

INSTITUTIONALISATION OF AMATEUR ARTS IN LATVIA: INVOLVEMENT OF AMATEUR ARTISTS IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

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Abstract

There are 69.6 thousand amateur artists in Latvia (3.5% of the population) who take part in various amateur arts groups. Majority of these amateurs sustain the tradition of the Nationwide Song and Dance Celebration, a phenomenon which has been inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO.

Even though in many countries amateur arts groups are self-governed, in Latvia the process has been institutionalised, mainly due to the organisation of the amateur arts sector during the Soviet period. Groups do not usually operate as civic associations, but are affiliated to municipal cultural centres. Both local and national authorities have a decisive role in the process. The study aims to identify gaps in the communication and decision-making process between amateur artists, artistic leaders of the amateur art groups and institutionalised decision-making bodies. Quantitative and qualitative data have been collected to analyse the governance of the Celebration and to identify the forms of amateur involvement.

Keywords: *amateur arts, participation in arts, Song and Dance Celebration, governance, institutionalisation, decision-making.*

Introduction

The Song and Dance Celebration is the most characteristic cultural tradition of Latvia included in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO. It is a cultural expression, which in historical perspective has served as a vital tool in the nation-building process celebrating cultural identity. Today the tradition of the Song and Dance Celebration is a continuous process, a

social practice and a system of numerous events [Tradition and Symbolism of the Song and Dance Celebration 2010]. It is a large wide-ranging amateur arts event focusing mainly on amateur *a cappella* choral singing and dance group performances. It has taken place every 5 years since 1873 (with some exceptions), so the last celebration was organised in July 2018 when Latvia celebrated its centenary. It is important to add that this tradition is characteristic for all the three Baltic countries – celebrations take place also in Estonia and Lithuania (similar festivals on a smaller scale are organised also in the Nordic countries). Although the tradition is unique for all the three Baltic States, we have established that there exist quite remarkable differences between the manifestations of the tradition in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia.

To characterize the scale of this phenomenon in Latvia, here are some data about the last celebration that took place in 2018: in total 43,219 participants took part in the celebration which forms approximately 2% of the total population of Latvia. The Song and Dance Celebration could be called a festival, but for its size and significance, it is designated a nationwide celebration. Vast majority of society, including arts groups in diaspora is involved in the preservation of this tradition at various levels and through various forms of participation. It involves a considerable part of community as voluntary practitioners of song and dance who participate in amateur choirs and amateur dance groups between the events. We are particularly interested in the amateur arts process in general, as the precondition for safeguarding the tradition of the Song and Dance Celebration is amateur arts groups that are active in-between the celebrations.

The tradition of the Nationwide Song and Dance Celebration in Latvia is sustained mainly by amateur artists. Part of them perform a repertoire, which is shared by all the groups wishing to participate in the celebration. They also take part in the competitions that assess the artistic quality of the groups on a regular basis. There are almost 2000 amateur arts groups involved in the process of the celebration. (See Table 1.)

In the article, the authors will focus on those amateur arts groups which perform a shared repertoire (choirs, dance groups, brass bands, *kokle* ensembles). They constitute the largest part of the groups involved in the process of the Song and Dance Celebration.

The study aims to identify communication flows between amateur artists and institutionalised decision-making bodies and the involvement of amateur artists in the decision-making process. The specific objectives are as follows: (1) to identify the procedures how amateurs are involved in the decision-making process and governance of the celebration; (2) to identify strengths and weaknesses of their involvement according to the opinion of the stakeholders; (3) to develop recommendations for the future to guarantee the long-term sustainability of the tradition.

Table 1. Amateur arts groups involved in the process of the Song and Dance Celebration, 2018

Group type	Number of groups	Type of participation
Folk crafts and applied art groups	112	Participate in the Song and Dance Celebration with their own repertoire; take part in various events during the celebration.
Folklore ensembles and ethnographic ensembles	145	
Amateur theatres	53	
Vocal ensembles	28	
Folk music chapels	45	
Ensembles representing ethnic minorities	80	
Choirs	427	Preparing shared repertoire in each of the fields that is collectively performed at special events during the Song and Dance Celebration. During the interim period between the celebrations, the groups in each field are divided in districts. Recurrent common rehearsals are organized at local or regional level. Each district is supervised by a chief leader (professional artist from the field), who is employed by the Latvian National Centre for Culture. Each district has also a coordinator at municipal level.
Dance groups	876	
Brass orchestras	66	
<i>Kokle</i> * ensembles (*Latvian type of zither)	66	
Total number	1898	(average number of participants per group 23 persons)

Source: Latvian National Centre for Culture, 2018.

Bottom-up participation is significant, as it is the essence of the amateur arts process and the basis of individual motivation for participation in culture. Even though in many countries amateur arts groups are self-governed, in Latvia the process is rather institutionalised, mainly due to the organisation of the amateur arts sector during the Soviet period [Daugavietis 2015]. Groups do not usually operate as civic associations, but are affiliated to municipality run cultural centres. Moreover, the whole process of the celebration is institutionalised because of the complicated organisational process and involvement of different stakeholders, such as large numbers of amateur artists, professional artists and local authorities. Both local and national authorities have a decisive role in the process.

The study centres around several key notions – the tradition of the Song and Dance Celebration in Latvia, amateur arts, governance and institutionalisation of the amateur arts sector, participation of amateurs in the decision-making process.

Theoretical framework and key terms

In the following section the authors will provide a concise description of these phenomena. Some of these issues are understudied, therefore they offer a great potential for developing an analysis which is beyond the scope of this article.

Amateur arts and amateur artists

Amateur arts for the most part concern individual benefits and satisfaction. It is considered that amateur artists perform or produce mainly for their own satisfaction and quite often that of other members of the local community, while making their living some other way [Elkington and Stebbins 2014]. In general terms, this definition corresponds to the amateur artists in Latvia. Following the concept of serious leisure introduced by the sociologist Robert A. Stebbins, one could also say that amateur artists involved in the celebration movement through singing in choirs or performing in dance groups are engaged in serious leisure activities, which means “the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist or volunteer activity sufficiently substantial, interesting and fulfilling for the participant to find a (leisure) career there acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge and experience” [Elkington and Stebbins 2014: 4]. To acquire the repertory of the Song and Dance Celebration, it is necessary to undergo regular and devoted training 1–3 times per week, which demands time, energy and money from participants that according to our and other researchers’ [Tjarve, Zemite, Freiberga 2017] observations are above the typical investment in amateur arts.

In this article, the authors understand amateur arts as a performing arts-based activity undertaken by formal groups that work on a regular basis to achieve high artistic standards and constitute the process of the Latvian Song and Dance Celebration. Although the word “amateur” may have connotations of being less “professional”, in this study the authors deal with highly skilled amateur arts groups committed to achieving high-level results, as their quality is monitored on a regular basis. Sociologist R. A. Stebbins, who has devoted numerous books to the topic of amateurs, also stresses that amateurs often are oriented on high standards and excellence [Stebbins 1992]. Moreover, the key stakeholders in the development of the Song and Dance Celebration are artistic leaders of amateur arts groups who have professional qualification acquired in formal or vocational training courses and chief leaders – group of highly professional artist from the field, who are employed by the Latvian National Centre for Culture and who supervise the creative process of the celebration.

Governance and institutionalisation of the amateur arts sector

Hobbyist activities are usually performed on individual level and most often they are organised by the private sector or individually. However, the governance of the amateur arts activities related to the Song and Dance Celebration in Latvia is

different. Possibly, one of the reasons is that collective forms of amateur arts activities require a particular model of organisation. Traditionally amateur arts are a community driven process, including community sharing and individual contributions. Yet in Latvia, the vast majority of amateur arts groups are affiliated to municipality-run cultural centres and financially subsidized by public authorities [Tjarve, Zemite and Freiberga 2017].

As regards the governance of the amateur arts sector, at present it is mainly management and governing of civil society organisations or non-governmental organisations, also called the third sector, that have been studied. However, little of that knowledge relates to the community arts sector [Ramsden et al. 2011]. Moreover, little information can be found about institutionalisation of the amateur arts sector. M. D'Angelo in his book "Cultural Policies in Europe: Local Issues" suggests that institutionalisation of people's voluntary cultural activities in Finland has led to profound transformations in the amateur arts sector which has "become part and parcel of the merit ("free-of-charge") public goods system organised financially and administratively along the state/municipal axis" [D'Angelo 2000: 110]. It applies also to the amateur arts process in Latvia, which is largely institutionalised and has become part of the public service. Leisure time activities are also asserted as a public service on a policy level. The main cultural policy document defines the minimum basket of cultural services, setting a task for each municipality to offer leisure time activities and provide access to the process of the Song and Dance Celebration by maintaining cultural centres [LR Kultūras ministrija 2006].

Participation of amateurs in the decision-making process

Arts participation may vary depending on whether it is individual or collective, active or passive [Laže, Muktupāvela 2017]. There are also various types and levels of participation. Participation patterns can differ, but the importance of involvement in decision-making is widely supported both in management and cultural policy literature. This study focuses on the process of the celebration which can be perceived as part of the public sector (as stated before, majority of collective amateur groups are affiliated to municipal cultural centres and to a great extent funded by municipalities). Therefore, the authors will take a closer look at decision making in the public sector and particularly at the involvement of citizens.

In general, there is an immense amount of literature on the role of civic engagement in the public sector governance, especially concerning different aspects beyond the scope of this article. New public management (or NPM, introduced by Hood 1991) has helped to improve the performance of local and national government in numerous countries over the last decades. However, the critics of NPM argue that NPM efforts have mainly focused on efficiency and effectiveness neglecting

other democratic values. The debate of creating public value has been unfolding over the recent years [see, for example, Bryson, Crosby and Bloomberg 2013]. As an international leader in public participation, the International Association of Public Participation Practitioners has developed the “IAP2 Core Values for Public Participation” for use in the development and implementation of public participation processes (IAP2 Core Values n.d.). These principles include the right of the public to be involved in the decision-making process in a meaningful way and the right to be informed about the ways to participate, as well as about the results of their participation in decision making.

While there exists a critique of reducing the role of citizens and excluding them from policy making and administration, it has been argued that participation may not only slow down decision-making processes, it may actually lead to complete inaction. It has been proposed in some cases to leave decision-making to the experts who know all the technical details and political realities and can do the job more quickly [Involve 2005]. Expert-led democracy is the prevailing model in the case of the celebration in Latvia as well. However, with the changes in society and also with the increasing role of new communication tools, such as social media, the existing expert-led governance model is called into question.

The Song and Dance Celebration depends on amateur participation. Moreover, the celebration is a phenomenon of active collective participation. It demands long-term participation, investment of time, energy and money. The involvement in decision-making and management processes is a re-motivational factor upholding the interest in maintaining active collective participation.

The governance process and participation in the decision-making process of the celebration in Latvia is an understudied issue. Some aspects have been discussed in the studies carried out a decade ago: “Song and Dance Celebration and Changing Social Environment” [Tīsenkopfs 2008] and “Song and Dance Celebration in Changing Economic Environment” [Počs 2008]. Yet there exists no in-depth analysis of the management process of this ambitious multidisciplinary mega-event and process.

Methodology

The present article takes a closer look at the governance of the Song and Dance Celebration process and particularly the decision-making process as one of the factors that may influence sustainability of the tradition. The authors presume that participation of amateurs in the decision-making process is a significant factor to ensure the development and safeguarding of the tradition of the celebration in a long term. The purpose of the study is to determine whether there is sufficient involvement of amateur artists in the decision-making process related to the Song and Dance Celebration in Latvia.

In this study the authors have used a mixed research strategy that includes qualitative feasibility study and quantitative data collection, as well as the analysis of legislative regulations and documents. The electronic survey of participants took place after the celebration in 2013 and included 1504 respondents who were selected using the sample quoting approach. Also, two electronic surveys of the leaders of amateur arts group took place. The first survey was performed in 2013 with 574 respondents. The second survey took place at the beginning of 2017 and had 251 respondents. 20 semi-structured interviews with chief leaders and chief conductors, 7 interviews with the employees of the Latvian National Centre for Culture and also the Ministry of Culture of Latvia took place in 2017.

Results

At the beginning of this section, the authors will shortly present the analysis of documents to provide characteristics of the involvement of amateur artists in the decision-making process of the Song and Dance Celebration. After that the authors will present research data that help to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their involvement in the decision-making process and governance, and to identify gaps in communication and the decision-making process between amateur artists and institutionalised decision-making bodies.

Involvement of amateurs in the decision-making process

In the context of this study three main stakeholder groups involved in the decision-making process are identified: (1) amateurs (approx. 43,000 members of various amateur arts groups), (2) artistic leaders of amateur arts groups (approx. 1400 professional artists and 63 chief leaders of choirs, orchestras, dance groups and *kokle* ensembles), and (3) organisers (team of the Latvian National Centre for Culture – about 10 employees who are directly involved in the management process of the celebration).

The legislative framework has been set to regulate the process of celebration. Matters related to the safeguarding and development of the tradition in Latvia are governed by the Intangible Cultural Heritage Law [Saeima 2016], the Song and Dance Celebration Law [Saeima 2005]; moreover, in 2005 Latvia joined the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage [Saeima 2006]. The first two laws have direct provisions for the organisation of the celebration and the process that takes place between the festivals. Concrete tasks are set for the state and municipal institutions, while the amateur arts community has been mentioned as a tradition carrier. So, the Intangible Cultural Heritage Law defines the participation of communities in the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage, suggesting that “the community cares for ensuring the sustainability

of its intangible cultural heritage, and it also participates in legal, technical, organisational, administrative and financial measures implemented by the State administrative institutions, including local government institutions” (section 8). The amateurs are planned to have a more well-defined role in the capacity of the advisory board members. The Intangible Cultural Heritage Law defines the purpose and composition of the Council of Intangible Cultural Heritage, where among 14 members there are five representatives of non-governmental organisations which are related to the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage and operate in the four regions of Latvia – Kurzeme, Latgale, Vidzeme, Zemgale – and the capital city Riga, invited by the Minister of Culture (section 11). While the Song and Dance Celebration Law describes the composition of the Council of the celebration for the supervision of the safeguarding and development of the Song and Dance Celebration Tradition, where out of 19 members 11 persons may represent amateurs to some extent (section 8 suggests that the Council involves two representatives of the choral sector, two representatives of the folk dance sector, representatives of the brass band sector, the folk applied arts sector, the folk music sector, the traditional culture sector, the professional music, and the representatives of local government culture centres and non-governmental organisations). The members of the Council can be nominated by non-governmental organisations that work in such fields as choir, dance, brass band, crafts, folk music, traditional culture, professional music and cultural centres and have the competency to nominate representatives from the field. In addition to this, the Song and Dance Celebration Law envisages that the Council establishes the Artistic Council of the celebration that is responsible for creative and artistic decisions. There are 11 members in the Artistic Council – two representatives of choirs, two representatives of dance groups, one brass band representative, one representative from the field of crafts and applied arts, one from folk music, one from the field of professional music, one from municipalities, and one representative from the non-governmental sector.

There are also two mid-term planning documents that define the developments in the field. The Plan for the Safeguarding and Development of the Intangible Cultural Heritage 2014–2020 [LR Kultūras ministrija 2015] is a national level medium-term development planning document, which determines national targets for ensuring the sustainability of the intangible cultural heritage for a period of seven years by prescribing legal, administrative and organisational measures, as well as their financial resources. The Plan for the Safeguarding and Development of the Song and Dance Celebration Tradition 2016–2018 [LR Ministru kabinets 2016] ensures a cyclic occurrence of the celebration and a timely preparation process thereof. It does not provide a detailed analysis of the governance. It is stated that safeguarding of the tradition can take place only through cooperation between state, municipal

institutions and the non-governmental sector. There are no detailed descriptions or analysis of the involvement of the amateurs and artistic leaders in the governance or in decision-making. Among other sustainability factors of the tradition the Plan mentions a need to develop a well-functioning model of governance, including cooperation between the public institutions, non-governmental sector and community.

To ensure participation of the society and experts in the decision-making process concerning the preservation of the intangible cultural heritage, the Song and Dance Celebration tradition, the development of the folk art and the education in culture and creative industries, 10 advisory boards have been established at the Latvian National Centre for Culture. Each Board has its own regulation that defines the work and procedures of the Board. Representatives of educational institutions, state institutions, the non-governmental sector and leaders of amateur arts groups can be nominated for board membership. At the same time, the non-governmental sector which is a key stakeholder that could represent amateur artists on advisory boards is not well developed. There are a few associations representing certain sectors of amateur arts, however, they carry out few activities and have a limited administrative and financial capacity.

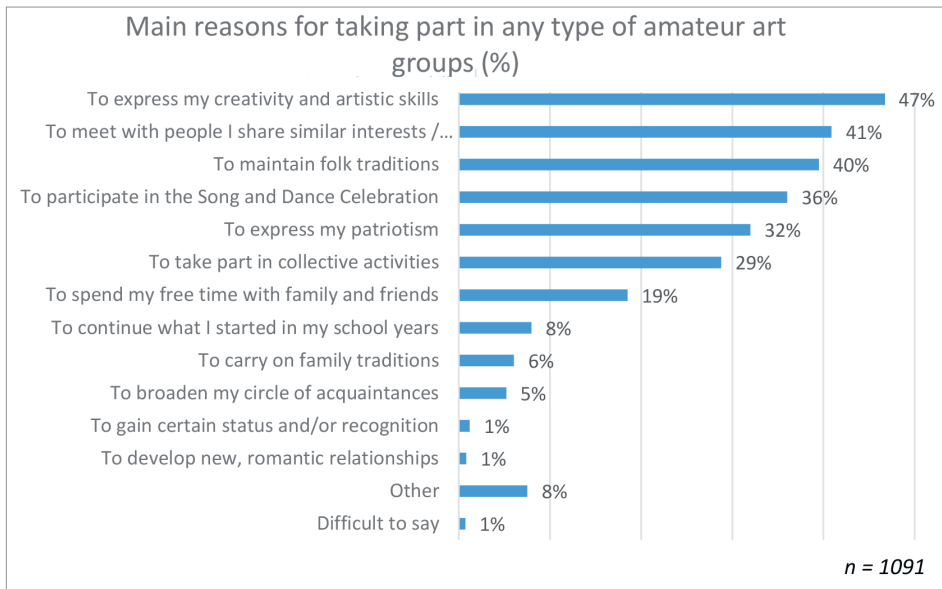
To conclude, participation of amateurs and artistic leaders in the governance and decision-making process related to the Song and Dance Celebration is described in detail neither in the legislation, nor in mid-term policy documents. The role of community (amateurs) is acknowledged in the Intangible Cultural Heritage Law. In the legislative and administrative documents related to the celebration, the role of the non-governmental sector is stressed. For the most part, community participation in decision making can take place indirectly, through representatives of non-governmental institutions or leaders of amateur arts groups sitting on the advisory councils or boards. On the whole, the public institutions (both at national and municipal levels) have a decisive role in the governance of the celebration. In decision making, the expert-led model prevails. Meanwhile, communication mechanisms with the community are not regulated and clearly described.

In the following sub-section, the authors will present the results of the empirical research: surveys and interviews. The task is to understand the opinion of the stakeholders about the involvement of the amateurs and artistic leaders in the decision-making process, and to find out strengths and weaknesses of the existing model where mainly experts are involved in the decision-making process.

Involvement of amateurs in the decision-making process

Since the Song and Dance Celebration Law does not define the direct role of amateurs in the decision-making process, their expectations and understanding of

possible instruments and opportunities to influence decision-making are not always apparent. Data show that motivation for participation in amateur arts groups differs. 47% of respondents admit they want to express their artistic skills and creativity, 41% – to socialize with people with similar interests. The wish to participate in the Nationwide Song and Dance Celebration is one of the dominant reasons for many members of amateur arts groups (36%). One of the reasons mentioned is also participation in collective activities (29%), which includes communication and decision making to ensure integration in the group (see Figure 1).

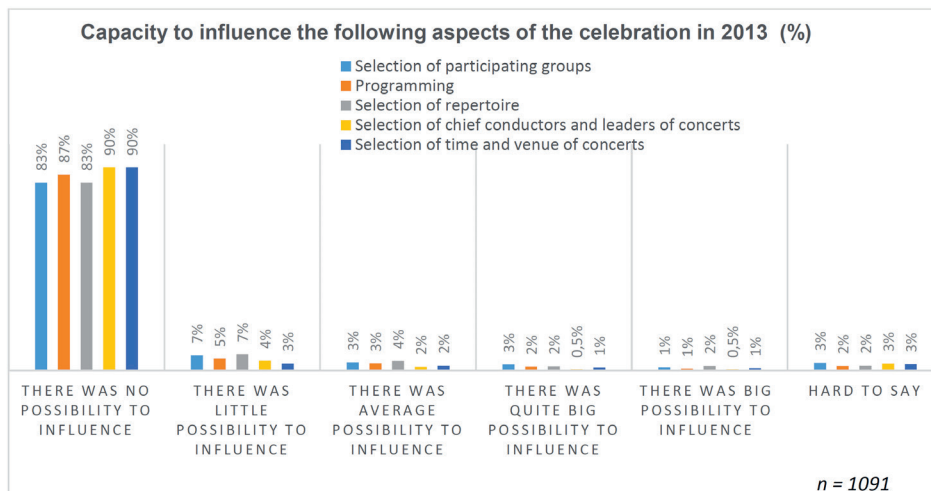


Source: Survey of the Song and Dance Celebration Participants, 2014.

Figure 1. Reasons for taking part in amateur arts groups.

Obviously, motivation mainly relates to individual benefits. In addition to this, the survey data manifestly demonstrate that amateurs do not feel capable of changing or influencing the decision-making process related to the questions that are vital in the context of the celebration. Figure 2 presents the opinion of amateurs about their capacity to influence different decisions. The majority of respondents (83%–90%) indicates that they have no possibilities to influence either the selection of groups taking part in the celebration, or the programming, the selection of chief conductors, the choice of repertoire, and the selection of venues and time of the main events of the celebration (see Figure 2).

Meanwhile, it is important to take into account the fact that huge numbers of amateur artists are involved in the process of the Song and Dance Celebration. Therefore, the organisers of the process emphasize that it is impossible to receive



Source: Survey of the Song and Dance Celebration Participants, 2014.

Figure 2. Capacity to influence different aspects of the Song and Dance Celebration in 2013.

feedback from several tens of thousands of participants, or to respect such a variety of opinions. It may endanger the basic idea of the celebration. During the semi-structured interviews, the organisers underline that there is a strong legislative setting that imposes an obligation to safeguard the celebration and the tradition. One of the employees of the Latvian National Centre for Culture in the interview admits that sometimes there is a wrong perception of the term “responsibility” and of the role of the state.

There have been several attempts to establish choir associations, various non-governmental organisations to take over the responsibility but somehow, they haven't succeeded. We as a state institution have taken responsibility for the celebration, and people think that we are dictating the rules and we should shoulder the whole responsibility. In fact, this is a national movement where state only acts as a safeguard of the tradition (Representative of the Latvian National Centre for Culture).

The choice of the repertoire is a question which has often been debated in media by amateur artists. 83% of the respondents say they had no possibility to influence the choice of the repertoire (Figure 2). The selection of the repertoire for special events during the celebration is organised on the basis of a competition. Artistic teams can suggest the concept of the event and it includes also the relevant repertoire. The Council of the Song and Dance Celebration makes the decision on the concept and accordingly also the repertoire. The discussions of the concept selected take place also during the advisory board meetings. But still – the artistic decisions are taken by professionals who have professional training in the field and to

some extent represent the organisers (they are either artistic directors or they are on the advisory councils). In the interviews, artistic directors or chief conductors and chief choreographers admit that there is no clear idea how to ensure participation of amateurs in the decision-making about the repertoire. Moreover, they are not sure of the need for such engagement. Chief leaders believe that an ordinary participant lacks the understanding of the artistic vision of the events, and does not understand the deeper motivation behind the choice of the repertoire.

I do not know whether dancers should influence the repertoire. Participants and group leaders can express their opinion through chief leaders. We meet twice a year and we have an opportunity to discuss it all. The dancers are often unhappy while learning, but if you talk to them after the final concert of the celebration, they are happy (Chief leader, choreographer).

It would be interesting to ask the participants what they want to perform. If we put together the programme from what they want... I am afraid that it could be some tasteless compilation without any idea or statement (Chief leader, choreographer).

For any concert there is a certain artistic vision. It seems to me that everyone who arranges concerts tries to balance between the wishes of participants and the artistic statement (Chief leader, conductor).

I don't know any country where art is based on democratic principles (Chief leader, choreographer).

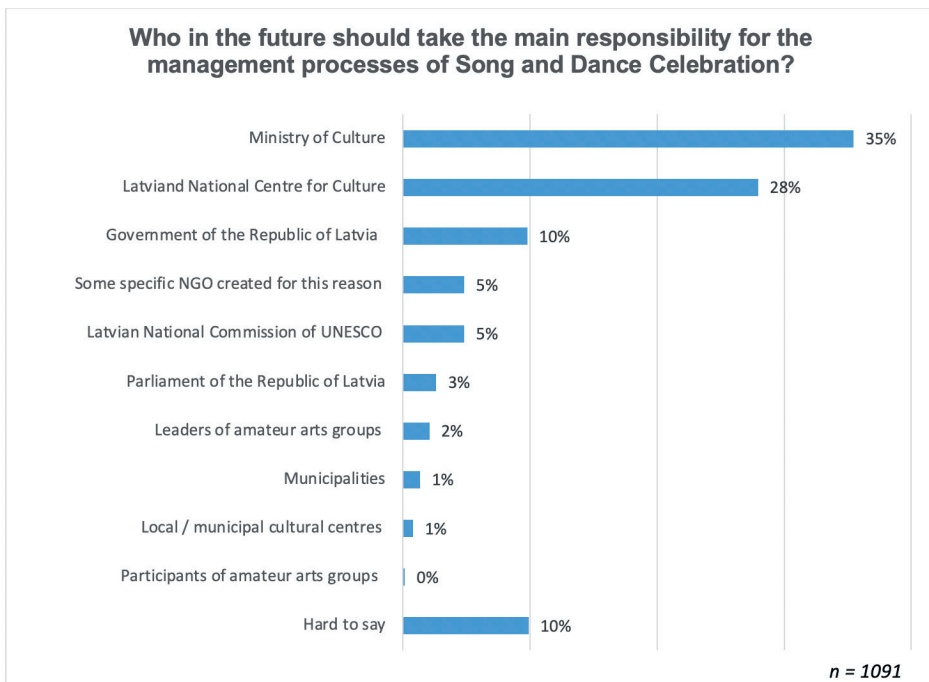
Despite the fact that there are no particular regulations of amateur involvement in the decision-making process, the organisers indicate that amateurs have possibilities to be part of the decision-making process through the advisory boards of the Latvian National Centre for Culture and various surveys are carried out on a regular basis asking the opinion of participants, there are also possibilities to express their opinion in meetings, discussions and on social networks. However, the organisers have observed a very low activity in using the possibilities to impact the decision-making process.

Participants have the possibilities to participate and recently we have experienced some examples where the opinion of participants has impacted decisions. But generally, we have a very bad experience with that. For example, we launched an open competition on our website to apply for the advisory boards – everyone could apply – group leaders, chief leaders, participants. We were hardly able to put the boards together, there were some fields where no one had applied despite the fact there are thousands of actors in the field (Representative of the Latvian National Centre for Culture).

My observation is that people do not pay attention, miss it all in their everyday rush, but when we arrive at the final stage, they say, why, why, I did not think that way at all. We are always on the swing and I do not want to stand on one side or the other side and say that there are bad artistic leaders or bad participants. I cannot say that. But sometimes when participants come to us with claims and say that they cannot influence anything, we have to point out that they have had the opportunity to speak (Representative of Latvian National Centre for Culture).

When we develop new documents, regulations, we try to organise regional discussions and usually we invite also group leaders and participants. They either join them or don't depending on whether it is topical for them at that moment or not (Representative of the Latvian National Centre for Culture).

Indirectly Figure 3 indicates the low interest of amateurs in taking part in the decision-making process. Questioned about the future of the celebration, more than 80% of the respondents suggest that the main responsibility for the preservation of the celebration should be taken by the state institutions – the Ministry of Culture, the Latvian National Centre for Culture, the government, the Latvian National Commission for UNESCO, or the Parliament (see Figure 3). The responses to this



Source: Survey of the Song and Dance Celebration Participants, 2014.

Figure 3. Participants' views on the future of the Song and Dance Celebration.

question reveal that the participants are not willing to take responsibility; they prefer to rely on the decisions made by others. Moreover, they do not perceive themselves as a vital part of the future development of the celebration.

The low interest about participation in decision making may also derive from the comparatively recent experience of living in a democracy. The organisers express the opinion that participation culture is still in its development phase, since Latvia regained its independence only in 1991. Moreover, it depends very much on education and family attitude.

Participatory skills and desire for engagement, understanding, are largely dependent on cultural education and upbringing in the family. But, in the context of the Song and Dance celebration, it also depends on the group leaders, chief leaders and on their ability to communicate, to guide. The participation in decision making is part of cultural responsibility, which is important in the context of the preservation of the tradition in general (Representative of the Ministry of Culture).

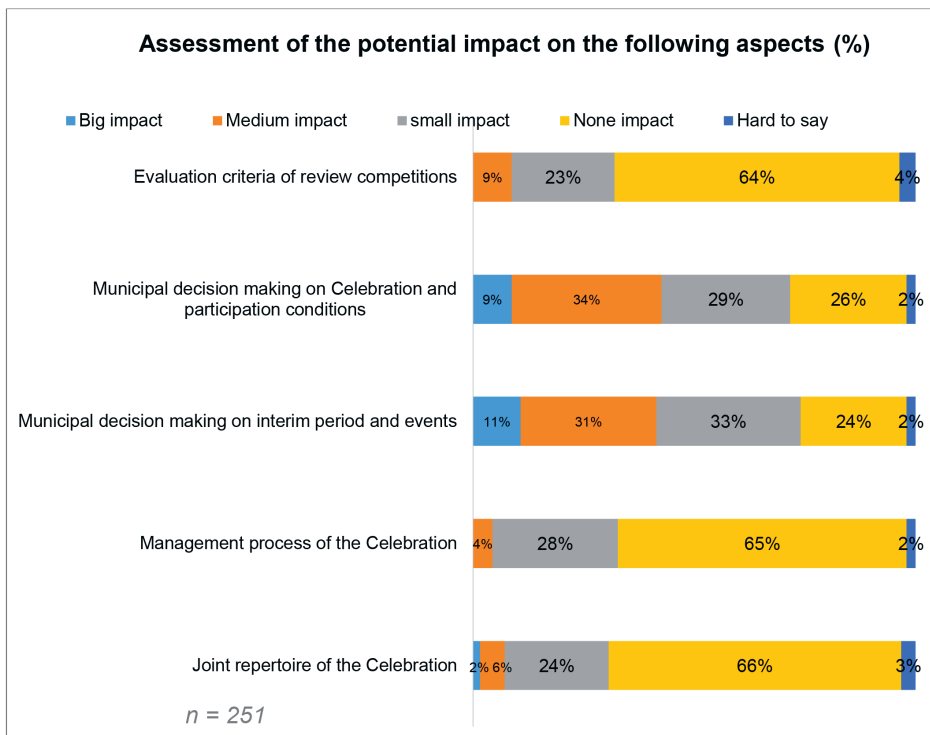
Involvement of artistic leaders in the decision-making process

Artistic leaders of the amateur art groups have a key role in communicating the decisions to the amateurs. Moreover, they have more opportunities to get involved in the decision-making process than an average participant of an amateur arts group. They represent their amateur arts group in different meetings and surveys at municipal and national levels, receive information on decisions, and they have a possibility to be elected to advisory councils or boards. Other participatory methods mentioned in the interviews include: voting in meetings, open discussions in the meetings, sending in written recommendations during the meetings, sending e-mails. The website of the Latvian National Centre for Culture also serves as a communication tool for disseminating information. Moreover, the Latvian National Centre for Culture organises special events for every amateur art sector to inform about the news, also offering open discussions. Summer schools and training seminars for the group leaders take place to test the repertoire.

The survey of artistic leaders lets us establish the characteristics of them – they lead on average two amateur arts groups, working with 50–60 participants. They work on average 10 hours per week with each amateur arts group. Majority of them have higher education in the field, however most of them have another full-time job as a principal occupation and the main source of income. They have a long-lasting experience participating in the process of the Song and Dance Celebration, as most of them have participated in several celebrations. Generally, the group of amateur arts group leaders feel socially recognised and appreciated despite the fact that they are dissatisfied financially. The group is quite split internally; often there is also a mutual competition because the results of their amateur arts group performance in

competitions during the preparation process for the celebration might impact the size of their salary from municipality. At the same time, they have a significant role in the preservation of the tradition through intense contact with amateur arts group participants, they are the main motivators, inspirers for participants.

The overall situation with artistic leaders' perception of their possibilities to influence decision making (see Figure 4) differs depending on the decision-making level. The average perception of the ability to influence decision making at municipal level is significantly higher than at national level, where in none of the questions the impact is perceived as significant. The decisions that are made at national level include the repertoire, evaluation criteria of review competitions and management process of the major events during the celebration. More than 60% of the artistic leaders have replied that they have no impact on these decisions; slightly more than 20% suggested that they have a small impact; less than 10% of them have affirmed that they have medium impact, while only 2% have thought that they have big impact on the repertoire selection. Considering decision making at municipal level, the responses show larger potential impact. 43% of artistic leaders think they

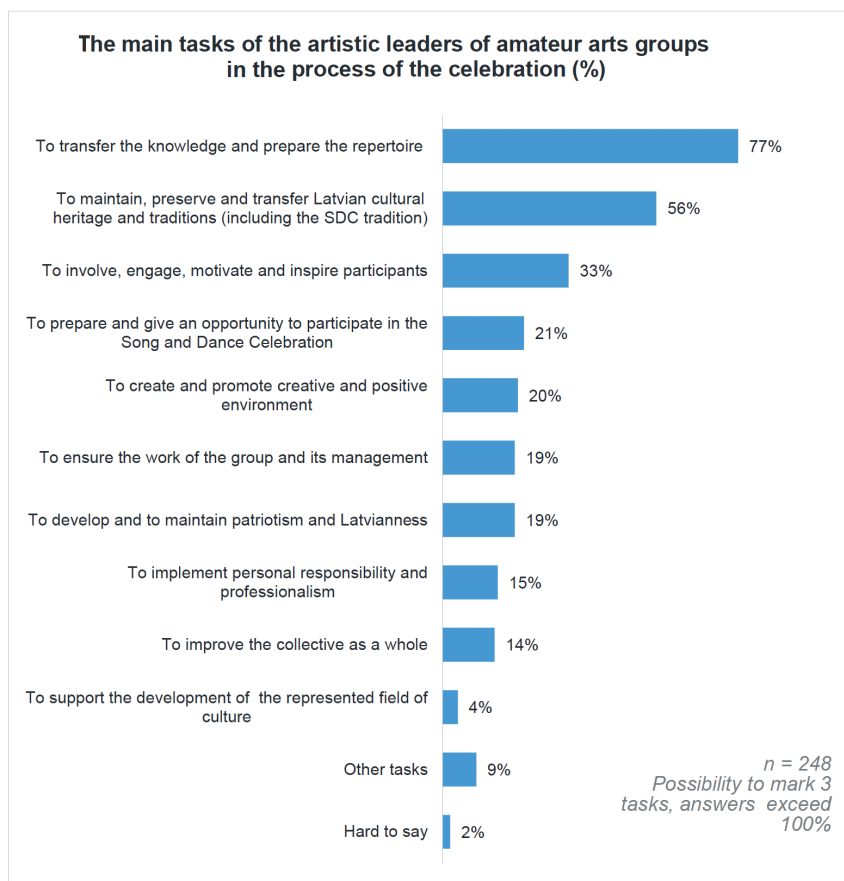


Source: Survey of the Leaders of Amateur Arts Groups 2016–2017.

Figure 4. Group leaders' assessment of their impact on specific aspects of the celebration.

have significant or medium impact on municipal decisions on the celebration and participation conditions. 42% of the respondents consider they have significant or medium impact on the municipal decisions concerning the interim period and events between the celebrations.

The artistic leaders are key persons in communication with participants. On their willingness to involve participants in discussions, on their motivation to deliver the feedback to organisers and on their individualities depend many aspects of decision making. In the survey, the artistic leaders were asked to write down three main tasks that they perceive as the most important ones, 248 respondents replied to the question. The tasks mentioned by the respondents were categorized in 10 thematic groups (see Figure 5). Data show that respondents see the transfer of knowledge as the most important task. The preservation of Latvian cultural heritage and safeguarding of traditions is the second most significant task in the opinion of the artistic leaders.



Source: Survey of the Leaders of Amateur Arts Groups 2016–2017.

Figure 5. The main tasks of the leaders of amateur arts groups.

The third most important responsibility is to involve, motivate and inspire amateur participants. Only 4% of responses indicate participation in decision making, wish to influence the developments in the arts sector in a broader sense.

On the one hand, the data indicate the tendency that the artistic leaders concentrate very much on the group they direct and on its achievements, results in review competitions, since this is a way how to demonstrate their own professionalism and the quality of their work. The tendency to think predominantly about the benefits of their own group causes problems also in the context of advisory boards, where some of the artistic leaders are directly involved in decision-making.

This is crazy. They predominantly represent their own arts group. There are very few persons in the field who can represent the interests of the whole field. Unfortunately, it leaves impact on some decisions as well (Representative of the Latvian National Centre for Culture).

Organisers also criticise some artistic leaders for their lack of constructivism, or shortage of ideas. Moreover, some artistic leaders suggest they are unable to influence anything, or they do not dare to express their opinion during the meetings and discussions.

I think that it is easier to do what you are told to do. I have experienced this clamouring from the artistic leaders – nobody listens to us, no one takes us seriously. At the same time, I know several artistic leaders I have asked to express an opinion, to suggest something, to give some ideas. In the end I have understood that this doesn't take us anywhere, they have no suggestions, they have no ideas. They love what they do and what they are used to and they actually love to grumble, instead of doing, changing something themselves (Chief leader, conductor).

Some of them are not brave enough to stand up publicly and to speak. Although I would say that if you are a conductor, you should be able to. Come and say what you think, if you need more time – take it, write an e-mail. But if you do not react, don't do anything – I have no idea how to do it otherwise, how to do it more democratically. How we can push the artistic leaders to listen to participants and to get to know their standpoint, how we can push them to say what they think (Chief leader, conductor).

I imagine that some of them believe that they can't change anything. This is Soviet heritage. It is still alive among some artistic group leaders (Chief leader, conductor).

The formal participation method prescribed also in the legislation, is advisory boards where selected artistic leaders may represent their sector. The data show that neither the participants nor the artistic leaders perceive the advisory boards as an opportunity to express their opinion and the board members as their representatives. Moreover, amateurs and artistic leaders do not believe the advisory boards may have real impact, since they are consultative and the decisions made are not binding. Even the board members themselves do not think that their decisions or opinions are authoritative. There is also some doubt about the objectivity of the decisions of those board members who are also artistic leaders.

It's the third meeting we have been talking about this [repertoire], but since we are just an advisory body, we have no right to decide (Chief leader, choreographer, member of advisory board).

I think the advisory board has no impact, I haven't seen it until now (Chief leader, choreographer).

There are also artistic leaders and chief leaders who value the work on the board and see its significance although they admit that the work sometimes is not efficient.

Data show that the leaders of amateur arts groups are the key persons taking part in the decision-making process of the Song and Dance Celebration on behalf of amateurs. However, their participation is hindered by diverse factors. Therefore, the reciprocal communication flow is a crucial factor that could improve the situation on informal level.

Discussion and conclusions

In the context of the participation of amateurs and artistic leaders in the decision-making process related to the celebration, historical background plays a significant role. State was the main stakeholder and decision-making body during the Soviet period. After the Soviet period, the role of public institutions in safeguarding and developing of the tradition of the Song and Dance Celebration continued to expand. A strong legislative framework has been established; moreover, since 2003 the tradition has been inscribed in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO. The Latvian National Centre for Culture is a state body responsible for the policy development in the field and it manages many aspects related to the celebration, including coordination, financing and management of the celebration that takes place every five years. Municipalities have a decisive role in funding the network of cultural centres where amateur arts groups perform their activities. The authors have concluded that amateur art sector in Latvia on a great extent operate as a public service.

We started with the presumption that bottom-up participation is significant, as it is the essence of the amateur arts process and the basis of individual motivation for participation in culture. Furthermore, the Song and Dance Celebration depends on amateur participation. To maintain active collective participation, the involvement in the decision-making and management processes is a re-motivational factor upholding the interest in participation. Moreover, the literature on the role of civic engagement in the public sector governance emphasizes both the importance of inclusion of citizens in the policy-making process and the impediment their participation may cause by slowing down the decision-making process. Due to the historically strong role of the public institutions and due to the huge numbers of the amateurs involved, an expert-led democracy is the prevailing model in the case of the Song and Dance Celebration. However, with the changes in society and also with the increasing role of new communication tools the existing expert-led governance model is called into question.

The role of amateurs and artistic leaders in the decision-making process can be defined as indirect since there are advisory council and boards where their opinion can be represented. Theoretically, this could be perceived as an instrument to guarantee participation of amateurs and artistic leaders in the decision-making process but the empirical data show that the gap between amateurs, artistic leaders and the council and boards is quite large. There are also other instruments developed to ensure participation of amateurs and especially of amateur group leaders in the decision-making process. Various surveys are carried out on a regular basis asking the participants' opinion; there are also possibilities to express one's opinion in meetings, discussions and on social networks. Other participatory methods include: voting in meetings, open discussions in the meetings, sending in written recommendations during the meetings, sending e-mails. The website of the Latvian National Centre for Culture also serves as a communication tool for disseminating information. Moreover, the Latvian National Centre for Culture organises special events for every amateur art sector to inform about the news, also offering open discussions. Summer schools and training seminars for the artistic leaders take place to test the repertoire. In the opinion of the organisers there are numerous participatory forms, however, the organisers have observed a very low activity of participants in using the possibilities to impact the decision-making process.

Data suggest that amateurs themselves do not feel capable of changing or influencing the decision-making process related to the questions that are vital in the context of the Song and Dance Celebration. Leaders of amateur arts groups are the key persons in representing amateurs and communicating the decisions. They estimate their ability to influence decision making as more effective in comparison to amateurs. The average perception of the ability to influence decision-making at

municipal level is significantly higher than at national level, where in none of the questions the impact is perceived as significant. However, the actual involvement in the decision-making process can be graded as insignificant. There are several factors that lead to inaction or non-participative in decision making and communication. Leaders of amateur arts groups tend to represent only the interests of their own group; they are often afraid to express their opinion fearing administrative or financial consequences; they think they are unable to influence anything and rely on decisions made by authorities. The non-governmental sector could serve as a representative body of amateurs and artistic leaders in the decision-making process. However, currently the non-governmental sector is underdeveloped and lacks administrative and financial capacity.

Conclusions

- Participation of amateurs and artistic leaders in the decision-making process related to the Song and Dance Celebration is an important tool for safeguarding the tradition and motivating amateurs. The willingness to take part in the decision-making process among amateurs and artistic leaders is not at a significant level. Possibly, they are not aware of participatory measures and of the significance participation could bring. Participation of amateurs and artistic leaders in the decision-making process is neither clearly defined in the legislative and regulative documents, nor participatory forms are clearly communicated to the stakeholders. The public authorities should intensify their efforts to improve communication and involvement of amateur artists and artistic leaders in the currently available participatory forms.
- The huge numbers of the amateurs involved in the process of the celebration encumber and limit a direct involvement of amateurs in the decision-making process. Therefore, an expert-led decision-making model might be an appropriate one. However, the general distrust in experts and their capacity to influence decisions leads to the need to improve the existing model. Transparent nomination and selection of experts is significant in this situation. However, the very low activity of amateurs in nominating representatives weakens the process. The role of the non-governmental sector as mediators and lobbyists should be reconsidered. To empower the non-governmental sector and strengthen its administrative and financial capacity, indirect support incentives may be needed.
- Amateur arts and inheritance of traditions is mainly based on the self-initiative of tradition bearers. In Latvia there is a significant state involvement in regulating and governing the process. The balance between the self-initiative of tradition bearers (amateur artists) and the state is a

crucial factor for the sustainable development of the celebration in the future. This balance should be established, communicated and accepted by all the groups involved. It is evident that a tradition of such a scale and of such significance cannot be solely the responsibility of individuals and be self-organised through numerous amateur arts groups. Moreover, the status of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO requires certain measures and supervision implemented by the public authorities. Regulations and governance versus self-initiative and participation – this is the main issue to be addressed in the nearest future in the context of the sustainability of this nationwide event.

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