CHAPTER 3

EU Cultural Policy: Europe from Above

1 Focus on Two Agendas

The potential of cultural policy for promoting and bringing together integration processes in several policy fields is generally acknowledged (see Chapter 8). In this chapter, we provide an overview of the EU cultural policy, interpreting it as an instrument for forming Union citizens and bridging the gap between them and the EU, as well as a means of constructing the EU community and legitimizing the EU integration processes. In other words, EU cultural policy aims at advancing the EU’s politics of belonging by using culture to promote these objectives. In addition to culture, the notions of identity, participation, and citizenship have a key role in EU’s politics of belonging, and all of them are entwined in the rhetoric of EU cultural policy. Here we separate them analytically into two clusters that we name ‘identity-building agenda’ and ‘participatory agenda’. Under the ‘identity-building agenda’, we analyze discussions in the EU cultural policy in which factors that can be called cultural are referred to as elements of identity – such as cultural heritage, traditions, languages, religions, everyday practices, arts, values, symbols, and cultural institutions and activities. Under ‘participatory agenda’, we examine discussions in which citizens’ participation and citizenship are regarded as a means of creating citizens’ belonging to the EU and Europe. Our discussion is based on close reading of key policy documents on issues such as the Creative Europe programme, a critical reading of earlier academic studies on EU cultural policy, and the authors’ previous empirical analysis of EU cultural policy discourse.

We start this chapter with an overview of the development of EU cultural policy and its main initiatives. In particular, we introduce the Creative Europe programme, together with its predecessors Culture and Culture 2000, which have been the EU’s core culture programmes and form the umbrella for the three cases in our book – the European Capital of Culture (ECOC), European Citizen Campus (ECC), and European Heritage Label (EHL). Then we discuss how the EU’s politics of belonging has developed in the context of cultural policy around two key ideas – European identity and participation. First, we consider how EU cultural policy connects to the concept of identity and the strengthening of its European dimension since its inception. After this, we discuss the participatory approach of EU cultural policy as well as its links to citizenship of the Union. These two sections start with a more general outline on
the identity-building agenda and participatory agenda, respectively, followed by a review specifying the role of the EU projects as well as the ECOC and the EHL actions in these agendas.

2 Development of the EU’s Cultural Policy and Initiatives

The idea that integration covers not only economics, but also culture has been present in the action of the European Community from its early years. Long before its explicit official cultural policy, the European Community had given culture multifaceted instrumental value, using it as a channel of power to promote integration and to build its image and identity (e.g. Shore 1993; 2000; Shore and Black 1996). On the other hand, scholars (e.g. Rosamond 2000; Herrmann and Brewer 2004; Sassatelli 2006, 2009; Näss 2009) have pointed out how political actors in the European Community anticipated that cultural and social integration would emerge as a spill-over effect of cooperation in other sectors or policy fields, such as the economy and trade. According to this understanding, increasing cultural integration would, in turn, strengthen institutional integration (Herrmann and Brewer 2004, 1–2). Integration in different fields would hence be mutually reinforcing. To support this, the European Community and the EU have created various policies and practices to promote and govern matters related to culture.

From its earlier incarnation as the European Community, the Union has cooperated with other transnational actors in the field of culture, such as the Council of Europe and UNESCO. Culture has been at the core of the activities of the Council of Europe since the beginning, as is indicated by its initiation of the European Cultural Convention, signed in 1954. The Council of Europe has a major influence on the EU’s political discourses. Its rhetorical formulations and areas of interest have been absorbed into the EU’s political discourses and goals, particularly in questions related to culture (Sassatelli 2009, 43; Patel 2013, 6). For example, the Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Council of Europe 2005) has impacted on the EU’s cultural heritage policy. The Council of Europe’s European Heritage Days have been organized in cooperation with the European Commission since 1999. Collaboration with Europa Nostra, in turn, is manifested by the Europa Nostra Awards for Cultural Heritage, which have been awarded in cooperation with the Commission since 2002. These were later renamed as the European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage and then as the European Heritage Awards in 2018.

The first steps in the cultural policy arena of the European Community were taken in the 1970s. Since 1977, the European Commission has published cultural
communications, setting guidelines for the cultural activity of the European Community (e.g. EC 1977, 1982, 1987, 1992, and 1994). These early communications raise issues of free trade and discuss how to apply the treaty establishing the European Economic Community to the cultural sector. As early as these documents, culture was considered “as a means of arousing a greater feeling of belonging and solidarity amongst Europeans” (EC 1977, 5; see also EC 1987, 5, 7). These communications increasingly took up issues such as values, reaching wider audiences for cultural productions in Europe, or creating a European cultural area, which have become core points of the EU’s cultural policy.

In the 1980s, the European Community launched cultural initiatives more actively, and the European Council adopted several resolutions dealing with cultural matters, such as films, the mobility of artists, and networking libraries. In 1987, the European Community officially established the Council of Ministers of Culture and the ad hoc Commission of Cultural Issues. Through its structural funds, the European Community provided funding for culture well before it had established culture as an official policy sector. Between the early 1980s and mid-1990s, the funding instruments for cultural heritage included the European Historical Monuments and Sites Fund, initiated by the European Parliament, which provided financial support for restoring and conserving archaeological and heritage sites (Niklasson 2016, 82–91).

The Maastricht Treaty – the founding agreement of the EU adopted in 1992 – made culture an official sector of EU action, as it introduced an article explicitly focusing on culture. Since then, the EU’s interest in culture and the development of its cultural policy has been increasing. During the 1990s and 2000s, the EU implemented various new cultural programmes and actions offering economic support for inter-European collaboration in the field of culture. Kaleidoscope, a Community support programme for artistic and cultural projects with a European dimension, ran from 1996 to 2001. It aimed at enhancing artistic and cultural creation and fostering dissemination and knowledge about culture by focusing mainly on performing arts, visual and spatial arts as well as multimedia and applied arts. A Community support programme in the field of books and reading called Ariane sought to promote dissemination and translation of literature in the five-year period from 1996. The third Community action programme for the same period, Raphael, focused on cultural heritage, with the objective of promoting, conserving, and restoring cultural heritage “of European importance” (EP&C 1997, 33), improving transnational cooperation, and encouraging the general public to participate in preserving and developing cultural heritage.

Cultural policy gained prominence in the EU during the 2000s (e.g. Sassatelli 2009; Näss 2010; O’Callaghan 2011; Lähdesmäki 2012a) when several
new cultural initiatives were launched. The ECOC (see Chapter 1) had already been turned from an intergovernmental initiative to an EU action in 1999. Europeana – a European digital library, archive, and museum – was initiated by the Commission in 2005, focusing on digital heritage, the digitalization of (non-digital) heritage, and open access. The EHL was launched as an intergovernmental scheme in 2006 and turned into an EU action in 2011 (see Chapter 1). In addition, the European Parliament became active in cultural matters during the 2000s. For instance, the Parliament made a decision on establishing a visitors’ center in 2005 due to which the Parlamentarium, an exhibition space of 3,000 square meters, was opened in the administrative block of the Parliament in Brussels in 2011. The decision to establish a House of European History was made in 2008 by the European Parliament, and this history museum was opened in Brussels in 2017. The role of culture in the EU’s international relations was highlighted in the Commission’s communication on international cultural relations (EC 2016a), which emphasized cultural diversity as an important asset both within the EU and in its international relations. This communication connected culture to sustainable social and economic development and sought to promote cooperation on cultural heritage, as well as intercultural dialogue for peaceful inter-community relations.

The first European Community framework programme in support of culture, Culture 2000, was established for the period from 2000 to 2004, and subsequently extended to the end of 2006. The programme merged the fields of the previous three Community action programmes into one single instrument financing and regulating cultural cooperation. Its activities were continued in the Culture programme (2007–2013) and in the Creative Europe programme (2014–2020). These programmes sought to further artistic and cultural creation and their competitiveness, as well as to enhance knowledge and dissemination of culture. The main objective was to advance mobility and cooperation between member states in the field of culture (EP&C 1996; EP&C 2000, 2–3; EP&C 2006b, 4; EP&C 2013, 226). The Creative Europe programme consisted of Media and Culture sub-programmes and a cross-sectoral strand. The Culture sub-programme comprised five support measures, including “transnational cooperative projects”, through which funding was allocated to projects such as the ECC, and “special actions”, such as the ECOC and the EHL. All our case studies in this book are thus part of this core programme in EU cultural policy, but in its successive generations. The ECOC has been included in the actions of the Kaleidoscope, Culture 2000, Culture, and Creative Europe programmes. The ECC project was funded from the Culture programme from 2013 to 2015. Finally, the EHL falls under the Creative Europe programme.
The Identity-Building Agenda in EU Cultural Policy

Since its formative phases, cultural policy has been closely entangled with the EU’s interest in identity building and its subsequent politics of creating and fostering a European identity and thereby fortifying (economic, political and cultural) unification in Europe (e.g. Shore 2000, 2006; Littoz-Monnet 2004, 2007, 2012; Sassatelli 2006, 2009; Tzaliki 2007; Näss 2009, 2010; Dewey 2010; Patel 2013; Calligaro 2014; Mattocks 2017; Lähdesmäki et al. 2020). While the rhetoric and objectives of this identity-building agenda have transformed over the decades, its core focus has been on creating belonging so that the citizens of member states would perceive the EU as a cultural and social entity close to them and their concerns, rather than a distant economic and intergovernmental organization.

In the years directly following World War II, European institutions regulating the economy and trade were established to develop an identity surpassing the exclusive national chauvinistic appeals of the past (Herrmann and Brewer 2004, 1–2). The actual emergence of the identity discourse of the European Community can be located in the 1970s. Due to the recession in this decade, the legitimacy of the European Community could no longer be based on economic prosperity. Simultaneously, the post-war consensus that the Community was a provider of stability had started to erode, not least because of the first enlargement of the Community (e.g. Calligaro 2014, 65). In this context the Declaration on European Identity, signed in Copenhagen in 1973 by the then nine member states, can be perceived as the starting point of the official discourse on the idea of European identity.

In the 1980s, the role of cultural issues in creating a sense of belonging was highlighted in the reports of the Committee on a People’s Europe (1985). These reports became influential milestones in the process of increasing the importance of cultural factors in integration, and many of their proposals were later implemented. Furthermore, the cultural article of the Treaty of Maastricht (1992, Article 128) as well as the subsequent founding treaties (Amsterdam 1997, Article 151, and Lisbon 2007, Article 167) implicitly referred to promoting a common identity by aiming at “bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore” while respecting national and regional diversity.

In the 2000s, several interrelated challenges influenced European societies and politics, the EU included (see Chapter 1). The Union has sought to respond to these by advancing the idea of unity in Europe – together with respect and tolerance for diversity – and by enhancing both symbolic and concrete European integration. As in earlier decades, culture and heritage served as political
tools in this process (Lähdesmäki 2016; 2020; Lähdesmäki et al. 2020). Highlighting the human dimension of the EU – by appealing to common cultural roots, identity, and shared values – is a means to restore the legitimacy of the EU and integration (Shore 1993, 785–786).

The Union’s official slogan ‘United in diversity’ shapes EU’s current identity discourse, which combines the collective and individual dimensions of belonging and different territorial scales – particularly the local and regional – as central elements of constructing a shared European identity. Recent cultural policy documents follow the earlier discourses on culture as a vector of identity building. In 2007, the Commission presented a ‘European Agenda for Culture in the Globalizing World’. In it, the Commission described Europe as diverse in terms of history, languages, and cultures, and at the same time united through shared values and principles (EC 2007, 2). In its communication titled ‘Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture’, the Commission repeated the importance of culture and education in producing European identity as well as “strengthening the sense of belonging together and being part of a cultural community” (EC 2017, 2). Values, cultural heritage, and diversity were seen as prerequisites of “our cultural community, our common values and identity” (EC 2017, 3), and mobility and transnational cooperation were understood as enhancing European identity and belonging. Furthermore, according to ‘A New European Cultural Agenda’, adopted by the European Commission in 2018, “Europe’s rich cultural heritage and dynamic cultural and creative sectors strengthen European identity, creating a sense of belonging” (EC 2018a, 1). In a Commission communication on the subject, cultural heritage was seen as “a major factor in defining Europe’s place in the world” and as a way of creating belonging among European citizens (EC 2014a, 2). According to the communication, several territorial scales are involved in the narrating of the past: “heritage is always both local and European”, as it is “made up of local stories that together make the history of Europe” (EC 2014a, 2–3). In another communication, the Commission perceived cultural heritage as a way of “raising awareness of common history and values, and reinforcing a sense of belonging to a common European cultural and political space” (EC 2018b, 1). These central policy documents from the first two decades of the 2000s exemplify the consolidation of the concept of belonging in the EU’s official vocabulary alongside the concept of identity and the rhetoric of “common” culture, history, and values.

Cultural programmes play a key role in the EU’s identity-building agenda. In the programmes, culture is an instrument of integration for defining Europe and the EU as a community, for producing identity for this community and
its members, and for attaching European citizens to this community. Identity comes to mean belonging and sharing ‘European culture’ as defined in the programme documents. Thus, the cultural programmes continue the trajectory paved by the Committee on a People’s Europe (1985) emphasizing cultural identity as a core element in the integration process.

The three first cultural programmes highlighted the idea of Europe as a cultural community. They referred to culture and cultural activity as central elements for conceptualizing and accomplishing the idea of a shared European identity. According to the Kaleidoscope programme documents (EP&C 1996, 20), culture is a defining element of this identity:

in reality, the most tangible and influential aspect of Europe as a whole is not merely its geographical, political, economic and social features but also its culture; whereas the perception of Europe in the world is largely determined by the position and strength of its cultural values.

The Culture 2000 and Culture programmes continued to highlight the role of culture in building identity and legitimizing EU integration (EP&C 2000, 1; EP&C 2006b, 1). Both programmes sought to support such cultural activity that helps “to increase their [i.e. the “people of Europe’s”] sense of belonging to the same community” (EP&C 2000, 6; EP&C 2006b, 8), to raise awareness of cultural diversity in the member states, and to contribute to intercultural and international dialogue. Emphasizing the goal of enhancing belonging, the Creative Europe programme mentioned ECOC and EHL as particularly useful for stimulating this kind of activities (EP&C 2013, 223).

In the three most recent cultural programmes, the idea of Europe as a cultural community was conceptualized as ”a cultural area common to the European people” (EP&C 2000, 1–2; EP&C 2006b, 2–4; EP&C 2013, 222–223). The concept of a common cultural area was not only a way of producing the EU as a cultural community but also exemplifies how EU’s cultural policy initiatives are used to create identity and belonging to this imagined community and its members. As the decision on Creative Europe (EP&C 2013, 3) stated:

Funding should also be provided for the European Capitals of Culture action and for the administration of the European Heritage Label action, as they contribute to the strengthening of the feeling of belonging to a common cultural area, to the stimulation of intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding and to the enhancement of the value of cultural heritage.
ECOC and EHL are here explicitly identified as instruments of the EU’s politics of belonging. Moreover, the decisions on these programmes linked the “common cultural area” to ideas of a “common cultural heritage” in Europe, “intercultural dialogue”, “transnational mobility”, “cultural exchanges”, and “the emergence of European citizenship”, as can be seen in the following quotations from the Culture Programme (EP&C 2006b, 2, 4):

The Council, in its abovementioned resolutions, has stressed the need to adopt a more coherent approach at Community level with regard to culture, and that European added value is an essential and determining concept in the context of European cultural cooperation, and a general condition for Community measures in the field of culture. [...]  

In order to make this common cultural area for the peoples of Europe a reality, it is important to promote the transnational mobility of cultural players and the transnational circulation of artistic and cultural works and products, and to encourage dialogue and cultural exchanges. [...]  

The general objective of the Programme shall be to enhance the cultural area shared by Europeans and based on a common cultural heritage through the development of cultural cooperation between the creators, cultural players and cultural institutions of the countries taking part in the Programme, with a view to encouraging the emergence of European citizenship.  

Cultural activities and transnational cooperation were presented as both the basis and a means for establishing this cultural area (EP&C 2000, 1–2; EP&C 2006b, 2–4; EP&C 2013, 222). Transnational mobility was regarded as equally important for constructing a European area in terms of culture as it is for economics (EC 2004, 11; EP&C 2006b, 2–3). The mobility of cultural actors and cross-border dissemination of art and cultural products were core purposes of the programmes.  

The cultural programmes mention values, history, cultural heritage, way of life, symbols, cultural events, and cultural cooperation as important and distinctively ‘European’ elements of identity. In the Culture 2000 and Culture programmes, citizens’ common values and roots were seen as central factors in their identity and “their membership of a society founded on freedom, equity, democracy, respect for human dignity and integrity, tolerance and solidarity” (EP&C 2006b, i; see also EP&C 2000, 1). The importance given to values in the context of identity and belonging echoes the value discourses of the early
phases of European integration, which became repeated in the later EU treaties and were adopted by the Charter of Fundamental Rights in 2000 (EP&C&COM 2000). In these initial and subsequent steps towards integration, the cultural sphere has been tightly linked with the goal of promoting values perceived as European (Calligaro 2014, 61). The central values emphasized in the discourse over the years include solidarity, peace, and reconciliation in the initial phase; representative democracy, the rule of law, social justice, and respect for human rights in the Copenhagen Declaration on the European Identity (CofEC 1973, 119); and liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, and equality as core principles of the Union (Treaty of Amsterdam 1997, 8; Treaty of Lisbon 2007, 10). Throughout the value discourse, Europe is presented as something sublime, and as the cradle and protector of these values.

The identity-building aspect of EU cultural policy is thus clearly present in the Creative Europe programme and its predecessors, which form the umbrella for the three cases examined in this book. Cultural programmes will “contribute actively to the development of a European identity from the grass roots”, as the Commission argued in its programme proposal for 2007–2013. It saw “theatres, museums, professional associations, research centers, universities, cultural institutes, the authorities, etc.” as intermediaries in reaching citizens and offering them “cultural actions with a European dimension” (EC 2004, 4).

However, culture is a problematic tool for building identity and belonging to Europe. While the EU seeks to overcome national and cultural divisions within Europe by furthering a sense of communality and constructing a positive feeling of belonging to Europe among its citizens, the emphasis on a common European identity may create explicit and implicit boundaries. Moreover, the narrative of Europe as a unique cultural area with its distinctive cultural heritage and history is also (mis)used by nationalist parties and extreme right-wing movements to justify political attitudes and actions that are often based on explicit xenophobic, Islamophobic, anti-Semitic, sexist, misogynist, and anti-immigration positions. Thus, culture serves as an argument to simultaneously include some and exclude (many) others and to construct Europe as a precious fortress that needs to be defended against ‘non-European others’ in particular migrants from the Middle East, Africa, and Asia (see Vejvodová 2014; Lähdesmäki 2015, 2019; Brubaker 2017; De Cesari and Kaya 2019).

Despite its controversiality, the EU’s identity-building discourse functions as a reference point for the rhetoric, programmes, and initiatives of EU cultural policy and for the actors at its different levels. EU cultural policy documents and other discourses contribute to identity discussions by both producing and reproducing conceptions of Europe and Europeanness. Furthermore, the
actors at national and local levels need to position themselves in relation to the EU’s identity-building endeavors. Whether cities applying to become the European Capitals of Culture, or projects, such as the ECC, applying for funding from the Creative Europe programme, or heritage sites applying for the EHL, they all need to use the same rhetoric in one way or another to become accepted, funded, or awarded by the EU.

4 The Role of the Projects, ECOC, and EHL in the Identity-Building Agenda

The EU’s cultural programmes explicitly seek to raise awareness of Europe through various measures, such as citizens’ cooperation within programme activities. The projects funded through the programmes, such as the ECC, serve this aim by producing and distributing knowledge about Europe, presenting Europe as an entity that can be an object of knowing and a meaningful framework for manifold matters. Moreover, the projects contribute to the programme objective of constructing EUrope as a lived and experienced place that is visible in citizens’ everyday lives, thereby making it easier for them to identify with it. Practices such as encounters with other project participants may guide the participants’ conceptions of Europe and offer elements of their identity. For example, through personal experiences of speaking and hearing several languages in the project, participants may come to regard multilingualism as a feature of a European identity. However, in many cases, EU funding and contact with participants from other member states may be perceived as the only defining link to the Europe. Nevertheless, this may be enough to strengthen the symbolic or practical presence of the EU or Europe.

In the most recent guidelines for cooperation projects funded through the Creative Europe programme, the Commission defined five priorities for the projects. One of them was to “raise awareness of common history and values, and reinforce a sense of belonging to a common European space” (EC 2019, 4). This priority indicates that the EU’s politics of belonging is explicit in its project funding. The Commission stated that funding would be available through Creative Europe for projects that enable “cultural heritage organisations [to give] a European dimension to their activities” (EC 2019, 9). This means that the purpose of the programme is not to support all cultural (heritage) activities for their own sake, but only those with an explicit “European dimension”.

As one of the EU’s best known and longest running cultural initiatives, the ECOC plays a relevant role in the EU’s politics of belonging. Focusing on urbanity and urban cultural matters, the initiative resonates with the idea of European cities as significant sites of governing the process of Europeanization.
Constructing a common European cultural area and strengthening citizens’ feeling of belonging to it have been both implicit and recently also explicitly stated aims of the ECOC since its launch as an intergovernmental event in 1985 (EP&C 2006b, 2; EP&C 2013, 223). When the initiative became an EU action in 1999, its European focus was sharpened by introducing the criterion of “European dimension” into the decision (EP&C 1999, 2). This criterion was characterized as “based principally on cultural cooperation” (ibid.). The discourse emphasizing the ‘European’ was heightened in the second decision of the ECOC action in 2006. In this decision, the required criteria for the local cultural programme was divided into two categories, “the European Dimension” and “City and Citizens”. The first category aimed to “foster cooperation between cultural operators, artists and cities from the relevant Member States”, “highlight the richness of cultural diversity in Europe”, and “bring common aspects of European cultures to the fore” (EP&C 2006a, 2). The European Commission’s guide for ECOC applicants advised cities to find their “European dimension” by linking their local culture to the “European culture”, thereby indicating “their sense of belonging” (EC 2009, 11):

In other words, candidate cities must present the role they have played in European culture, their links with Europe, their place in it and their sense of belonging. They must also demonstrate their current participation in European artistic and cultural life, alongside their own specific features. This European dimension may also be designed and perceived by the cities through the dialogue and exchange which they establish with other cultures and artists from other continents, so as to foster intercultural dialogue.

The Commission’s proposal for the third decision of the ECOC action emphasized the European dimension as the core discourse of the action (EC 2012). The new decision, made in 2014, again highlighted the idea of belonging to a common cultural area, as its first general objective was “to safeguard and promote the diversity of cultures in Europe and to highlight the common features they share as well as to increase citizens’ sense of belonging to a common cultural area” (EP&C 2014, 4). The decision continued to emphasize that the ECOC’s cultural programmes must have “a strong European dimension” (EP&C 2014, 2, 5). The meanings of this European dimension were specified by connecting them to cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, and mutual understanding between European citizens; common aspects of European cultures, heritage, and history, including European integration and current European themes; European artists and transnational cooperation; as well as attracting broad European and international public (EP&C 2014, 5).
The Commission’s latest guide for the applicant cities went on to underline how “the European dimension is at the heart of an ECOC’s programme” (EC n.d., 18) and how it can be manifested by linking the local culture to the ‘European’ (ibid., 19). The ECOC policy discourse intertwines cultural elements from the local and European levels and thus produces the ‘European’ as a multi-layered construction. This discourse avoids addressing the national layer that has been sometimes perceived in the EU cultural policy discourse as a challenge to the construction of the ‘European’ (Lähdesmäki et al. 2020). The frequent bypassing of the national in the official EU discourses indicates how nations can be interpreted as one of the EU’s ‘others’, even though, simultaneously, ‘Europe of nations’ is one of the images included in the EU’s identity building.

Several consultations and evaluation reports of the ECOC action have criticized the designated cities for giving the European dimension only a minor role in their plans and events (e.g. ECOTEC 2009; Ecorys 2011, 24; EC 2012, 3). Hence, the strengthening of the discourse of the European dimension in the ECOC policy documents can be interpreted as a response to the perceived lack of this dimension in both ECOC applications and the designated cities’ cultural programmes. Several scholars have also noted how the ‘European’ is difficult to perceive from the ECOC’s programmes and events (e.g. Myerschough 1994; Sassatelli 2002, 444; Palmer 2004, 85–86; Richards and Wilson 2004, 1945). The cities’ diverse interpretations of the European dimension and varying emphases between the notions of European and local identities indicate the complexity of the idea of Europe, which can be understood and manifested in myriad ways.

The ECOC action has, nevertheless, contributed to the Europeanization of cities around Europe through requiring them to find ways to narrate and present themselves as European (see e.g. Sassatelli 2006, 2008; Mittag, 2013). The action played a strong role in the cultural Europeanization of former socialist states during the Eastern enlargement of the Union and soon after it (see for instance Habit 2013; Lähdesmäki 2014). Since 2009, the EU has annually designated at least two ECOCs – one in an ‘old’ member state and one in the ‘new’ states that joined the EU in 2004 or 2007 (EC 2005). Since then, the ECOC title has been used to brand cities as European in the new member states and, more broadly, in rethinking and remapping the cities and their host countries in the geography of Europe (Lähdesmäki 2014). This mode of selecting the ECOCs will continue until 2032 (EC 2012).

The role of the ECOC action as a policy instrument for cultural Europeanization and integration in Europe was further bolstered by a decision that enabled cities beyond the EU member states to apply for the ECOC title for the years 2021, 2024, 2028, 2030, and 2033 (EP&C 2017a). Applications were opened to
cities in EU candidate countries, potential candidate countries, or members of the European Free Trade Association party to the Agreement on the European Economic Area (called EFTA/EEA countries). Even though some non-EU cities had been designated as ECOCs already before this decision, the official broadening of the ECOC action blurs the boundaries between the EU and non-EU and enlarges the perception of a ‘common European cultural area’.

The EHL, finally, is a good example of how the EU seeks to respond to its identity crisis and tackle the unwanted effects of the recent political, economic, and social challenges in Europe by constructing a European identity through focusing on the past. The past has been important in the identity-building efforts of the European Community and the EU since European integration began, but since the 1970s, the amount and scope of EU heritage policy documents has increased enormously (Delanty 2005; Sassatelli 2008; Lähdesmäki and Mäkinen 2019, 36–37; see also Kaasik-Krogerus 2019). In the 2010s, political interest in creating and promoting a common European narrative of the past and an idea of shared cultural heritage has increased among EU actors and cultural policy-makers. In the EU’s “move to history” (Prutsch 2013, 36), the narrations of the past and attempts to foster common cultural heritage in Europe function as building blocks for a future Europe and to educate a new generation of European citizens.

Even though the EHL can be seen as the EU’s response to the various recent challenges in Europe, it can also be interpreted as a reaction to a very specific identity crisis inside the EU and its institutions: the shock rejection of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe in the referenda of the Netherlands and France in 2005. At the time, this was commonly referred to as a constitutional crisis in the political and academic debates. The European Council quickly launched a period of reflection on the EU’s future, aiming to improve connections with citizens. In its proposal on establishing the EHL as an EU action, the Commission noted that as an intergovernmental scheme, the EHL “emerged in 2005 as one of the responses to the gap between the European Union and its citizens” (EC 2010a, 2; see also EC 2010b, 15). According to the Commission, the gap is due to a lack of knowledge of both the history of Europe and the role of the EU, its institutions, and values (EC 2010a, 2; EC 2010b, 15). According to the impact assessment accompanying the EHL proposal, the low turnout in the European Parliament elections in June 2009 and the relatively negative perception of the image of the EU in the Eurobarometer survey indicated that the gap between citizens and the EU had not closed (EC 2010b, 16–17). Neither of these documents mentioned the ‘constitutional crisis’ but the impact assessment explained that repairing the EU’s connections to citizens was an aim of both the EHL and other EU instruments, such as “Plan D
for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate” (EC 2010b, 15), which was launched precisely during the period of reflection. Hence, it can be interpreted that the EHL continues the mode of action adopted in prior phases of integration: in the face of (identity) crises, new cultural policy tools are developed to highlight identity building, thereby promoting and legitimizing integration.

The core motive for the initiative stems from the EU’s politics of belonging. Its objective is to turn cultural heritage, hitherto framed mainly in national and/or local terms, into a shared transnational basis for evoking a notion of “our” (European) identity and feeling of belonging. The intergovernmental declaration on the EHL proclaimed that “our heritage in all its diversity is one of the most significant elements of our identity, our shared values and our principles” (Declaration on the initiative for a European Heritage Label 2007).

A Commission press release on the forthcoming EHL action announced that in order “[t]o give Europeans a greater sense of belonging, the Commission has decided to sponsor the European Heritage Label, a registry of historical sites whose significance transcends national borders” (EC 2010c). Another example of using the EHL in the EU’s politics of belonging is provided by the Commission’s communication on cultural heritage, in which the EHL sites were described as “concrete examples of European values and identity, explained directly to citizens and thus made tangible” (EC 2018b, 12).

The politics of belonging is visible in the goals of the EHL action. The action has two general objectives: “strengthening European citizens’ sense of belonging to the Union, in particular that of young people, based on shared values and elements of European history and cultural heritage, as well as an appreciation of national and regional diversity” and “strengthening intercultural dialogue” (EP&C 2011, 3, Article 3). The aims for the EHL sites follow these general objectives and include “highlighting their European significance [and] raising European citizens’ awareness of their common cultural heritage” (EP&C 2011, 3, Article 3). Consequently, the criteria for awarding sites a Label emphasize the sites’ “symbolic European value” and “significant role in the history and culture of Europe and/or the building of the Union” (EP&C 2011, 4). Narratives related to crossing borders between member states are underlined as a means of demonstrating this (EP&C 2011, 4).

The policy documents directly dealing with the EHL indicate conceptual changes in the EU’s politics of belonging. In the intergovernmental phase, the concept of European identity was frequently used, but in the proposal and decision of the EHL as an EU action, the concept of belonging replaced it. In the documents of the international selection panel (see Chapter 1), which are core texts in the implementation of the EHL as an EU action, neither of the concepts was used. Instead, these documents conceptualized belonging as “European significance”, which is the key criterion of the EHL award.
The Participatory Agenda in the EU Cultural Policy

Similarly to identity, participation is perceived in the EU documents as a way of deepening citizens’ belonging to the EU. Cultural programmes are the instruments proposed for enhancing citizens’ participation in the Union and thereby strengthening their support for EU integration. As such, the programmes are embedded in the EU’s participatory governance (see Chapter 2). The White Paper on European Governance (EC 2001) has had a significant role in distributing the idea of participation as a central principle of good governance, although it has been criticized for a narrow understanding of participation (Magnette 2003; Bevir 2006). Participatory governance is increasingly popular in various contexts (Bache 2010; Saurugger 2010; Lindgren and Persson 2011; Kohler-Koch and Quittkat 2013; Wolff 2013), and the EU programmes, with their emphasis on multilevel cooperation, can be seen as part of this participation boom. Participatory governance requires the involvement of actors from multiple levels as partners in making, supporting, and implementing policy. Utilizing local actors and their projects and networks is typical for EU cultural policy, as the ECOC and EHL exemplify (see also Sassatelli 2009, 68–73).

The cultural articles in the EU founding treaties did not discuss participation in culture. Similarly, the Commission’s cultural agendas, presented in 2007 and 2018, made little mention of participation. However, the European Agenda for Culture in the Globalizing World noted the need for dialogue, including civil society actors, which was supposed to create “a renewed sense of partnership and ownership of EU action to achieve these objectives” (EC 2007, 8). The idea of seeking to involve various partners in implementing the EU’s policy goals exemplifies participatory governance. Typically of participatory governance, the agenda did not specify how people would participate, in what, and whether they could influence the processes and outcomes – that is, whether their “ownership of EU action” was real or illusory. In the New European Cultural Agenda, citizens’ participation in culture was connected to well-being and social cohesion, and particularly to the idea of European belonging: “there is clear scope to increase cultural participation, and bring Europeans together to experience what connects us rather than what divides us” (EC 2018a, 1).

Participation has been addressed increasingly in some recent EU cultural policy discourses. In its communication on cultural heritage, the Commission called for a “more participative interpretation and governance models [of cultural heritage] that are better suited to contemporary Europe, through greater involvement of the private sector and civil society” (EC 2014a, 7). It also underlined the importance of diversifying audiences and saw digitization as a way to enable citizen access and engagement with cultural heritage (EC 2014a, 8). Another communication continued to highlight a “participatory approach to
cultural heritage” (EC 2018b, 1). The first of its five pillars concerned participation and access to cultural heritage, which was connected to constructing an “inclusive Europe” (EC 2018b, 5). The communication did not only emphasize “citizens’ participation and engagement with Europe’s shared heritage” (EC 2018b, 13) but wished to “foster cultural heritage as a key enabler of citizen participation and a vehicle of shared values such as dialogue and diversity” (ibid.). The notion of participation in cultural heritage was closely connected to the idea of constructing a European community and belonging: “engagement with cultural heritage also fosters a sense of belonging to a European community, based on common cultural legacies, historical experiences and shared values” (EC 2018b, 6).

The notion of participation is present in the cultural programmes of the EU, improving access to culture being one of their central goals. The very first cultural programmes, Kaleidoscope, Ariane, and Raphael, emphasized participation in terms of access to culture. For example, one programme objective stated in the decision on Raphael was “to improve access to the cultural heritage in its European dimension and encourage the active participation of the general public, in particular children, young people, the underprivileged and those living in the outlying and rural areas of the Community, in the safeguarding and development of the European cultural heritage” (EP&C 1997, 33). This objective acknowledges that different groups do not have equal access to and opportunity to participate in cultural heritage.

Similar objectives about furthering access to and participation in culture were set in the following programmes, Culture 2000 (EP&C 2000, 3) and Culture (EP&C 2006b, 1). The most recent cultural programme, Creative Europe, sought to “support [...] audience development as a means of stimulating interest in, and improving access to, European cultural and creative works and tangible and intangible cultural heritage” (EP&C 2013, 229). These documents also recognized that citizens’ opportunities to engage in cultural activities differ due to age, economic situation, or social background (e.g. EP&C 1996, 20; EP&C 1997, 33). For example, the authors of the Culture 2000 programme conceived culture as an instrument of social integration and emphasized access to and participation in culture by young or underprivileged people from various social, regional, and cultural backgrounds (EP&C 2000, 1, 5). Similarly, Creative Europe aimed “to reach new and enlarged audiences and improve access to cultural and creative works in the Union and beyond, with a particular focus on children, young people, people with disabilities and under-represented groups” (EP&C 2013, 226).

In this context, citizens’ participation in culture primarily referred to cultural cooperation within the programmes themselves, consuming cultural goods, and receiving cultural services provided by various private, public,
third-sector, formal, and non-formal cultural actors. Other forms of participation in culture – such as involvement in knowledge production or public decision-making regarding culture or producing and experiencing culture through citizen-driven grass-roots activities – did not receive equal attention.

The cultural programmes also emphasized citizens’ participation in the process of European integration. In particular, culture and participation in it were seen as developing and concretizing the citizenship of the Union that was adopted in the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. In the EU’s politics of belonging, culture, citizenship, and identity are tightly intertwined and used to co-create each other (see also Steiger 2009). Improving access to culture, cultural and linguistic cooperation, diversity, and “knowledge of Europe’s cultural roots” (EC 1995a, 10) contributes to this end, according to the programmes (e.g. EC 1995b, 10; EP&C 1996, 20; EC 2004, 10; EP&C 2006b, 1). For instance, the Culture 2000 programme specifically aimed at “explicit recognition of culture as an economic factor and as a factor in social integration and citizenship” (EP&C 2000, 3). The “emergence of European citizenship” was part of the general objective of the Culture programme to enhance the cultural area (EP&C 2006b, 4). In the EU documents, rather than referring to political agency, the concept of citizenship – like the concept of identity – is used to legitimize EU integration (Mäkinen 2012).

The programme documents demonstrate how participation and identity are often entwined and mutually reinforced in the EU’s politics of belonging. For example, the Culture 2000 and Culture programmes (EP&C 2006b, 1; see also EP&C 2000, 1) included an almost identical formulation on this:

For citizens to give their full support to, and participate fully in, European integration, greater emphasis should be placed on their common cultural values and roots as a key element of their identity and their membership of a society founded on freedom, equity, democracy, respect for human dignity and integrity, tolerance and solidarity, in full compliance with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

According to this formulation, citizens’ participation in and support for European integration requires attention to cultural identity. Related to this, citizens’ membership in the EU community was emphasized. This community was described as a society based on values such as freedom, equity, democracy, human rights, and solidarity – frequently listed in EU discourses as the core principles of the EU and central elements of its identity, as noted above. In a nutshell the quote states the idea common to the EU’s cultural programmes that both culture and participation are tools for creating identity, belonging, and bringing citizens closer to the EU and to each other. These building blocks
construct the EU community as a cultural or people’s union, which is more than an economic union. The programme text cited above continued by referring to the need for this construction to work as a whole: “a better balance should be achieved between the economic and cultural aspects of the Community, so that these aspects can complement and sustain each other” (EP&C 2000, 1).

In these culture programmes, Europe and an idea of Europeanness are not only to be constructed from above through symbols and rhetoric but also from below through citizens and their participation. The aspiration is to build an EU community and European identity founded on personal relations and interaction through citizens’ participation in the EU programmes and in the EU integration project. Therefore, in the programmes, citizens are encouraged to engage in different forms of cooperation and dialogue, in order to advance integration in practice by raising awareness of their own culture as well as improving knowledge of other cultures and mutual understanding between Europeans. For instance, the Culture programme assumed that “intercultural dialogue leads to mutual enrichment and a common search for shared values and interpretations” (EC 2004, 6). These goals can be seen as attempts to legitimate European integration, based on the assumption that it is easier for citizens to accept an organization in which they feel involved. In sum, participation is assigned a similar function to identity in EU cultural policy.

6 The Role of the Projects, ECOC, and EHL in the Participatory Agenda

The projects funded through EU cultural programmes provide an example of the EU’s participatory governance in practice. Often involving civil society actors as organizers and participants, the projects themselves can be understood as participation and civil society activity. However, the projects funded through the programmes are not primarily about participation in decision-making but rather about creating networks and advancing transnational cooperation in various cultural fields. Nevertheless, this type of project participation allows participants from different countries to encounter each other and can create a sense of engagement, European identity, and a sense belonging to the EU.

In the EU documents, projects funded through the EU programmes are seen as channels that enable citizens’ participation in EU integration (e.g. EC 2018b, 13). The project examined in this book, the ECC, sought to encourage debate on the citizenship of the Union through art (see Chapter 5). Indeed,
the EU projects can make citizenship of the Union more tangible – but in the EU programme documents, citizenship is depicted primarily as mobility across member state borders and as European identity rather than as political agency (Mäkinen 2012). Even though the importance of culture and the EU’s cultural activity in developing the citizenship of the Union is explicitly underlined in several policy documents, this is not backed up by specific discussion of how funded projects promote citizen participation in society or in European integration.

Instead, participation is commonly discussed in the programmes in terms of access to culture, and the funded projects play a key role in facilitating this access. Already the first Kaleidoscope programme was to fund projects promoting access to culture (EP&C 1996, 24). While the notions of access and audience participation were not discussed any further in the programme decisions, this was done in the Commission’s guidelines for cooperation projects funded through the Creative Europe programme. Audience development was one of the four main objectives for these projects (EC 2019, 4). According to the guidelines, the projects were to “follow an inclusive and participatory approach, putting the audience and the project beneficiaries at the center of activities, and involving them in their design and/or implementation” (EC 2019, 8) and specifically focus on young people and other groups that are hard to reach. The guidelines advised that “[a]udience development should be an integral part of the project” (EC 2019, 6), and that this could mean both broadening and diversifying audiences and deepening the relationship with existing audiences. The aim was to engage audiences “in the programming, production, participatory art, physical dialogue, social media interaction, volunteering or creative partnerships with other sectors” (EC 2019, 6). Furthermore, mobility of artists and cultural operators was to include interaction with local communities and audiences (EC 2019, 6). These guidelines thus explained the ways in which the projects were to promote citizens’ participation in culture.

Participation has an established role in the ECOC action. In the programme period 2007–2019, the second criterion for local cultural programmes, “City and Citizens”, focused on participation of those living in the city and its surroundings (EP&C 2006a, 2–3). In the programme period 2020–2033, widening access to and participation in culture was one of four specific objectives set for the action, and citizens’ participation was one of the six categories of assessing applications. According to the decision, the local population and civil society should participate in preparing and implementing the ECOC programme (EP&C 2014, 6). Specific groups to involve included young and elderly people, volunteers, marginalized, disadvantaged, and minority populations, as well as persons with disabilities (ibid.). In a guide for potential applicant cities, the
Commission underlined an “active participation and not just participation as audiences” (EC n.d. 20).

Since 2005, more and more ECOC programmes have had elements of community engagement, including community-led projects (EP 2013, 76). They often use rhetoric of social inclusion and have utilized the ECOC year to improve public participation in the cultural activity (EP 2013, 91). This “citizenship dimension”, as it is sometimes called, has even been interpreted as a key success factor of the ECOCs (EP 2013, 91). However, approaches to public engagement vary greatly from one city to another, and involving local people remains a challenge (e.g. Lähdesmäki 2013; EP 2013, 91, 171).

Participation in processes and practices concerning cultural heritage and the interaction between heritage institutions and communities is commonly emphasized in cultural heritage policies at local, regional, national, European, and global levels (e.g. Vergo 1989; Sandell 2003; Council of Europe 2005; Macdonald 2005; 2007; Applegate Krouse 2006; Hooper-Greenhill 2006; Watson and Waterton 2010; Adell et al. 2015; Murawska-Muthesius and Piotrowski 2015; Bidault 2018). While a participatory approach to the past is increasingly emphasized in the EU’s cultural heritage policy (EC 2014a, 7; CofEU 2014; EC 2018b; EC 2018c; EP&C 2017b, 5), participation in cultural heritage is not further discussed in the EHL policy documents (e.g. EP&C 2011; EC 2013; 2014b; 2015; 2016b).

As in many other EU initiatives, networking is a key goal and core mode of action in the EHL, as the decision of the action emphasizes (EP&C 2011, 2, 4, 7). This mode can be interpreted as a type of participatory approach that seeks to involve heritage practitioners in advancing the EHL objectives through furthering their mobility and cooperation (see Lähdesmäki et al. 2020). Another mode of action is micro-level participation at the EHL sites and in EHL governance. The sites already encourage people living in the vicinity of the sites to participate in their activities, but based on our previous research, so far citizen-driven engagement does not have ongoing effects on the governance of cultural heritage in the EHL context (see Lähdesmäki et al. 2020).

In sum, cultural initiatives have long had a central role in the EU’s politics of belonging. They continue to serve as political instruments to advance cultural Europeanization and reinforce the legitimacy of European integration. In this chapter, we have shown how identity building and citizen participation are important elements in the EU’s politics of belonging as articulated in its cultural policy. Both elements are closely entwined with the notions of culture and citizenship but these relations are not clearly defined in the EU policy rhetoric. Thus, identity, participation, citizenship, and culture are intertwined instruments of creating belonging in the EU cultural policy.
References


