

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CO-CREATING MATERA

“Co-creating Matera” is a report written between June and December 2020 on behalf of *Arteco sas*, by the research group coordinated by Professor Pier Luigi Sacco and composed by Sabrina Pedrini, Maria Tartari, Giorgio Tavano Blessi (researchers), with the contribution of Sara Uboldi (associate researcher) for Fondazione Matera-Basilicata 2019.

This document presents the results of the research on the impacts that the cultural program of Matera Capital of Culture 2019 (MCEC 2019), with its projects based on co-creation and active participation, had on the participants and on the same cultural operators who orchestrated the co-creation of projects, in terms of building or enhancement of skills, relationships and well-being. The research has been reported as a narration, as unbiased as possible, of the main topics and issues that emerged during the interviews and through the analysis of the ideas that emerged during the focus group on the topic of cultural co-creation. For the impacts’ assessment, the research group used three main tools drawn from the main quantitative and qualitative methodologies currently used in the social sciences: a questionnaire administered on a regional scale (Basilicata), consisting of 33 closed questions on a sample of 402 people who participated in the MCEC 2019 program; a semi-structured interview, addressed to a sample of 40 people drawn from key-informants familiar with the design and/or implementation processes of the MCEC 2019 projects; a focus group with the participation of the Open Design School working group.

Following a preliminary literature analysis, the survey has been developed according to a set of indicators modeled on 6 dimensions, identified as follows:

1. active participation
2. co-creation
3. social relations
4. empowerment
5. welfare
6. resilience

In particular, among the aforementioned dimensions, the attention towards the participatory aspect of cultural projects has been growing for the last decades. Firstly, the growing democratization of cultural creation processes allowed by new forms of digital production, fosters anyone to autonomously produce and socially disseminate their own contents with no need for intermediation or legitimation by gatekeepers or intermediaries, as it happens also in the most advanced forms of the pre-digital mass cultural industry. Furthermore, the awareness

of how, through participation, it becomes possible not only to imagine richer and more complex forms of creativity and expression of collective intelligence, but also how participation leads to pursue objectives with a real social impact. In this sense, the indicators developed were a tool aimed at investigating:

- the relationship between cultural production and active participation in terms of accessibility, building of new technical skills, knowledge and cultural interests;
- the relationship between cultural expression and active participation in terms of developing new relational and social skills;
- how co-creation processes are constructed: contributions to the debate on cultural co-creation, its limits and possible developments;
- the level of effectiveness in achieving the objectives of collective construction of new knowledge and skills;
- the level of effectiveness in achieving the objectives of generating positive impacts on the territory;
- the legibility of the impacts generated in the relationship between projects of active participation and well-being and resilience;
- the relevance of the various measurement dimensions within active participation projects.

The analysis presented in "Co-Create Matera" shows that the participatory processes in the context of MCEC 2019 have, overall, generated significant positive effects, both in terms of involvement and of participatory awareness, positively affecting the psychological well-being of citizens - albeit of course with the inevitable nuances and complexities that can only be appreciated through a close, detailed analysis of the data. However, we can say that MCEC 2019 fully represents a good practice in the context of the European Capitals of Culture from the point of view of participatory practices, and this is even more significant in light of the cultural participation rates that are typical of the regions of Southern Italy: namely, among the lowest in the entire European Union.

Let's see some highlights: from the survey reported in this document, it is possible to observe how a **75% of respondents, after participating in the MCEC 2019 event, believe that their interest in cultural activities has increased**, demonstrating that the exposure to active participation projects within the cultural agenda significantly influences citizens' attitudes toward culture. Moreover, it is possible to observe how MCEC 2019, for the majority of questionnaire and interviews respondents, had positive effects in terms of **increased confidence (about 46.5%), improvement of their skills (about 60%), greater ability to collaborate (more than 80%), cooperate, and understand others**. The most interesting results that emerge from the analysis of the data collected seem to confirm the value and potential of the ECoC experience in generating empowerment, in investing in personal and

collective abilities of citizens in creating value and meaning around the shared construction of commons, thanks to artistic interventions.

In this regard, it is interesting to focus on the main reasons that led the interviewees to participate: around **40%** of them clearly appreciate the opportunity offered by the MCEC 2019 project, that is **to challenge the limits of their knowledge and experience**, showing that they **embraced the proactive function of participatory processes**.

It is also interesting to focus on the impact that the MCEC 2019 experience had on the lives of the volunteers interviewed: the sample unanimously indicated that they had **benefited from active participation** in the events, making new friends within an international context and feeling more **self-confident** even at work, benefiting from the substantial training experience related to their involvement in the projects. Also from the interviewed sample of residents of the "inner areas", the feedback in terms of **personal growth** and development, even if already consolidated by curricula of decades of experience, has been substantial.

The MCEC 2019 experience, according to what emerges from the results presented in this report, confirms that culture is a key element for maintaining, generating or increasing the level of collective well-being, in close relationship with welfare and cognitive growth: the report suggests that **MCEC 2019 has created the conditions for an increased perception of well-being in subjects**, the **72.4%** of whom declare themselves 'definitely full of energy' and 'quite full of energy', about 16% more than the following year. MCEC 2019 has potentially generated an improvement in the sphere of **life satisfaction**, as the sample agreeing to this amounts to **57.6%**, compared to the 50.3 of the benchmarking coming from ISTAT, with respect to the geographical area of reference (Basilicata Region).

The activities of MCEC 2019 have been an experimental territorial co-design laboratory from the early stages. In particular, MCEC 2019 can be considered as a significant pilot for two of the currently most important EU strategic projects. On the one hand, the **New European Bauhaus** project, and more broadly in the context of the new project cycle of the Next Generation EU, with particular reference to the Open Design School that represents an important experimentation platform. On the other hand, the participatory dimension as a significant component of MCEC 2019 programming shows how, even in the context of the imminent launch of the new **KIC** on cultural and creative industries, the most successful experiences coming from the laboratory of the European Capitals of Culture can offer a **point of reference in imagining a creative ecosystem that assigns an adequate weight to the dimensions of impact and social capacity**.

Finally, it is important to underline that, in view of the data collection method adopted, the results of this analysis only allow us to establish correlational evidence and therefore do not allow us to draw causal inferences. Nevertheless, due to both the objective relevance of a timely survey of the effects of a project on such a large territorial scale, and the preliminary

state of research in these areas, such correlational results can still offer, in the awareness of their intrinsic limitations, a useful basis for understanding the ongoing social dynamics and for the planning of future interventions, as well as for future studies of a longitudinal nature that will finally allow to dig deeper as to the causal mechanisms behind the effects of cultural participation.