we could not help with at all, since Vessel's agenda and that of the residents were very different (for example, one resident was anticipating the demolition of her home to make way for a new railway line). These differences in expectations caused some friction and also revealed that despite our publicity, many of the local residents had misunderstood the purpose of the project. Again, this highlighted that the context is very different from that of other regions in Europe, and thus provided an opportunity to better define the project's purpose and perimeter. As mentioned, the majority of existing documented examples of socially engaged artistic projects

highlight occurrences in the context of Northern Europe (such as the Blue House in the Netherlands http://www.jeanneworks.net/projects/the_blue_house/ or Grizedale in Cumbria <http://grizedale.org/>); while people in those regions have access to stronger welfare systems, the people of the hamlets do not and hence were concerned with more immediate, personal and practical concerns.

These unexpected issues and misunderstandings revealed a lot of assumptions. For example, the fact that Vessel came with cameras and were speaking English seemed to lead to the widespread misapprehension that the Vessel participants were American journalists. Some residents were expecting the video footage to appear in the media and anticipated that once their complaints had been heard, something would happen to remedy them. Some of the residents were disappointed when this did not occur and disengaged with the project after a few months. Again, this was evidence of the Western-centric mindset that was endemic in the residents even though these locations were remote and rural. Some of the participants lost interest in the project after this initial stage, reporting disappointment in the lack of practical response to their concerns. In becoming discouraged after discovering Vessel could not directly and practically address their concerns, the residents who disengaged demonstrated a lack of empowerment in themselves and the communities; they just wanted practical help with pressing issues, rather than cultural engagement.

These conclusions implemented Vessel's reflective process. Thanks to these evaluations, in fact, Vessel decided to run a workshop in the area in 2013, as mentioned before. This proved a very flexible approach offered by Vessel, which attempted to respond to the lack of empowerment encountered in the area by stimulating a sort of active response.

However, around half of the *Terra Piatta* (then *BIR*) participants remained engaged with the project after this initial stage, understanding the purpose of the project and what it was able to offer. Some even continued to meet independently of the Vessel gatherings and trips. Although we were initially

disappointed with this drop in engagement, we found that the remaining participants were more motivated to contribute, and the smaller, more focused group seemed more effective. The remainder of 2012 was a time for Vessel to rethink the project and consider how to overcome some of the aforementioned obstacles. The project offered visibility to the region and the issues raised by the residents; newsletters were distributed online through participants' networks, and printed leaflets and posters were distributed in local bars and public transport stations.

In 2013, Salvatorre Lovaglio, a local artist who has lived in Borgo San Giusto (one of the hamlets) since the 1990s and who participated in the *Paese Nuovo* visit, worked with Vessel to make a public presentation of *Terra Piatta*. He proposed the inclusion of different professionals from the area in the discussions. The local residents were pleased with this development, as it provided a new dimension to the group, a new audience for their concerns and a potential for local activism. Lovaglio hosted the workshop in his studio, and the different environment also seemed to affect the nature of the exchange. This workshop served as a learning process, and gave us the opportunity to engage with and learn from the area while developing the practice. Furthermore, individuals found and fostered connections with one other and became aware of each other's activities and concerns. This led to the residents sharing more (interests, working together, etc).

While it would be more beneficial for Vessel to be based in the area, this is impossible without financial support or institutional premises. Therefore, it continues to look unfeasible to realise the proposed arts centre for the hamlets. Unfortunately, and probably soon, the local people will get tired if they do not get the centre, since this has been presented as the final aim of the project. Nevertheless, even without the proposed centre, a network is still functioning/has been activated. The activities continue, so that if one day funding comes, *Terra Piatta* and its participants will be ready. There was also a noticeable growth in interest in art projects, which made the local community feel cared about. Furthermore, the local community was able to learn about different projects operating in the area such as *Lanterne*, a group

devoted to cycling tours in the area. The community got to know them, and they got to know some of the local protagonists of the community thanks to the *Terra Piatta* promotion, presentations and workshops. This would constitute a positive result: within Latour's understanding of the process, *Terra Piatta* created a network (1993: 122 and see Chapter 2 section 2.1.2).

Though this project has been described in relation to the geographical, it also has relevance to the issue of timeframes. This project required almost four years to really engage with the 'local' and to get a clear idea of the residents' urgent concerns and priorities. It is argued that such a project should never stop, since the 'local' is in flux and should follow 'local' development. Time becomes an important concept for Vessel, which is therefore, in O'Neill's understanding, a durational project (2011).

The project promoted cooperation between existing local organisations, associations and individuals working on the development of the area as well as residents. To this, Vessel added an international network of artists and cultural professionals interested in the social empowerment of rural and semi-rural areas. This combination of local participants and international artists was successful, in that a genuinely enriching exchange was able to take place for both parties. This involved breaking down conventional understandings of 'art' to a much broader understanding that included social engagement. There was an acknowledgement that genuine social engagement involves forming human relationships of trust, and this cannot be rushed. Another key point was that we recognized the need to use a different glossary, since the technical language used by art practitioners was no longer functional: the terms adopted responded to the kind of language already used by the participants, and unfamiliar concepts were communicated through metaphors. The result was a high level of sustained engagement from those involved, including many who would not usually participate in the arts. This was possible due to the way in which we tailored the format in response to the participants, which was necessarily self-reflexive and context-responsive. This would not have been possible with a fixed timeframe or pre-determined outcome.

This was achievable because of the careful use of open-ended methods, carefully balanced with the right amount of structure in order that the participants felt valued and able to contribute, and the artists did not feel bound by a strict timeframe or demands for 'product'. The success of this project can also be attributed to the attitude taken by the artists and curators. That is, despite the socio-economic inequalities of the region, it was not considered to be 'in need of development' so much as being a rich source of diverse and embedded cultural knowledge. Giving visibility to the region was an aim, and this may benefit those who live there, but their direct engagement in a process they felt ownership of was key to the accomplishment of this project.

Vessel twice tried to nominate *Terra Piatta* for funding, but both applications were unsuccessful. *Terra Piatta*, therefore, never attained sufficient financial support for the hub to be activated. Nevertheless, the project continued and was short-listed for several prizes, including the *Visible Award* and *Che Fare? Prize*. After the failure to win funding for the 'hub', the team continued working in order to create subsequent projects, including *Rural in Action*, and around half of the participants of *Terra Piatta* remained engaged through that initiative. This demonstrated the perseverance of the curatorial team, which built trust with those participating.

Terra Piatta currently exists as a series of curatorial and artistic research projects, meetings, gatherings and workshops, including *Rural In Action* (see 4.4.1).

4.3 Process

As mentioned in Chapter 2, process includes both the local and the 'durational': a continuous engagement with geography and an open-ended trajectory. In O'Neill's opinion, thanks to participation, the 'passive' audience

turns into an active participant, and the format is no longer an 'outcome-focused' project but an outcome, an end product, in itself (2010: 1). As the project is a participatory process based on the 'durational', the process is an outcome in itself. O'Neill sees the participants as 'actors with their actions being part of a cumulative process of engagement with both imaginative and tangible potential' (2010: 4). Vessel represents an expansion and development of O'Neill's durational approach. The original aspect of Vessel's use of the durational stands in the fact that the durational really exists only in process and has no relation to any artistic commission or physical outcome, as in the projects O'Neill and Doherty describe in *Locating the producer* (2011).

The concept of process adopted by Vessel will be expounded further in this section. Vessel does not only use process in the different capacities that have been introduced so far, but adds to it a self-reflexive dynamic. Process becomes an outcome itself, as well as a method for developing, testing and interrogating curatorial practice as a process.

4.3.1 Vessel as Process: *Radio Materiality*

The construction of Vessel is based on a process: year-by-year and as a result of a collective reflection, Vessel's curatorial team shapes its profile and its programme. In this way, the curatorial project can better follow the context, which is in constant flux, and its own rhythm to incorporate necessary 'time for reflection'. Being based on process means every step is interconnected, each part of the project emerges from the previous step, and while the new part is running, old and new connections emerge, linking the project in a continuous thread of ideas and activities.

For example, after the first *International Curatorial Workshop (ICW)*, which ran from May 28th to May 30th, 2011, Vessel collected all the ideas, feedback and suggestions discussed during both the residencies and the ICW and

shared this with the Committee together with research on the local epistemology (see footnote 1). After brainstorming these shared ideas, the Committee generated the premise for *Giant Step* (see Introduction and section 4.1.1). The Committee suggested continuing with a focus on the local, its knowledge and its contemporary profile, but to do so by observing the dynamics related to the local contemporary art system and its pressing concerns.

The same process led to the *Radio Materiality* project (2012 - 2013). By the end of the first series of residencies hosted in summer 2011 and after various brainstorming sessions with the curators, it became clear that the position of the Puglia region had been important for each of the participants. In such a critical moment of change, signaled by the beginning of the Arab Spring in 2010, Puglia became the second harbour of arrivals from North Africa to Europe (see Chapter 1, section 1.1.2). From various stimulating conversations with curators in residence - Arzu Yayintas, Pieter Vermeulen and Raluca Voinea - it emerged, more than any other 'situated knowledge', that Vessel should investigate the social and cultural processes created by this geo-political situation.

This is how the *Radio Materiality (RM)* project was born conceptually. It is itself a clear example of a Vessel project in which the use of process has been challenged. *RM* was 'potentially' a public and intangible space, a hub that stimulated communication, exchange and dialogue between Puglia and the Euro-Mediterranean area in order to build cultural and social bridges among the countries of this region. The aim of the project was to create a common socio-political subjectivity, based not only on the common history of these countries, but also on the socio-economic and political transformations currently occurring in the area.

The idea was to focus the project on the experience of the process of creation and the possible preparation of the radio station itself rather than creating a usual moment of 'acceleration' towards the production of outcomes. By working on the process itself, we ruminated on the possibility of having a different result and engagement both from the partners of the project and its

participants.

The imagination of this new socio-political subject was intended to trigger a dialogue between Puglia and its Mediterranean neighbours and create a network between them. Considering the reconfigurations of the Mediterranean geopolitical subject and the main long-term objective of Vessel, the radio station offered a way to initiate this process. In particular, *Radio Materiality* gathers practitioners who take an interest in the diverse processes happening in this area in order to make this interaction viable. The radio shows could be transmitted through different platforms, by sharing a series of podcasts on the web. A physical structure was built specifically for Bari's public spaces by XScape and Momang, a group of architects and designers from the region.



Figure 15. *Radio Materiality Casetta* by Momang and XScape, photo by Andrea Pizzi.

The radio station was the tool through which Vessel intended to understand and redefine existing social and geopolitical dynamics through the lens of art and culture. The radio station stimulated participatory and multidisciplinary actions in order to expand knowledge related to the Euro-Mediterranean area, to re-interpret its own identity and to reflect on the way the public sphere is perceived and can be empowered. Thanks to the radio

shows, Vessel gave voice to the alternative narratives that do not fit within hegemonic ones: to do so, we instigated collaborative and collective artistic practices involving different points of view and approaches.

In the first place, the radio station was the virtual space where many actors (artists, organisations, curators, intellectuals, etc.) met to share ideas, projects and perspectives related to the creation of a new solidarity among countries of the Mediterranean basin. Simultaneously, its physical presence in the city of Bari facilitated interaction between international practitioners and local communities. Projects and contributions were given by: Bisan Abu-Eisheh (July 11th), Claire Bosi (June 26th), Elena Cologni (July 20th – 23rd), Kari Conte (June 29th – July 6th), Leone Contini (June 6th – 9th), Jaime Ferrete (June 24th – 30th), Hakan Topal (June 29th – July 6th). Podcasts will be made available online in 2016. *Radio Materiality* is part of *Materiality*, a two-year European project that is being developed in collaboration between Wyspa in Gdańsk (PL), Vessel in Bari (IT), Instituto Politécnico de Tomar (PT) and Kibla in Maribor (SL). It explores the visual, sensual, transformative, political and scientific aspects of materials. *Materiality* is supported by Cimetta Fund + Program “Kultura”. The Program “Kultura” supported the project mainly for the creation of three large-scale exhibitions in Poland, Portugal and Slovenia. Of the *Materiality* project’s total budget of 135,000 euro, *Radio Materiality* received only 10,000 euro, of which only 20% could be used for human resources.

RM developed two parallel paths: the curatorial research project and the artist research and process. For the first strand, Anna Santomauro and I conducted research for over two years about the curatorial use of radio projects as well as public art commissions having process, rather than an object, as an outcome. For the purpose of this research we traveled to Spain, Greece and the USA, devoting one month to each location. We accumulated several examples of and references for the creation of a web radio station for the Mediterranean basin, but we never activated it. The final purpose was not the real creation of the web radio but the process of research related to a potential outcome which would be rather immaterial in any case.

Instead, the artists visited Puglia for short periods during June and July of 2012. We offered them a residency in Bari, with the aim of providing them with tools and resources to conduct research within the area for the potential creation of a radio programme. Some of them had a predetermined idea, whilst others observed the urban and social tissue of the city and decided to respond to that. Vessel attentively studied each proposal and helped in addressing it: suggesting an existing community of interest for each specific project, creating temporary communities for other projects, and providing reading material or contacts. Some of the artists left the loose process open and are still continuing their research, while others rapidly finalised an audio podcast suitable for a radio programme.

4.3.2 Evaluation of *Radio Materiality*

Engagement with both the overarching curatorial research and the individual artists' research has fluctuated throughout this project. Overall, although the idea of process for process's sake is not new, I could see that the majority of practitioners involved were resistant, reluctant or too used to the outcome-oriented project to engage with a different way of working.

In all the aforementioned locations in which I was in residency with Anna Santomauro and where we engaged in conversations, brainstorming, workshops and presentations, as soon as the participants invited understood that the reason for the gathering was not related to the immediate creation of the radio station, the group would automatically split into what could be characterised as three different groups. One group of the participants (a minority) would be demotivated and leave at the first possible chance; another group would feel suspicious but would still engage in conversation and potentially return for the next meetings; and the third group (the majority) would feel enthusiastic about dealing with the idea. This level of theoretical and more process-based approach, to something that ultimately can exist and requires some programming skills and technical support, was a true

inspiration for some of the participants. This process brought them to a level of speculation that they found rare within the art world.

Almost the same thing happened with the artists involved in *RM*, and in one case even led to an artist postponing the experience, perhaps thinking that this process can be deferred and activated at any other moment. So, these artists did not devote to this research/process-based residency the same priority they would have given to a commissioned residency that would end in an exhibition where they could materially present their works. For those who made their way to Puglia, some simply used the period to practice and test an audio project they intended to produce anyway with another organisation. Others tried to accelerate their observation of the region in order to be ready to present an outcome in less than two weeks. Some engaged with a specific local issue from the residency period (July 2012) and have continued with their work; with or without Vessel's support, they kept in touch with some local actors or community members and carried on research that still has not been converted into any outcome.

Through this level of engagement, the *RM* artists working in the region not only experienced a different geography, a different timeframe and a different approach (the process) but also encountered a 'local' knowledge, an epistemology yet to be 'processed' by the contemporary art field and hence requiring a different mode of practice.

With the *Radio Materiality* artistic residency, Vessel initiated a more coherent relationship with the general public: local communities and temporary groups. This represented a significant change within the curatorial practice developed up to that point, as well as within the research. While the participants involved during the first and the second year of activities (*Residency*, *International Curatorial Workshop*, *Giant Step* symposium) were predominantly art practitioners and scholars, with *Radio Materiality* the Albanian community was involved, young mothers from the city of Bari, LGBT local organisations, migrants, asylum seekers and refugees as well as fishermen, music experts and various activists. This was largely the result of the new structure, and the

open call for participants, which meant that those involved were more willing to work without concrete objectives. It seemed that while the process-focused trajectory could allow for more research, dialogue and reflection, acting as an incubation period for those involved, this would be more successful with a specific focus, and even with an immaterial outcome (as a substitute for a public-facing exhibition or publication). It also became clear that social engagement could be considered an aim of the residency, and that although there was no concrete intended outcome, the opportunity could still be used to devise or address future proposals.

4.4 Epistemology

While the previous three components are the answer to this research inquiry, the epistemology is part of the premise and therefore a central element in the research question. That is one of the reasons why I decided to speak about it at the very end of this chapter. The starting point is that every place owns its epistemology, its 'situated knowledge', and curators should therefore avoid treating any place in the same way as another, or worse, ignoring the existence of a 'local' epistemology and connecting with the place as a mere venue.

The main theoretical reference discussed in Chapter 2 when discussing epistemology has been Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2013). His theory supports the active involvement of the epistemologies of the South in cultural production, as much as the epistemologies of the North. de Sousa Santos claims that with the acceptance of 'situated' theories comes the need to make a space in which these theories can be created, distributed and promoted (2012: 45). Vessel aimed to be that place.

4.4.1 Vessel as epistemology: *Rural in Action*

Rural in Action (RiA) represents a section of *Terra Piatta* developed between July 2014 and January 2015. After many unsuccessful attempts to obtain funding for the creation of a Center for the Arts, Vessel decided to stimulate

some simple, small actions in the area of the hamlets (Foggia) to keep the attention on *Terra Piatta* vivid and the process activated. Vessel applied for and received a grant called *Laboratori dal Basso* (Bottom up workshops), intended to cover the cost of workshops for business development in the region. Business activities of any nature can request this grant in order to learn skills, share expertise and acquire the tools used by other practitioners in the same field. Though we are a not-for-profit organisation, we were allowed access to the same fund and so requested it. We were able to pay a fee to the artists who participated, covering their flights, accommodation and per diem, while any of the Vessel members who worked on this workshop were paid or had their expenses covered.

Of all the projects developed by Vessel, the *Rural In Action* research and workshop offers the best example of the way Vessel addresses the 'epistemology of the South'. 'The South' referred to by Vessel is connected with Puglia in this case, a region historically focused on agriculture and farming. Farming/ agricultural knowledge is a knowledge not retained as relevant or worthy of acknowledgement. The reality is that this is a local knowledge that is disappearing under the constant global normalisation of the rural, particularly, and the contemporary society, more generally. Vessel created an occasion for exchange between 'local' farmers and actors involved in agriculture and a 'local' knowledge, and international artists focusing their work on the rural world.

Vessel focused on the relationship between art, territory and pedagogy by activating this series of workshops, which addressed social, political and economic processes taking place in the rural area of the Puglia region. *Rural in Action* aimed to activate informal learning and research processes led by artists, curators and practitioners whose practice could stimulate new approaches to the interpretation of rural contexts, as well as to participatory interventions within such marginal areas. We believe that art is the lens and the tool that should be adopted to create a common ground for dialogue and collaboration. We invited the followers of *Terra Piatta*, some of whom are local experts from different disciplines, to take part in the laboratories and to

give their important contribution to the discussion. We also invited the general public to take part in the workshop through our newsletter, Facebook page and posters in local schools and universities. Artists, participants and local citizens operated together as a transitory community of interest by adopting Participatory Action Research methodologies in order to collectively investigate the area and define possible strategies for interdisciplinary cooperation.

The workshops activated intersections between international and local practitioners and allowed regional knowledge to meet international practices, thus opening up a dialogue on some of the issues that affect many marginal regions in Europe. *Rural in Action's* format consisted of six modules consisting of three-day laboratories, in which a plurality of voices and practices investigated and narrated the potentialities, as well as the challenges, of the territory.

One of the best examples of how this worked is the second laboratory, hosted by Vessel from 8th to 10th January 2015: Asunciòn Molinos Gordo, a Spanish artist operating within the Mediterranean basin, presented *On Cultural Sovereignty: new possible understandings of cultural production within marginal contexts*. Molinos Gordo focused on the social and cultural implications of the agricultural and rural sphere through a transnational approach. The workshop investigated the concept of cultural, social and economic sovereignty: stemming from the idea of food sovereignty, the artist activated a discussion on the possible applications of this concept in both cultural and social fields. During this workshop, the practice and methodologies developed by the artist in different contexts (especially Spain and Egypt) met those already existing in the territory of Capitanata, to create a common ground for rethinking possible approaches to the area (for more about her feedback see Appendix H).

4.4.2 Evaluation of *Rural in Action*

The fact that *Rural in Action* was developed as a phase of a long term project, *Terra Piatta*, helped Anna Santomauro and I as curators of the project to address the series of workshops to a more focused group of people and use a more appropriate methodology. It was certainly the long-term nature of the project that allowed us to carefully identify target locations and groups.

The workshop was held in very remote locations; one local farm and local youth organisations. No transport was offered for people to reach the workshop, which meant that attendees of the workshop had already had to invest a lot of energy, physically, to be present. Though the farm was far away from urban centers and train stations, it was near other farms. This increased the presence of those people who live in the countryside and are the first audience for this kind of workshop. While *Terra Piatta* had a non-specific target, *Rural in Action* devoted its attention to local farmers and farm workers (the same people, but more specific).

Though this group of people was the audience Vessel was aiming for, this did not mean it was a group that was prepared to experience what Vessel was proposing. For the majority of them the speculative attitude adopted during the workshop was still hard to accept. The majority of participants were in their fifties or sixties; they did not speak any language other than Italian and they were not used to this verbal sharing of ideas. The group was sometimes impatient to reach a point of conclusion or realisation of a concrete project. It was hard to convince them of the value of this embryonic stage of discussion of tools and methods that may or may not be adopted for a future project. The level of engagement changed, little by little; after two months of workshops the group of people consolidated into a group which is now determined to make the hypothesis we discussed a reality. This means that, though indirectly, *Terra Piatta* is now alive. One of the participants said: 'you have now put a seed and we will look after it so we can make sure we can all harvest' (Laboratori dal Basso - YouTube, 2015).

The participants are protagonists from the area, such as the first founders of a 'rural B&B', as well as some farmers who use their farms as 'didactic farms'. The workshop and the group stimulated some assiduous followers too; people who may not be totally involved in the ongoing discussion but that are already developing their own projects in the area and are interested in following what Vessel and this group are trying to do. In this way, for instance, Vessel's relationship with 'Lanterne' intensified. Lanterne is a group of activists interested in responding to the lack of mobility suffered in the area with the use of bicycles. From *Rural in Action* onwards, Lanterne has continually offered Vessel and the group various occasions to gather on bikes and explore the area, while collecting wild herbs or analysing the landscape.

While *Terra Piatta* had been open and inclusive, with a broad range of participants from different demographics, it became apparent that there were certain groups within the community who were receptive to the idea of involvement in cultural initiatives, but for practical reasons were not engaging with the project. This included agricultural workers and other rural organisations, subject to a different schedule and constraints. In order to address this, the *Rural in Action* workshop focused mainly on farmers and rural organisations operating in the area. We understood the need to be realistic with our scope. We noticed that, although the local farmers and rural organisations were talking a different language (not necessarily familiar with the art world), they were also taking a different attitude to their engagement. In contrast to the urban participants in other projects, whose engagement tended to be more short-term, participants who came from rural backgrounds tended to have a greater long-term commitment to the project, at least once they had invested a significant amount of their own time and felt ownership of it.

Just as with *Terra Piatta*, we recognised that language and communication had to be treated sensitively. Frames of reference changed, and terms the participants themselves introduced were then adopted in further discussions. The artists were briefed about this prior to the workshops, and about the kind of participants they could expect. A dossier of previous projects was also

shared. As a result, the artists took care to speak in this way and it was possible to communicate well. Meetings were held in which invited experts discussed concepts such as cultural hegemony, concepts around non-production and definitions of 'rural'. As they were sensitively presented, the participants responded well to these discourses, and found it empowering to have new concepts and vocabulary to use and share; they continue to use these terms in correspondence. Storytelling with audio-visual aids was also an important method – using a narrative approach. In some circumstances, rural workers may have felt alienated by academic language or dense texts, but the reflective and responsive approaches used rendered the subject matter accessible, especially when the participants became aware that they were at times *themselves* a subject for academic analysis.

It also became clear that the setting of the discussions was an important factor in determining the ease with which participants engaged in dialogue. The meetings were more successful when held in familiar surroundings, and social conventions were respected, such as sharing food and wine to begin the meeting. All suggestions were followed, as far as possible. For example, on one occasion the group was invited to a farm 45 minutes away; the participants felt included and this contributed to their confidence to participate.

Residents who engaged more tended to be those who had moved to the region more recently and who had traveled more widely. Other than this, as mentioned above, on the whole, engagement was actually much greater with the rural participants than with urban Vessel participants in Bari. This was, in part, due to a different attitude to engagement with the arts, but also the stigma attached to receiving 'help', which seemed a greater issue for urban participants. From 2011, no-one from an urban area followed up with an autonomous group, but this did happen with *Rural in Action*. This was the main success of the project; participants formed a network of contacts with individuals and organisations they would not normally have associated with, and continued to meet autonomously. They also wrote to thank the team and report that the project was beneficial to them.

The success of this project can be attributed to several approaches. Firstly, there was an initial effort to identify and understand the target participants, their concerns, needs and interests, in order to respond appropriately. Later in the project it was also important to continue to support and stimulate the networks remotely and encourage further development of their activities. The connection made between the artists and local participants also remained, and they continue to meet face to face and to correspond, sharing documents through email and using the Facebook group created for the project. The long duration of the project enabled Vessel to build a relationship of trust with the participants, in which they understood the motivation of the organisers and the objectives of the project. Many participants continued to meet, often without the presence of the curatorial team. In itself, this is evidence of the longevity of the project, and the level of commitment of those involved.

Conclusion

Informed by the critique of large-scale exhibitions and Biennales as global art formats (see Chapter 2) and an examination of some alternative curatorial practices in the Mediterranean (see Chapter 3), this chapter delivered a description of the approach that this research has developed, through a combination of secondary analysis and the direct, practice-based research of Vessel, in the region of Puglia. Thus, the theoretical and practical aspects of this research came together to form a contribution to knowledge regarding curatorial approaches and methodologies, namely, a theoretical model for understanding, devising and evaluating curatorial methods in regional contexts, characterised by four elements: geography, time, process and epistemology.

This chapter underlined once again the relevance of the geo-political context previously explained in Chapter 1. The context of reference is not only important for its position (its 'where'), but also for the current situation (its 'when') as well as the content it is generating (its 'what'). Most importantly,

this chapter presented the 'how': the curatorial approach to the context. This represents, in synthesis, a curatorial proposal for Euro-Mediterranean regions subject to development policies.

The curatorial approach of Vessel is defined as self-reflexive. The main concept is to operate in a cyclical, rather than linear, way, with the focus primarily on reflection on the practice itself. In practical terms, this means the curator would exercise the practice and reflect upon each stage in order to then implement the next; this would be the dynamic, working on the 'how' rather than the 'what'. This emphasis on self-reflection would be the key to avoiding the potentially detrimental effects of hegemonic formats, through continual scrutiny of the practice. The 'four elements' model represents a framework that can be usefully applied to such a self-reflexive process; each element must be considered in relation to the other three and, in this way, the curator can maintain a balanced approach.

This self-reflexive practice questions any assumptions of a place as a stable identity: the *geography* would be treated as a living body, changeable in time. The space and time would not be simply coordinates for an alien or mainstream cultural event to be organised; they are essential elements for the production of embedded knowledge. This is an important point of departure for any practice that aims to influence regional cultural development. The proposed approach is, therefore, to start with, show respect for and aim to build on 'situated knowledge' (as defined by Rogoff, 2000, see also 1.3.2 and 3.4). Any reflection can start from the locality and aim to express the knowledge related with it. This is the type of knowledge that could potentially be lost, overshadowed by a more global narrative, and therefore a situated approach is very timely.

Similarly, the reflexive curatorial approach, as outlined here, would respect the different *timeframes* present in the lives of people in these regions, who would potentially participate in or engage with the arts. Responding to this means taking alternative approaches to the balance between process and product. This would change depending on the geography of the region, the

individuals living there, their livelihood and their concerns. As demonstrated in this chapter, being sensitive to these different geographies and timeframes can allow a greater level of engagement and the possibility of building understanding and meaningful exchange between global and local contexts, as well as between local groups and arts workers who usually operate on the global stage.

This approach to curation, evolved through the work of Vessel, makes evident the multiplicity of entry points in contemporary Puglia to situated knowledge in need of exposure. Within Vessel Puglia becomes: a curatorial virgin land, an abused and abandoned rural site, a vivid location for participation and a strategic point within the Mediterranean sea and its 'voices'. This cultural profile emerging from a different curating does not resemble a region 'in need of development' as designated by the EU. Rather, it appears as a different profile in need of a context-addressed curatorial approach, rather than the adoption of global practices and formats such as large-scale exhibitions and Biennale.

In the final conclusions of this thesis, further emphasis will be given to the connection between the argument and the outcome of this practice-based research. The conclusions will address these findings within the context of the original research questions, and suggest ways in which this new knowledge about curatorial practice could be duplicated in and adapted to places other than Puglia.

Conclusion

I. Overview

This thesis proposes a set of methods and considerations for a self-reflexive model of curatorial practice, intended to effectively enable the engagement of local knowledge in the cultural production. These are designated as 'four elements of curatorial practice for local engagement': geography, time, process and epistemology. These represent four key principles for curatorial practitioners to be mindful of. Whilst these principles have been selected in response to the specific geographical context of Puglia, the resulting theoretical framework can be applied to any region. The principles can be used to devise and evaluate any curatorial project that seeks to cultivate local epistemologies in cultural production.

This proposal was reached through three stages of research: considering the political, geographical and theoretical contexts of the Mediterranean area; evaluating the presence of local culture within existing models and identifying good practices; and finally, applying and evaluating methods and frameworks for local engagement through a series of curatorial initiatives, through Vessel. From this research, four principal characteristics were identified: geography, time, process and epistemology.

In attempting to summarise the findings and evaluate the project's outcomes, the concluding section of this thesis returns to the original research questions:

- How can the curatorial re-imagine the 'epistemology of the South' beyond the exhibition, in the context of the Mediterranean region?
- What kind of curatorial models can enable the engagement of local knowledge(s) in the production of culture?

Firstly, the thesis gave an overview of the geo-political context to better clarify the relevance of focusing on this issue at this time. Case studies were presented to illustrate the dominant cultural production on global and local scales. This production was associated with specific formats: the Biennale and large-scale exhibition. The second section of the thesis then demonstrated alternative modes of production. Examples were offered as well as a practical application.

This research addressed the questions posed both theoretically and practically. The curatorial can re-imagine the 'epistemology of the South' in the Mediterranean region through refocusing on how this epistemology is produced and promoted in the first place. The key is to re-discuss the practice and create a more situated curatorial approach: to stimulate self-reflexivity. Once this shift has been made, the curatorial practice will be able to engage with local knowledge through socially engaged art projects, participatory action research, long-termism, and process oriented activities.

II. The geo-political context and theoretical framework

In order to actively value and involve local epistemologies, it is important to critically consider the role of political factors, such as financial and economic imperatives, which affect the hosting of cultural events. The EU has defined certain regions (mainly in the South of Europe) as 'in need of development' under the ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) strategy. This includes regions within the Mediterranean zone, including Puglia. These regions can be thought of as in a 'state of dependency' (as defined by Lister, 1997), receiving financial support which is allocated strategically to enhance the economic development of each region. This situation calls into question the role of EU support in the cultural production of those regions as, regarding cultural development, the funding is targeted at a limited range of practices: those already widely practiced in and recognised by the more affluent North. This support propagates cultural influences and practices that may not be the most appropriate or beneficial to the local cultural development of those

regions. There is, therefore, a risk that sponsored practices could overshadow more diverse regional cultural activities and approaches.

This thesis frames the Euro-Med region as under the influence of a 'cultural hegemony' (as the predominance of once social classes world view, as defined by Gramsci, 1998, and in the sense of a process of homogenisation, described by Mazrui, 2001) made possible by these funding structures. This pattern of dependency between Northern and Southern regions also occurs on a global scale. This thesis addressed the way in which this 'hegemony' is manifested in the cultural arena, through the format of the large-scale exhibition. This is supported by Paul O'Neil's definition of the Biennale as a 'globalised' phenomenon: a highly visible format that is replicable in different locations, and attracts an international audience.

III. The case studies

In Chapter 2, I argued that large-scale international exhibitions, such as Biennales, do not necessarily have a positive effect on 'local' cultural production. In terms of European cultural development strategies, the Biennale supports the mainstream (which Camnitzer, 1995, associates with the art market and strategies of predatory capitalism), and can be instrumentalised as a device for touristic promotion, temporarily benefiting the economic development of host regions, but not necessarily *developing* those regions culturally. The host region provides a budget, and a set of venues and facilities, and in return gains the economic privilege of some international visibility. While this can benefit the global art world, and the touristic industries of host regions (incentivised by priorities 4 and 7 of the European Commission Regional Policy, 2013), it fails to cultivate the local cultural activity of those regions.

The reasons that the Biennale format and other large-scale exhibitions fail to enrich local cultural activity are manifold. They are often nomadic and globalised (not tailored to the locality), short term, product-oriented (temporary exhibition based), and they address mainstream trends and

discourses in contemporary art, defined by an international group of artists and curators. Any acknowledgement of 'local flavour' is often cursory, utilised in the marketing of the event rather than its content, and therefore unlikely to reach any depth of critical engagement. The process of constructing and delivering the exhibition is accelerated, with most labour brought in from elsewhere. The sudden influx of visitors places a strain on local infrastructures, and any improvement made in anticipation of this is likely not the most pressing concern for the local community. After the event is over, there is little evident cultural benefit to the host regions. Therefore, I argue that the Biennale does not prove to be a sustainable model; alternative models of cultural engagement should be sought. Ideally those would allow space for participatory research, 'time for reflection' (as defined by O'Neil, 2010), deep analysis and self-reflexive revising of processes and outcomes.

The dynamic at play here means that the large-scale exhibition model is perpetuated by the funding strategies and this, in turn, perpetuates mainstream, globalised discourses and approaches in the arts, ahead of subaltern or local epistemologies and cultural practices. At the same time, there exist curatorial practices which seek to address this trend. In Chapter 3, I evaluated a number of examples of curatorial practices from the Mediterranean region which successfully engage local cultures: *Liminal Spaces*, 98Weeks, Intermediae and Matadero Research Groups. Reviewing these, I identified similar themes to those problematised in Chapter 2's critique of the Biennale format: geography, time, process and epistemology. These elements were then clarified as the four components of curatorial practice that should to be considered when seeking to engage local knowledge in cultural production.

IV. Vessel

Chapter 4 described initiatives by Vessel which address the components of curatorial method outlined in Chapter 3, and evaluated the effectiveness and appropriateness of specific approaches for enabling local engagement. Four

main examples of relevance were outlined: the Residency programme, *Radio Materiality*, *Terra Piatta* and *Rural in Action*.

- **Residency programme**

In 2011 the Residency programme invited curators from elsewhere in Europe to Bari. It aimed to reflect upon curatorial practice itself, through conversation and exploration of context. In order to achieve this goal and shift the emphasis away from cultural product and towards process, there was explicitly no requirement for a concrete outcome or exhibition. This ensured time for research in the curatorial plan, by taking away the urgency of an 'outcome'. Not all the curators found this easy, and two presented some resistance to the process-based approach as it did not correspond to their predetermined ideas about curatorial practice. Nevertheless, there were strong positive results; for example, one of the local artists taking part in Vessel activities at the time, later began his own project in the region. With another, a collaboration was instigated for the second year. The space for conversation allowed this connection to form without the pressure of time constraints.

- ***Radio Materiality***

In 2013 Vessel released a call for curators for a residency related to the Borgate area and invited some artists to take part in a residency for the discussion and creation of a web radio station. The radio station was conceived of as a connector between different Mediterranean countries, while operating on a more local level by delivering 'situated narratives'. The residencies this time were related to a more concrete scope, easier for participants to envision. This made their participation less problematic than the first year of the residency programme. The resulting podcasts were exhibited at Athens Biennale in 2013.

- ***Terra Piatta***

Terra Piatta was initiated in 2014 and aimed to create a hub of research and artistic, cultural and social production in the Borgate area. During the development of *Terra Piatta* we acknowledged and learned the importance of selecting a specific target. While the participants we worked with in *Radio Materiality* were existing communities (for example, Albanian or LGBT, etc.) operating within the rural, above all in such a disconnected and dispersed area, implied that we had to create our own community of interest.

- ***Rural in Action***

The aim of the *Rural in Action* project was to look globally at rural practices, and to consider how they could be adapted or applied to the area. Vessel secured regional council support (originally ERDF funding intended to support 'business') to pay expert tutors, who would come and engage with local rural participants on cultural issues.

V. The Four Elements of curatorial practice for local engagement

Vessel's set of methods and approaches are highly context-dependent and self-reflexive. They are, therefore, not directly transferable to other contexts; however, the *framework* for understanding how best to operate in a self-reflexive way developed throughout this project can be applied to other situations and curatorial projects that seek to enable the engagement of local knowledge.

In order to reimagine an 'epistemology of the South', or to enable the engagement of local knowledge in cultural production, these four principles (geography, time, process and epistemology) can act as headings under

which methods may be considered and implemented. Each must be considered in relation to the other three, regarding both the *design* of curatorial projects, and their *evaluation*. In this way, the framework can inform and drive an iterative process of reflexive curatorial practice that is both context-responsive and self-critical.

- **Geography**

Regions that have been identified as 'in need of development' can also be understood in a more positive light as 'subaltern' or as rich sources of diverse cultural practices and knowledge that are at risk of being subsumed by the mainstream. In order for curators to acknowledge the cultural relevance of these geographical areas, a different set of approaches than those currently sponsored by regional development funds is necessary.

Regarding geographies, it is possible to enable greater engagement of local community groups, and it is possible for meaningful exchange to take place between global and local frames of reference. Deep understanding of context and recognition of specific local ways of knowing ('local epistemologies') are key to curatorial practices that seek genuine local engagement. Conventional approaches to cultural production present obstacles to such understanding. Specifically, fixed term, outcome-driven projects can be observed to produce an artificially accelerated mode of cultural production, that necessarily results in a more superficial (at worse, exploitative) critical engagement with the place. In order to develop and respond to such an understanding, it is necessary to take alternative attitudes to time and process.

- **Time**

The time and rhythm of cultural activity can have a negative or positive effect on the experience of a curatorial intervention. In order to truly respond to a locality, it is helpful to move away from an accelerated, exhibition-focused model towards a slower, more reflective approach. If we are to genuinely engage the 'local', it is crucial to take a longer-term strategy; to 'value the

durational' as O'Neill would say. This means to acknowledge the lengthiness of processes such as forming human relationships, discussing complex issues with diverse stakeholders, and reflecting on experiences.

While conventional, short-term projects are suited to international, urban contexts, they tend to be market-driven. In that sense, they operate in the interests of the globalised art market, and the tourism industry, rather than the interests of the site they occupy or those who live there. Large-scale short-term projects, such as the Biennale, can even be detrimental to a small region's own local cultural activity, paying only token respect to it, even temporarily eclipsing it, while putting strain on local infrastructures, and demanding investment in provision for a temporary, international audience. The Vessel project found that a longer-term approach was better suited to more rural community groups who (although less ready to engage than their urban counterparts) once engaged, were more likely to sustain involvement and commitment to a project, providing they felt a sense of ownership of, and stake in, the project. An integral part of longer-term approaches to curatorial initiatives is a shift to emphasis on process rather than product.

- **Process**

In order to modify attitudes and approaches to the duration and rhythm of activities, it is important to consider the relationship between product and process. Looming deadlines for production or exhibition can operate as obstacles to engagement in process, and so, by removing the imperative of completing a 'product' it is possible to create a slower pace with more breadth of possibility. However, a total lack of target is an unfamiliar situation for many, and can be counter-productive unless alternative ways of structuring activity are provided. These can take the form of intangible outcomes or proposals for future activity; they can also be defined by the group itself in a generative way. The experience of a process can become an outcome in itself, and should be valued as such. The balance between process and product is therefore key to deepening engagement, but this must be measured and devised carefully in response to the specific group and their

concerns, through dialogue and experimentation, and by enabling space for continual reflection and reevaluation.

- **Epistemology**

The 'epistemology of the South' is as valid as that of the mainstream, affluent North. However, to engage southern, or 'subaltern', knowledge or epistemologies requires a different set of curatorial approaches and methods. Every place has a unique epistemology, with embedded, situated knowledge, and curators who seek to involve local cultures cannot do this by dealing with a place in a conventional way. Engaging with a place as a mere venue can even be detrimental to the cultural development of subaltern regions.

Although European 'development' funding is usually instrumentalised for financial (rather than cultural) development, the Vessel project worked on the premise that curatorial practices could actively seek to nourish and benefit the development of local epistemologies and cultures themselves. This is particularly crucial at a time when arts funding in Southern, or 'subaltern', regions is changing on an unprecedented scale.

Furthermore, the relationship between global and the local epistemologies is key to positive development in regional cultures. The involvement in regional initiatives of curatorial and arts practitioners who operate on a global stage can be instrumental, not only in providing visibility to those regions (as the Biennale model does), but in providing a genuine point of contact between the two realms, allowing a meaningful exchange that benefits both the global art-world and local, situated participants and stakeholders. It can enable the preservation and growth of diversity, and promote individuals' and groups' understanding of their regional cultural identity in relation to the global.

In summary, each of these four elements must be considered in relation to the other three and in response to the particular locality, context and stakeholders. In this way, the four elements provide a theoretical framework

for a critical and self-reflexive curatorial practice that values local culture and seeks to develop it.

VI. Scope for further research and development

Although the practice-based element of this work was confined to the Puglia region, and therefore the methods and practices used will not be directly applicable to other contexts, the framework for devising and evaluating curatorial practices proposed here is, nevertheless, broadly applicable. The set of considerations and recommendations outlined above is intended as a tool for curators in any regional context, who aim to nourish local, situated cultural production. It can be particularly relevant for curators who find themselves in a new or unfamiliar location, as it offers a framework for reflecting on and responding to the specific context in order to deepen engagement with the place. The framework can even be used in regard to large-scale temporary exhibitions, in order to seek the inclusion of and ensure benefit to the host region and its existing cultural practices.

Moreover, I argue that there is a need for initiatives with these objectives to gain recognition and visibility, given the present political and cultural climate of inequality (and strategies to address it) in Europe and the rest of the world. In particular, I would envision that this kind of initiative could be rolled out to other areas of the Euro-Med such as Albania, Macedonia, Egypt and Algeria. Some projects of this kind are already beginning to emerge in these regions, but they are not highly visible and remain in the margins.

This research and practice is a relevant contribution to new knowledge not only for the academic field but also for European project development. It is time to acknowledge the relevance of the South and to break the hegemony of the North. This thesis is of importance, as well, for non-academic practitioners, curators and artists who aspire to take an active role in this North-South relationship. The thesis, in fact, aims to reveal a strong connection between the geo-political development of the area and the role of

art within it. It stimulates more researchers and practitioners to operate differently, so to give to the South an active role. This research aims to underline the relevance that curatorial practice and culture would have in this scenario.

Despite this positive outcome of the research, the type of practice it champions is difficult to sustain in the present funding architecture, which tends to value *economic development* over, and sometimes even at the expense of, *cultural development*. While this issue is beyond the scope of the present research, we can identify a need for further research and development, in order to explore how better to manage European resources allocated to cultural development, and the inclusion of arts practitioners in the architectures that support them.

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Appendix A - Summary of policy documents

This Annex Ancludes a summary of policy documents mentioned in the Introduction and Chapter 1.

According to the European Commission/Culture (2013):

“More than 500 cultural projects received Community support, several pilot projects were initiated in the area of translation and the promotion of books, providing support for more than 500 projects or translations. These pilots then gave rise to three full cultural programs:

- *Kaleidoscope* (1996-1999) to encourage artistic and cultural creation and co-operation with a European dimension
- *Ariane* (1997-1999), supporting books and reading, including translation
- *Raphael* (1997-1999), to complement Member States' policies in the area of cultural heritage of European significance.”

Even though the stated common aim for all these programmes was to promote and above all translate the national knowledge of the Member States in order to facilitate the cooperation between new European territories and their practitioners, none of these programmes was actually concentrating on experiencing this mingling of new knowledge rather than representing it.

The sectors and formats covered by the programmes were:

- performing arts (dance, theatre, music, opera, etc.)
- plastic and visual arts (painting, sculpture, architecture, carving)
- applied arts (photography, design)
- multimedia (as a form of artistic expression).

The key words of these programmes were cooperation and translation; they both helped to realise the cultural condition at that time in need of cooperation and translation.

Immediately after these programmes were implemented was the beginning or inception of *Culture 2000*. According to the European Commission/Culture Archive (2008):

Culture 2000 is a Community programme established for seven years (2000-2006) with a total budget of 236,5 million euro. In contrast to the financial instruments that preceded it, Culture 2000 provides grants to cultural cooperation projects in all

artistic and cultural fields (performing arts, plastic and visual arts, literature, heritage, cultural history, etc.). Culture 2000 was established by the Decision No 508/2000/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, adopted on 14 February 2000 and prolonged by Decision No 626/2004/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 31 March 2004. These decisions were examined in accordance with the procedure provided for in Article 151(5), according to which actions in the area of culture are adopted by the Parliament and the Council according to the co-decision procedure, and unanimity is required in the Council. The Committee of the Regions is also consulted (European Commission /Culture Archive : 2008).

Two changes are relevant and noticeable:

1. The artistic and cultural fields seem to have expanded (the list of categories is now longer)
2. The decisions are taken and adopted by the Parliament and the Council while the Committee of the Region is consulted (evidence of the fact the “locals” are not taking decisions but rather following external decisions, as explained in Chapter 3).

The objectives of *Culture 2000* were: to promote a common cultural area characterised by its *cultural diversity* and shared cultural heritage; to *promote cultural diversity* and a shared cultural heritage; to encourage cultural creation and mobility; to encourage access to culture for all; to disseminate art and culture; to promote *intercultural dialogue*; to promote *artistic and cultural cooperation* in Europe; to spread knowledge of the history of the European peoples; to support artistic and cultural projects with a European dimension at the level of their creation, their organisation and their implementation; to accord culture a *social integration* and socio-economic development role (European Commission/Culture Archive, 2008: emphasis added).

Culture 2000 represented a moment of transition, starting from the cooperation and translation created by the former programmes. *Culture 2000* dealt with diversity, mobility and intercultural dialogue. So what before had been translated and shared was then ready to be discussed.

Other than festivals, exhibitions, new productions, tours and translations, the activities supported by this programme also included master classes and conferences. Formats such as workshops, talks, brainstorming, which would imply a more durational and dialogical form rather than pure presentation, were not yet included. This would imply that even in the more discursive events included in the programme, there would still be a very specific outcome in which dialogue would be presented and represented more than experienced or facilitated. An

exception to this was represented by some discussion of creating an online forum with remote dialogue.

The importance of dialogue and intercultural co-operation, as stated in the *Culture 2000* objectives, was not reflected in the format of the projects. The problem can be identified as a disconnect between form and content, between the dialogue and the way in which it is experienced. Furthermore, in the use of dialogue itself as a tool for production rather than as the final aim of the cooperation.

On the geographical side, the participants to this programme came from 30 European countries:

- the 25 EU Member States (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Cyprus and Malta)
- the three countries of the European Economic Area (the EEA - Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway)
- two candidate countries: Bulgaria and Romania

Concerning the time frame, three main categories were eligible: specific annual activities; multiannual activities forming the subject of cooperation agreements; special cultural events such as the European Capitals of Culture.

The temporary profile of these activities was a major incentive to reach a tangible outcome but it remained just this, a fast-producing dynamic of production rather than something more focused on the territory.

Sporadic cases mentioned on the EU website are used as references for this thesis: those that are temporary projects transformed over a long-term platform or in a stable network (European Commission /Culture Archive, 2008).

Culture programme 2007-2013

According to European Commission/Culture Programmes and Actions (2013):

The EU's *Culture* programme (2007-2013) has a budget of €400 million for projects and initiatives to celebrate Europe's cultural diversity and enhance our shared cultural heritage through the development of cross-border co-operation between cultural operators and institutions (...) The Culture programme aims to achieve three main objectives: to promote cross-border mobility of those working in the cultural sector; to encourage the transnational circulation of cultural and artistic output; and *to foster intercultural dialogue*

(...) For the achievement of these objectives, the programme supports three strands of activities: cultural actions; European-level cultural bodies; and analysis and dissemination activities” (European Commission/Culture Programmes and Actions, 2013:emphasis added).

This *Culture* programme represents a continuation of *Culture 2000*, but includes more focus on intercultural dialogue. It has been associated with the relaunch of the Euro-Mediterranean (Euro-Med) zone and is therefore addressed mainly to those countries.

EURO- MED and Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)

The Barcelona Process was relaunched by the EU under the name ‘Union for the Mediterranean’ (UfM) and according to European Union External Actions (nd.), stating:

The Union for the Mediterranean promotes economic integration and democratic reform across 16 neighbours to the EU’s south in North Africa and the Middle East.

The relaunch was an opportunity to render relations both more concrete and more visible with the initiation of new regional and sub-regional projects with real relevance for those living in the region. Projects address areas such as economy, environment, energy, health, migration and culture.

Along with the 27 EU member states, 16 Southern Mediterranean, African and Middle Eastern countries are members of the UfM: Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey.

The UfM has a number of key initiatives on its agenda: the de-pollution of the Mediterranean Sea, including coastal and protected marine areas; the establishment of maritime and land highways that connect ports and improve rail connections so as to facilitate movement of people and goods; a joint civil protection programme on prevention, preparation and response to natural and man-made disasters; a Mediterranean solar energy plan that explores opportunities for developing alternative energy sources in the region; a Euro-Mediterranean University, inaugurated in Slovenia in June 2008; the Mediterranean Business Development Initiative, which supports small businesses operating in the region by first assessing their needs and then providing technical assistance and access to finance (EEAS/EUROPA, nd.).

This UfM entity demonstrates the importance of the Mediterranean zone for the EU, and how the EU is trying to deal with this economy, this geography and its culture.

Appendix B - GIANT STEP proposal

This appendix presents the full proposal written by the Vessel team for the European Cultural Foundation Collaboration Grant.

STEP 1: SUMMARY

The project is born from the need to understand the function of the institution within the contemporary cultural system. We will try to analyse different approaches to cultural production in Europe and promote dialogue between different contexts. The starting point of the research that we will share with our partners will be through a tour symposium. It will focus on the study of the specific issues and urgencies that occur in each country involved (Italy, Poland, UK).

We are asking ourselves and our partners what is to be considered “an institution”, which role the institutions should play in the cultural production of a specific area in order to respond to the needs of the area itself, and how independent organisations can have a critical approach towards these themes. To do so, we have started thinking about a “dream institution”, essentially a utopian institution that would provide critical framework and foster immense public interaction, amongst other qualities. This will allow us to keep a positive attitude while we are carrying out the institutional critique. We feel that the best format for this is the symposium, which will allow us to explore a variety of experiences and provoke a wide dialogue about this topic.

In doing so, we mean to elaborate an idea of what, in our opinion, a good institution should be, in order to support and develop culture in its country and to activate an intense and critical dialogue with the cultural agents working in a specific context. At the same time, we don't want to impose our personal vision on the issue: our aim is rather to create a critical framework that could help people develop their point of view on what the institution is offering to them and the territory they are working on.

The very first step of the project is research on the topic of institutional critique in relation to the definitions and methodologies that have been elaborated in the last fifty years. The first two phases of institutional critique (in the 1960s/1970s and in the 1980s/1990s) have lost an immense part of their initial power due to the fact that they have become institutionalised and subsequently used in order to generate profit rather than critical framework. We hope to propose a dynamic form of institutional critique that will actively promote discussion and reform through dialogue, rather than create a project that is doomed to become institutionalised.

After this more general phase, we will focus more on the local situations, trying to establish a dialogue with the local artistic communities active in these three countries in order to make them aware of the aims of the symposium tour. This phase will be very important especially in countries, such as Italy or Poland, that at this moment can be considered marginal in the European cultural debate. We will share with these communities all the material that we will

collect about the topic: interviews, short workshops, talks, etc., in order to allow them to get in touch with the theme and allow them to participate actively in the symposium. In this part of the project the exchange between the organisations will be fundamental, although due to the profound peculiarities of the various contexts it will be conceived by each partner in a different way. We would like every participant to be completely aware of what the territory needs an institution to do, and additionally evaluate if we really need to have a traditional institution in such a complex moment.

Through the analysis of the institution in various contexts through the “dream institution” format, we will be able to discuss potential changes that could be applicable to specific contexts. In terms of the traditional institution, we will evaluate what the true need, role and meaning of the institution currently is and what it should be.

There is undeniable overlap between politics, culture and economy. Art in contemporary society is fully dependent on the system of capitalism; creativity and inventiveness is channeled into the primary goal of reception and subsequent sale of artworks. This monetary dependence fuels a connection with social life, which forms a culture around art. Due to the high monetary value attached to works of art, they have been converted into ‘symbolic legitimization of class society’ (Ray). While ideally art is an autonomous activity, it reverts into something that ‘captures and renders harmless rebellious energies and dissipates pressures for change. In this way art is an ideological support for the social status quo and contributes to the reproduction of class society’ (Ray).

This perverse domination of art feeds into the current structure of institutions within society. Art is exploited by institutions and exploited to give value at the exact time when it is most politically, economically or socially profitable. There is an inherent imbalance; the artworks that are considered most “valuable” are merely the works that have been most effectively manipulated by the capitalist system. Institutions are forced to cooperate due to lack of funds; thus they are dependent on the demands of the consumer economy.

We must ask ourselves the question of why even continue with this institutional mode of framing art if it is an empty practice devoid of critical and original thought. Is it rewarding to pander to the capitalist system, idly sit back and watch as significant critical and ideological framework is pushed out of the forefront? In order to combat this, we must put forth an immense effort in order to generate “alternative approaches”.

It is already common knowledge that art, politics and economy are inextricably linked; how do we utilise and add to this knowledge in order to create innovative solutions? One of the main problems with previous institutional critique was the fact that it remained limited within the art field. It was self-referential, shrouded in jargon and further prevented from enacting change by being institutionalised within the offending organisations themselves, neutralising any potential critical framework.

A goal of this process is additionally to ask ourselves and the general public the fundamental question of why the institution should exist. Ideally, what should it stand for, what should be its aims of production? For some, this correlates with the extremely personal interpretation

influenced by psychologist Sigmund Freud's interpretation of dreams; that layout of the museum reflects the dominant ideas of a dream and interprets the world accordingly (Rosalyn Deutsche). As stated by Bataille in 1971, 'the museum is the colossal mirror in which man finally contemplates himself in every respect, finds himself literally admirable, and abandons himself to the ecstasy expressed in all the art magazines'. In essence, the institution produces a 'spectacle of desire' (Montmann).

According to this analysis, museums should be actively attempting to interact with the public in order to get influence for a variety of dreams. In this sense, the museum would be an ally of the public, a medium for achieving unrealised potentialities. In a logical sense, this is entirely impossible. There is no overriding public goal; just as every human has different dreams, one institution cannot be expected to represent every viewpoint, or else it would be disjointed and conflicting. The misuse of this power could result in either the unjust manipulation or alienation of the general public.

What becomes of the institution in times of crisis? Instead of being a vessel for the desires, aspirations and improvement of society, it becomes a façade with no critical framework, a tool for manipulation, a world in which the true validation of art is a result of institutional approval. As previously mentioned, this notion is entangled in the politics, economics and social structure of society. When societal structures blindly support the institution, this is problematic. When institutions pretend to introduce critical discourse but in reality pander to the current trends while producing vapid shows, this is a problem. When there is no backlash amongst major institutions reaching millions upon millions throughout the years, this is a major problem.

There is the paradox that when the original desires for the creation of the museum are attempted to be met, the general public and government are unsatisfied. In this context, it seems that the way to most effectively introduce institutional critique would be from an independent organisation, which does not depend primarily on public sponsorship.

This provides further insight into the question of whether the goal of institutional critique should be the reform, rather than the destruction, of the institution. The main point is not how to be most radical, but rather how to most effectively alter the institution in order to enact a criticality that will be most constructive for society as a whole.

Thus, instead of blatantly rejecting the museum, we must strike a delicate balance. It cannot overtly cling to the museum, but it additionally cannot rely on the established institutional structures within the primary art field (Raunig). Culture and society are changing; how do we adapt the current institutional format in order to properly serve society?

STEP 2: HOW IS THE ORGANISATION FUNDED?

As a non-profit association based in Bari, W-est has received financial support from the Apulia Regional Council. This Institution has decided to support the activities considering the innovative character of the project, the young age of the group members and the strong

impact on the cultural life of the city. These aspects, together with the international perspective of all the activities, gave the association the opportunity to get in touch with foreign cultural institutions operating in Italy in order to cooperate with them for financial support. The success of individual projects in partnerships with these organisations has allowed W-est to begin to discuss the future implementation of activities financed under the same terms. The large number of other non-profit institutions and professionals working in the field of contemporary art that have cooperated with the association in the early months of the project has enabled the creation of a network beneficial to start working on projects to be presented to European funders. W-est from the beginning has been very attentive to the context in which it decided to operate. For this reason, local agents have decided for various reasons to support the association. The successful development of the activities of the corporation is an additional reason why these local agents decide to continue their sponsorship. Sponsors often rely on international projects in order to give them visibility. After the first phase of activities finished (residency for contemporary art curators, labs, workshops) W-east is evaluating, among other ideas, the feasibility of an agency for artists that can support them in their creative elaboration. This specific aspect of our activities called "incubatore" can provide some incomes to reinvest in the objectives of W-est, according with the Italian state law about the management of not-profit spaces. Another source of extra revenue is provided by fees paid by the supporting members, allowing us access to a range of initiatives usually guaranteed only to the direct participants.

ORGANISATION'S MISSION:

The purpose of Vessel is to create a dynamic container for discussion and dialogue. To elaborate on this further, it is important to note the concept of marginality. This applies in the broader context to the mainstream contemporary art scene in Western Europe, versus the marginal (outside the boundaries of the mainstream) Eastern Europe. A microcosmic example of this is Southern Italy, specifically, Bari, Italy. Vessel is positioned in this area in order to provide local artists with access to the international contemporary art scene without having to leave behind their entire culture, family and tradition. By hosting one curator from Eastern Europe and one from Western Europe, Vessel aims to allow for a discourse and diffusion of curatorial methodology amongst a variety of cultures. The curators present a lecture on their practice to the general public, which allows for interaction on a local level.

This dialogue will additionally serve to enrich and enhance the practice of the visiting curators as well as Vessel founding curators. A major part is the evolution of curatorial practice, which comes out of inter-curatorial talks focusing on redefinition of not only the role of the contemporary curator, but additionally the roles and function of the art system itself.

Participative members in this active dialogue are members of the Vessel archive, a group of artists chosen by Vessel's Scientific Committee, which is composed of an international team of curators. The international team allows for a wider range of voices for discussion.

Another portion of Vessel is devoted to helping a variety of projects, multidisciplinary in nature, come into fruition. Our overriding emphasis is on the process behind the art and not the physical, tangible product produced. By working with groups focused on social, environmental and political change, Vessel aims to aid the integration of the art world with a variety of fields, fostering long lasting and meaningful changes within society.

ORGANISATION'S MAIN ACTIVITIES:

Vessel hosts curatorial residencies each month, each one varying, but generally being about four weeks. There were four cycles of residencies and each cycle had one curator from Eastern Europe and one from Western Europe. At the beginning of each residency, the curators gave a talk to the general public concerning their practice. Presentations also include talks by Vessel co-curators Viviana Checcia and Anna Santomauro at Vessel as well as locations in Venice. Additionally, Vessel hosted guests who did not stay for a full residency, but still gave public talks.

Vessel curators in residence are given the chance to visit local artists in the Puglia region as well as local curators, galleries and art events. This allows for international integration with the local territory. Additionally curators are given the chance to explore the surrounding areas to Bari, within the Puglia region. These trips are as much about interacting with the artists as they are about exploring the territory and getting attuned to local issues. A large portion of this involves the curators networking in order to create international ties and connections.

Vessel helps to organise a variety of interdisciplinary workshops with the help of different associations, not just limited to the art field. Working with social, political and environmental groups, Vessel aims to go beyond being limited by solely operating within the art world. In addition to these collaborations, Vessel organises discussions with resident curators and local venues, also open to the public.

Vessel organised an international curatorial workshop to foster dialogue on the redefinition and discussion of the contemporary curator. This was successful on many levels; it not only drew a wide international pool of participants, but posed a variety of substantial topics which were then summarised through the venue of a public conference.

In order to continue with wide international visibility, Vessel participates with a variety of media sources to provide interviews describing our process-based curatorial approach. This in addition to interviews and interaction on a local level serves in order to connect the territory with a broader context.

Vessel serves as an “incubator” for multidisciplinary projects, helping with organisation, planning, visibility and participation. In this manner Vessel is able to affect and permeate multiple societal layers. Additionally, Vessel hosts events aimed at critically examining, reinterpreting and reexamining the role of the contemporary curator. This ties in to Vessel’s didactic aims of providing the local area with the information and tools in order to create a critical framework.

STEP 3: SUMMARY

Our project is motivated by a need to understand the function of the institution within the contemporary cultural system. It articulates a partnership between four institutions, two of which have a recognised and established status in the local-national context and the international art-world (Van Abbemuseum and Mostyn Gallery) whereas the other two (Vessel and Labirynt Gallery) see themselves rather as institutional “floating” structures which benefit from an increased flexibility in connecting contexts, geographical spaces and international cultural operators.

The project begins by researching the specific issues and urgencies that occur in each of the local and national contexts where these institutions function (Italy, Netherlands, Poland, UK). In a second phase, we will analyse these different approaches to cultural production in Europe and promote dialogue and information exchange between these different contexts. We are asking ourselves what is “an institution” today, which role the institutions should play in the cultural production of a specific area in order to respond to the needs of the area itself, and how critical approaches towards these themes are possible. Doing so we aim to elaborate an idea of what an “ideal” institution should be in order to support and develop culture and activate a critical dialogue with the cultural agents working in specific contexts. We want to create a critical framework to help people develop their viewpoint on what the institution is offering to them and their territory. In this process, we will involve experts from different fields: philosophers, architects, curators, artists and economists. We consider the format which best responds to our aims a “nomad symposium”, which will allow us to explore a variety of experiences and provoke a wide dialogue about this topic

Our approach is significantly influenced by the heritage of institutional critique. We believe that by re-questioning its premises and developments and by connecting them with the specific problems of local artistic communities and audiences we will be able to achieve an original approach to finding solutions. This will be encapsulated in a process of dissemination of significant material about the topic of institutional criticism; local cultural operators will have access to books, interviews, workshops, and talks: this “conceptual baggage” will constitute the base of discussions in our “nomad symposium”. A series of questions will be approached: how are “traditional” cultural institutions supposed to adapt to the complex economic, social and cultural context? What should an institution “ideally” stand for, and what should the aims of its production? If culture and society are changing, how do we adapt current institutional formats in order to properly serve society?

STEP 6: PARTNERS

The Labirynt artistic program featured in the Gallery was formed in the mid seventies and consequently promoted two branches of art: conceptual and analytic. Although this

guaranteed the gallery an important place on the cultural map of Poland, gradually the gallery become perceived as a predictable or even conservative place for presenting art. For the past year, the director of the gallery has been Waldemar Tatarczuk, who faces the necessity of introducing progressive changes in programing and the management system as well as renegotiating the role of the institution in the region.

Labirynt Gallery is located in Lublin, in the Eastern part of Poland, which is still perceived as peripheral in terms of culture and economy. On the other hand, Lublin aspires to become the Cultural Capital of Europe which has initiated changes in city activities in the field of culture.

The small size of the Labirynt Gallery, paired with the obligation to present art to broad public which are connected to municipal cultural institution requires new forms of communication with the audience within the current art discourse.

The Labirynt Gallery will prepare program of the seminar in close cooperation with Anna Smolak and Magdalena Ujma, experienced curators who are well acquainted with alternative curatorial models and the dialogue between East and West within the contemporary art field. The framework of the seminar will be built on the specific conditions for curators working in Eastern Europe, management in times of crisis, new curatorial strategies and alternative forms of self-organising.

The purpose of the seminar is to recognize the needs of the institution in the dynamically changing environment as well as analyse curatorial models applied so far in Eastern Europe in relation to the dominating Western discourse.

The content of the seminar will be followed up by a summer school for curators, which, through the format of workshops, will attempt to work out new curatorial methodology to meet contemporary challenges with particular focus on the regional context.

STEP 7: PARTNERS

Mostyn, Wales

Situated in Llandudno on the north Wales coast, Mostyn is the largest publicly funded contemporary art gallery in Wales. Its purpose is to launch the project and provide an international platform for visibility, discussion and implementation of possible strategies for the possible forms, statutes and programs of the art institution, however temporarily and utopian this may be.

Mostyn was born in its first configuration in 1901 as the first gallery in the world with the purpose of exhibiting women artists. Thus, its reason d'etre was clear and determined from the very beginning. 110 years later, Mostyn puts itself at the forefront of the discussion about

what is/should be/may be the art institution in the 21st century, its grounds and motivation, rationale and forms of participation and sustainability.

The launch of the project in the form of an international conference is about setting a horizon, however utopian and temporary this may be, for this to trickle down in cultural and political strategies at an everyday level.

STEP 8: PARTNERS

The Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven is amongst the first of contemporary art museums created in Europe, with a collection made up of roughly 2,700 works. In terms of societal views, the museum maintains a very experimental approach, focusing on openness, hospitality and knowledge exchange. We like to think of the collection as a vessel harboring the role as the cultural “memory” in relation to seeing the museum as a public site.

This is applied through international collaboration and exchange in order to foster creative cross-fertilization, which allows the museum to be a source of inspiration, imagination and surprise for the general public and everyone involved.

As in many cases in the history of institutional critique, the critique is starting from the inside of the institution itself. Van Abbemuseum is interested in taking part in this symposium in order to further question its own position in a local and international setting.

STEP 9: ACTIVITY PLANNING

What	Who	When (from... to...)	Where
Activity 1 pre-production and preparation: 1.1 preparing communication material (flyers, website, etc) 1.2 preparation activities: labs, short workshops, meetings with artistic communities to discuss the topic	All the partners	January 9 th - March 9 th	All the cities involved
Activity 2 production: 2.1 symposium on the topic of institutional critique	Mostyn	April 10 th - 12 th	Llandudno (UK)
2.2 symposium on the topic of institutional	Vessel	June 5 th – 7 th	Bari (IT)

critique			
2.3 symposium on the topic of institutional critique	Labirynt Gallery	September 11 th - 13 th	Lublin (Poland)
2.4 symposium on the topic of institutional critique	Van Abbemuseum	September 25 th - 27 th	Eindhoven (NL)
Activity 3 post-production: 3.1 elaboration publication 3.2 production publication 3.3 Distribution of the publication	All the partners	September – December	All the cities involved

CONTEXT

The birth of the cultural institution in the 19th century was intricately linked with the articulation of the discourse of a national cultural heritage, which had to be recuperated and preserved in the frame of the nascent nation-states. Their primary role was to educate masses of workers involved in industrial development, a task preserved throughout the first half of the 20th century within a Fordist economic paradigm. The historical avant-garde raised, for the first time in history, the question of how these institutions operate, of their policies of inclusion/exclusion and of the manners in which they sanction what passes as (valuable) high culture against popular culture. The heritage of the avant-garde was developed in a range of practices and discourses, which have been canonised under the term institutional critique. If in the first instance their target was the cultural institution in the frame of the nation-state, their focus nevertheless suffered significant changes in the last four decades. Institutional critics have acknowledged that the cultural institution faces new challenges stemming from the changing economic paradigm (Postfordism, info-labour, rise of the creative industries, etc), the dismantling of nation-states into supra-national bodies and economic blocks (the EU), from the rivalry of leisure industries (Berlusconi-type of mass-media, other industries of spectacle) which today establish aesthetic and cultural norms and from the present economic crisis.

There is thus a need to understand the present role of the cultural institution in the complex changing economic, social, political and cultural context. Our project intends to explore the complexities of this issue in the context of four different countries: Italy, Poland, Netherlands and the UK. Although they are all part of Europe, and they all share worries about the economic climate, these contexts are nevertheless profoundly different. First of all, each of these countries has their specific legal framework concerning culture, institutional transparency and funding policies. There are also different expectations regarding the role of culture in society and in processes of enhancing public spaces. Variations also amount to

differences inside these nation-states, e.g. between the north and south of Italy, between England, Scotland and Wales or between the west and the east of Poland. The structure of the audiences is also different: while Van Abbemuseum and Mostyn Gallery benefit from a more informed public, Vessel and Labirynt Gallery is still trying to articulate their publics. Artistic communities have different attitudes towards institutions and the way they should work. The lack of funds in art is something Italians are well acquainted with, while this is less of an issue for UK where there is an Arts Council investing significant funds in the arts. Last but not least, problems regarding the transparency of funding are diversely perceived: Italy and Poland suffer corruption in institutions, while in the UK and the Netherlands matters are more clearly regulated.

This diversity of issues regarding institutional existence is an important resource for the project: it will permit us to learn from the varying experiences and to formulate solutions for each single context.

SHORT-TERM OBJECTIVES

In terms of short-term objectives we hope to foster a spirit of hope in the communities that we work with. We know that immediate institutional change will not occur overnight, but through the symposium and shared information with the general public, we hope for abundant participation. Ideally this would occur in organisation of the general public in order to come together and discuss what is needed in the territory. We hope to foster not only this but a discussion about cultural change, institutional control and alternative methods to institutions. Additionally, we hope to create a “dream institution” for each specific territory. This will not only allow the public to ruminate on the aforementioned topics, but it will ideally allow the community to come together and work towards change. Vessel stresses a multidisciplinary approach and would like to bring together many differing backgrounds and occupations. This is a strength to creating ties within a wide spectrum participants from the general public.

In an even broader sense, our goal is to use to our advantage the diverse locations of the participating communities. We hope that the dialogue and discourse produced throughout this process will provide a multifaceted view of the possibilities of institutional form and evolution of critical framework. By accessing multiple areas instead of simply one, we hope to give the various communities hope and encouragement that they are not alone in their struggles for reform.

Another goal is to immediately address the areas considered “marginal” within the contemporary art world, such as Poland and Southern Italy. By providing these areas with access to an international context we are also shedding light on their respective institutions that have received little past attention. We hope that this will provoke institutions to hold themselves to greater accountability and strive to produce change that was not evident in the past.

TARGET GROUP

The project is addressed mostly to the art communities: artists, curators, critics, cultural agents. We want to offer them a critical framework to evaluate the way institutions work and the relationships that they can create with institutions. We are aware of the transition time we are going through, that's why we feel as an urgency the confrontation and the dialogue with the culture professionals about the existing traditional systems in order to propose new solutions that can suit this instability phase.

OUTCOMES

The project presupposes a *preliminary phase, composed of short workshops and meetings*. This phase is conceived in order to identify target groups, to introduce the idea of the project, and to make available the tools which will raise the awareness of the object of our investigations and its motivations. The historical heritage of the discourses and practices of institutional criticism will be introduced at this step. Additionally, Vessel and Labirynt will organise two curatorial seminars on the theme of the project which will be, however, financially supported from independent sources. The *main outcome is the "nomad" series of symposia*, which will take place in each country involved in the project. In this stage we aim at submitting to public discussion the needs and expectations related to institutional practice specific to each context, and at articulating solutions to the problems identified. We will consider this process successful if in its aftermath a *critical network of cultural operators and non-experts* will begin to take shape and if they will manage to *trigger institutional change in the form of new cultural policies* adapted to the needs of the context. Last but not least, the results of the project will be crystallised in a *publication, which will reflect on the discussed topics and will disseminate information* for territories where similar issues are at stake.

ORIGINALITY

Throughout recent years, there has been a resurrected interest in tackling the challenges that institutions face within the context of the global social, political and economic unrest. Under the directorship of Maria Lind, Kunstverein München experimented with alternative exhibition paradigms, which critically examined the atmosphere of the art institution. The European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies has articulated an online platform (eipcp.net/transversal), which strives to rediscuss the legacies of institutional criticism. Additionally, in 2010 alone, three institutions with a high international profile organised symposia on the same theme. "Institution as Medium. Curating as Institutional Critique" (organized by Kunsthalle Fridericianum Kassel) explored the possibilities and limitations of critical curating within contemporary exhibition formats and institutions. De Appel & Witte de With organized "Institutional Attitudes", which attempted to respond to the question of whether institutions are capable of reactivating their capacity to influence the public sphere and whether they are able to be critical about their own practice and about its receptions. We

observe, nevertheless, that debates organised by these flagship (though progressive) institutions tend to address a community of international experts in the field of art and culture and often lose the organic ties with the local communities they emerge from. Our project tries, on the contrary, to reestablish this organic public participation by reconstructing it from the bottom-up. We are fostering the concrete needs and expectations that cultural operators and marginalised audiences from contexts such as southern Italy, Wales, Poland and the Netherlands have relating to an “ideal” institution, and inter-connecting the concrete production of shared knowledge in the exchange offered by a “nomadic” series of symposia. The answers to our most pressing question, regarding the contemporary profile of the cultural institution, will be filtered in a four-fold manner in order to engender initiatives and cultural policies. This will function as a catalyst for contexts where institutional change and reform are necessary. The partnership between the four institutions becomes, in this sense, strategic: whereas Van Abbemuseum is one of the first public museums for contemporary art to be established in Europe and Mostyn is the largest publicly funded contemporary art gallery in Wales - thus two institutions which benefit from a high international reputation - Vessel and Labirynt are young institutional initiatives, which are struggling with issues linked with contexts where contemporary art and culture are still not widely recognised. The chemistry which results from the cultural permutation of the various offered specific expertise of these institutions assures innovative approaches and outcomes.

STEP 10: AUDIENCE

The audience is one of the most important protagonists in this project, because one of our aims is to provide in-depth focus towards the conception of a critical framework created and analysed within the audience itself. This is because we would like all the participants of the institutions, either internal or external, to be more aware of the significance of the institution as well as what and why they are specifically doing.

The audience we are referring to is made up of cultural operators as well as the general public. They definitely have different interests and involvement in a topic such as this one, but they have a need in common: to re-discuss the current reality and to create with new solutions. The audience in this case will represent the participant and the beneficiary of the project at the same time.

The main concept of this project has been created observing the public and its engagement with the institutions in all the locations we are dealing with. In Bari's case the audience matter is very controversial, because they (both external and internal public of the institution) are dreaming of the creation of a Museum, yet seem quite unprepared and confused about it.

Even though we are not addressing this project in terms of a certain target (young people, children, students and so on) we know that the further development of the project will be beneficial for a variety of targets. Working for a better functionalism and a better

understanding of how to interact with the institution, as well as what to expect from that would potentially respond to the needs of any sort of individual and group.

On the other hand, the main project is addressing its activity to young and more established curators, experts of the issue, artists and cultural operators coming from a European context. For us, the geographical background of the audience is an important detail, since we are interested into the European development of this situation rather than global or universal development.

COMMUNICATION/PR STRATEGY

Our strategy consists of promoting the project in different phases.

The first step of this strategy is to create a web page (website/blog), which will allow us to publish all the aspects of the project and serve as reference for all future communication activities. At the same time we will open personal profiles and pages for the project on several social networks and online networks specifically dedicated to art communities on a global scale.

The second step will be to stimulate all our PR resources and to promote the project through our European in-field connections. This step consists of different activities and a wide variety of media, including building a unique mailing list from the mailing lists of the three institutions involved in the project as well as research activities in order to add to this list all the institutions which may be interested in the project and localised near the places where the symposia will go on. This mailing list will also directly contact key people within the European art system in order to make them aware of the project and its importance.

These first two steps are more concerned with the art system and will start far before the beginning of the project, in order to generate discussion between the people working in the art and culture sector and to get them talking about the project.

The third step will be advertising. Our aim is to find an international media partner with a capillary distribution of its magazine, to work closely with this partner in order to get editorials related to the project, possibly buy advertising (also in other magazines), and, at the end of the project, publish with this partner a small release with reports and results of the project itself that could be distributed with or within the magazine.

The fourth step consists of three mailings, at least two weeks before each symposium, with art mailing service (e-flux or e-artnow). This is intended in order to reach the wide public interested in art and culture globally.

The fifth step is to locally promote the event, especially through institutions (schools, academies, universities, museums, galleries, art groups, etc.), to reach all the people who don't specifically work in this sector but are aware of the issues that the project wants to discuss.

These last steps have the goals to reach a larger public and to promote participation at the symposia. Of course the first steps are necessary to get maximum results from these last

ones, and vice-versa. The first steps alone are not sufficient to give the project the importance and resonance it deserves and needs in order to get real results on the cultural and artistic research at the basis of its mission.

LONG TERM OBJECTIVES

Our long term objectives are: (1) *to produce a study in the format of a publication which will produce guidance in regards to the conditions and possibilities of institutional evolution and development;* (2) *to create a critical mass of experts and non-experts in the cultural field with an informed awareness of the role and tasks of cultural institutions in the contemporary social, political and economic climate;* (3) *to support alliances between cultural operators and connected actors in the social, economic, and political fields articulated with the aim of influencing institutional change in the contexts where it is required.*

Through our first objective we are trying to synthesize the experience gathered in our “nomadic” series of symposia and articulate them in the format of a publication, which could serve as a resource for contexts with similar concerns. Especially for the case of marginal contexts we are trying to stress the idea that the contemporary cultural institution is more than the traditional museum or opera house. Instead of merely being a place for aesthetic experiences disconnected from our daily life experiences, it is a site for engagement, which can defend and promote interests of different constituencies of a democratic society. Through our second and third objectives we aim at raising a critical consciousness among cultural operators and non-experts about the importance of cultural institutions in the contemporary society. We believe that flexible open and transparent cultural institutions are instrumental for the continuous process of a society’s democratisation. The critical mass we hope to articulate following our series of meetings and “nomad” symposia will have a primary role in enhancing and influencing policies of institutional change.

STEP 11: EXPERTISE

The organisers of this project are recognised international experts in curatorship, art management, critical studies, cultural policies, art history, theory, and practice, etc.

Viviana Checchia (1982) is co-curator of Motore di Ricerca at Vessel. She curated, among others, “There’s something to this (but I don’t know what it is)” at Nitra Gallery – Slovakia (2010) and Twist with Eleonora Farina at uqbar, 91mQ, Golden Parachutes and Hungarian Institute of Culture in Berlin (2011). She organized a series of talks/screenings on art and social change as well as Eastern European art. She took part in the AICA International Summer Seminar Program of Art (2009) and the Gwangju Foundation Course for International Curators (2010).

Alfredo Cramerotti (1967) is a writer, curator, editor and artist. He is Director of Mostyn Gallery (Wales, UK) and co-curator of the Chamber of Public Secrets. He was senior curator at QUAD Derby and co-curated the Manifesta 8 European biennial of contemporary art. He wrote "Aesthetic Journalism: How to inform without informing", Intellect Books, 2009 and "Unmapping the City: Perspectives of Flatness", Intellect Books 2010. He collaborated with DigiMag/DigiCulture, Nolens Volens, Transmission, Brumaria, Esse Arts+Opinions, Altyazi and MOLE Magazine.

Charles Esche (1962) is a curator and writer. He is Director of Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven and co-director of *Afterall Journal and Books*. He is a board member of Manifesta. He has co-curated the 9th Istanbul Biennial 2005 and the Gwangju Biennale 2002 in Korea. From 1993-1997 he was Visual Arts Director at Tramway, Glasgow. He has written *The Netherlands, for example* (ed.), JRP/Ringier, 2007; and "Collective Creativity", Fredericianum, Kassel, 2006. He has written for art magazines Artforum, Frieze, Parkett and Art Monthly.

Anna Smolak (1976) is a curator based in Poland. She holds an MA in Art History and Cultural Diplomacy at the Collegium Civitas and Adam Mickiewicz Institute in Warsaw. Since 2004 she has been working for the Contemporary Art Gallery Bunkier Sztuki. Previously, she ran the private "Sito" Gallery, which actively promoted young artists. She was co-curator of the TRANSKULTURA project (2006-2008). She has taken part in the GeoAIR Collaborative Cultural Project/ Art Residency in Tbilisi (2011). Her latest projects include *Follow the White Rabbit! Exhibition for children* (2010) and *Katarzyna Krakowiak. Panorama* (2011).

Anna Santomauro (1983) is co-curator of Motore di Ricerca at Vessel. She collaborates with neon>campobase, a non profit contemporary art association. She curated video projects (Playlist, neon>focus on video artists and, neon>video selection). Since 2009 she has cooperated with Viviana Checchia for *1h art*, *Festa del Migrante* and *Green Days*. She is carrying out research focused on the social changes connected to the new mobility phenomenon and on the concept of identity and community. She publishes articles at Arte & Critica magazine.

Vlad Morariu (1983) is a philosopher and art critic. He has a PhD from Loughborough University School of the Arts, English and Drama. His thesis explores the present conditions and possibilities of critical practices within art institutions, with a focus on institutional critique. He has activated as artist, curator, and cultural organizer, and contributed to the development of the *Vector / Periferic Biennial platforms* in Iași, Romania. He published texts in collective publications (*Romanian Cultural Resolution*, Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2011; *Atlas of Transformation*, JRP/Ringier, 2010) and in magazines and journals such as "Idea. Arts + Society" (RO), "Boekman" (NL) and "Framework"(FI).

Rachel Pafe (1990) is a student majoring in art history and studio art at University of Maryland, College Park. She has been an intern for Vessel from March 2011 until the present. She is working as project assistant, conducting all background research needed for project fruition.

STEP 12: EVALUATION TECHNIQUES AND INDICATORS

The evaluation of the project will be both quantitative and qualitative. We will edit a questionnaire for the public to fill out for each location. This questionnaire will continue in quarterly per-year increments in order to monitor over the course of time following the project.

More than understanding the success of the project itself, of utmost importance for us is to consider the feedback for the further development of the project itself in the future. We will try, together with the students of the Academy, the University and various cultural operators, to investigate on a deeper level the involvement of the local and national operators, which will be contacted for written or video interviews about what has been done within the project.

The evaluation will also consist of reporting simple or serious changes that may take place in institutions after we start the project.

SUSTAINABILITY

In the first phase there are four countries involved: Italy, Poland, Netherlands and United Kingdom. The topics approached have particular relevance for these four countries, but are strongly present throughout the European scene. Once the project is completed, we will submit all the material in conjunction with the first conclusions to other European institutions. The idea of using the format of the symposium is intended to ensure that the proposed discussion can continue through the involvement of Universities and Academies, in this way raising the awareness of the younger generation. The realisation of these future meetings will be attended by some of the people involved in the central phase of the project. In this case funds will be used for artistic mobility guaranteed from each respective country of origin.

Among the objectives of the project there is the additional goal of raising public awareness to a new and more critical vision. For this reason, the activities will be followed by each partner in a way that can allow comparison and exchange of new awareness. These activities (meetings, round tables, public discussions) have the considerable advantage of being carried out for a very affordable cost and each partner will be able to afford them from its own funds.

We will also involve the local associations because they can create new groups of research. The associations will be in charge of the realisation of dossiers related to the development of

the arguments discussed during the project and the results achieved. In this way they can contribute to the increase of material on this topic.

Our project also aims to create a model that can be easily reproduced in other countries, resulting in the creation of a new network. Using the web we can create a blog or an online platform following the path and progress of our analysis.

Appendix C - Call for International Curatorial Workshop, 2013

This link contains the open call for the International Curatorial Workshop (ICW) 2013 focusing on Social Engaged Art Practices and taking place within the Capitana area (the area of the hamlets).

<http://www.vesselartproject.org/en/2013/03/31/2013-curatorial-residencies-and-international-curatorial-workshop-call-for-application/>

Appendix D – Terra Piatta campaign

This appendix consists of the English version of the *Terra Piatta* campaign. This campaign was created for *Terra Piatta's* application to the 100,000 Euro award, called *che fare?* This text was circulated in both English and Italian, both online and on paper.

TERRA PIATTA

VOTE FOR TERRA PIATTA!!

We are glad to announce that Vessel's project Terra Piatta is among the 40 projects shortlisted by the open call cheFare and has accessed the Second Step of the selection process. The projects are online and can be voted for by whoever has an email account: the first 8 projects will be analyzed by the jury and only one of them will get the grant to produce the project.

This is a great occasion for Vessel to create a more stable structure on the territory and to interact responsibly with its features and issues: this is our main challenge!

HOW TO VOTE FOR TERRA PIATTA?

Please register to the website and click "Vota" here <http://www.che-fare.com/progetti-approvati/terra-piatta/>

You will receive two different emails. In one of them you will find a link: click on the link to confirm your vote! The other email gives you a password that you can use in case you want to vote more projects.

PLEASE SHARE YOUR SUPPORT ON FACEBOOK AND TWITTER and help us to spread the voice!

Terra Piatta aims to create a hub of research and artistic, cultural and social production in the "Capitanata" area. The project will promote the cooperation between the already existing local practices run by organizations, associations and individuals working on the regeneration of the area. It will also include an international network of artists and cultural professionals interested in the social empowerment of rural and semi-rural areas.

cheFare is a tool that researches new ways of making culture nowadays in Italy. It is a space that allows non-profit organizations and companies to develop their practice, thus creating collaborations and activating local networks. cheFare is a platform that privileges the social impact and narrates highly innovative cultural projects.

Appendix E - DVD *Lavori in corso* (eng: *Work in progress*) video

This video is an example of one of the numerous site visits undertaken by Vessel members and curators in residence. This visit took place in Brindisi and was arranged by a local practitioner called Daniele Guadalupi.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9kytUCi-mo>

Appendix F - DVD *Paese Nuovo* video

This video was circulating online during *Paese Nuovo*'s candidature to *Visible* award. The video presents a proposal elaborated by Fernando Garcia Dory and Vessel after the analysis of the context made during the International Workshop, 2013.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5o7aB2Nk0Ec>

Appendix G - *Rural in Action* video

This series of videos shows the latest workshop hosted by Vessel in the hamlets area. Some of the videos are in English, some in Italian and some in Spanish.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-GWp2V2YQps&list=PLKQi86dfXuoaU1mMYQCnN_r04tW3D6T5C

Appendix H – Rural in Action’s tutor feedback

8/31/2015 Gmail - THANK YOU VERY MUCH ;-)))



Viviana Checchia <vivianachecchia@gmail.com>

THANK YOU VERY MUCH ;-)))

Asuncion Molinos Gordo <asuncionmolinos@gmail.com> 13 gennaio 2015
09:42 A: viviana@vesselartproject.org, Viviana Checchia
<vivianachecchia@gmail.com>, Anna Santomauro
<annasantomauro83@gmail.com>, Andrea Vara
<andreavara82@gmail.com>

Dear Viviana, Anna and Andrea,

First of all, I will like to thank you for your hospitality and professionalism; it has been a great pleasure to work with you!!

This workshop had a great impact on me for so many reasons, and all of them good!!

In despite of the difficulties, it has been a extraordinary learning experience that I believe has reveal a very complex scenario, so, so, so, similar to the one we have in my region.

Projects like Vessel are extremely courageous and generous and it is thanks to people like you guys that there is a possibility for change.

The challenge that we have ahead of us as cultural practitioners who are concern for the rural cultures is overwhelming. So much harm has been done, is not only about rural exodus, bad roads, lack of services, abandonment...and many other things that were mentioned during the workshop.

The biggest damage is the disintegration of the self. When we, the rural people, see ourselves as the leftovers of progress, when we think about our

neighbors and the people from our region as: “the losers who were not smart enough or rich enough to catch the train of bloody modernity” When our thinking is polluted with the most ferocious forms of capitalism, in which even social relations, have turn into a commodity to trade with in order to pay our gas bills... we are facing a very clear example of acculturation in which even ourselves believe that we are only cheap labor for the north, with no head and no thoughts and not culture of our own.

The comments of Said and Renato are not an anecdote or an accident, unfortunately this is the way in which the people of my region also think, that is why their words had such a great effect on me (era “llover sobre mojado”)

How on earth can we fuel some hope and optimism into our regions? How can we work to rebalance our communities and make them stronger and less vulnerable to the colonial powers? How can we gain back our confidence and trust in ourselves as a rural civilization and stop thinking about ourselves as a “mistake” in the development process?

For some strange reason I still believe we can do this and we must do this through culture. Culture is the fabric that negotiates every single human activity; we need to be able to knit it to fit all and not only a few.

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=d57cec9ebe&view=pt&q=asuncion molinos%40gmail.com&qs=true&search=query&msg=14ae2ac98e7672e6&siml...> 1/2

8/31/2015 Gmail - THANK YOU VERY MUCH ;-)))

For some reason, in my head the workshop is not over, it just started. I will like to give some reading to the participants, especially to Angelica, Emilio, Rosalia, Maximo y Renato. And I will like to facilitate my email address for possible conversations or exchange of opinions, recommend new readings... What do you think?

Again, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to be with you and to take part in the fearless project of Vessel, Rural In Action.

I have so much respect for your extraordinary work. Sois unos valientes!!
Much love Asun

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=d57cec9ebe&view=pt&q=asuncion molinos%40gmail.com&qs=true&search=query&msg=14ae2ac98e7672e6&siml...> 2/2

Appendix I – More recent curatorial projects following from Vessel

Since completing the practical element of this research, I have had the opportunity to use the tools developed through Vessel, adopting the four-fold framework for tailoring community based projects to their specific context.

An invitation to be part of the curatorial team for the Athens Biennale in 2013 presented me with an unfamiliar place, and a large-scale exhibition as a pre-determined outcome. I was able to influence the event by offering this framework for involving specific audiences, using participatory methods, working collaboratively across disciplines and, in doing so, challenging the overall format of the Biennale. I focused my efforts on a series of dialogically based interventions, with the result that the curatorial team reached a consensus that it was important to give more relevance to participatory elements of the programme and not just to the static exhibition.

The Young Artist of the Year Award in 2014 was another unfamiliar context. I created an educational platform online for nine young Palestinian artists and ten experts to share knowledge in order for the artists to deliver their local knowledge. In this case I used the process-driven model to engage with the situated epistemologies of the artists involved.

In my most recent role as Public Engagement Curator at The Centre for Contemporary Arts in Glasgow, I have still found it useful to refer to the four principles, even though the area is northern, urban and with institutional support. This has been a positive way of engaging with the Scottish context and has equipped me with the tools necessary for approaching a new location with due reflection and care. I was able to articulate the reasoning behind this approach, and the Director agreed that my role would remain silent (in reflection mode) for the first five months. This was beneficial, as the first three months were used to crystallise three topics of focus through dialogue and collaboration.