



## LESSON TRANSCRIPT

### *Paradox of the mandate for participation*

The fields we explored in their action in public space showed significant tension between the framework of increasingly present commissions from policymakers and the desire for citizen participation. Today, there's a lot of talk about co-development and co-design of public action to guarantee its legitimacy. By setting out the conditions for sharing the issues at stake, cultural rights help to identify and analyse the problems that arise in the participatory processes developed by public action.

We often use the expression «getting residents to participate», and often, «getting» them to «participate» means that people don't necessarily feel concerned. How can people really contribute and build solutions to the problems they face? Do we always have all the information we need to participate and build a solution or a way of thinking about public space? Are we trained in the collective intelligence tools that really enable us to co-develop a solution together?

In many cases, residents tend to adopt an attitude of complaint, i.e. a relationship with public action where they act as customers demanding that their needs be met. Artistic projects are often developed locally in response to calls for proposals. With these commissions, it's not always clear where political control begins and ends. Do they simply refer to the economic conditions that enable artistic projects to be developed, or do they call for more?

These calls for projects sometimes lead to artistic projects being dropped into unfamiliar territory. You have to give yourself time to understand where you are. How is the right to information expressed in the place? Who could have passed on the information? Is it just the commissioners? Was it possible to spend time exploring the area before the project really began? Were the lesser heard stakeholders able to make their voices heard?

Two key concepts emerge - diversity and cooperation - in the call for citizen participation or the encouragement of such participation. The professional stakeholder is often placed in opposition to the resident. However, there is wide range of players involved, and this complexity needs to be taken into account. This search for

participation can lead to organisations competing with each other to see where the resident will participate. Residents may feel over-solicited to participate in multiple projects and lose sight of their meaning.

The right to take part in cultural life is not just a right for residents, but also for artists and operators in the field. This right to participate must enable them to decide what they want to contribute and how they want to set the limits of their action, without becoming objectified for purposes that are not their own. For their participation to make sense, people need to meet and get to know each other relatively well. It's a basic idea, but often it's the most important issue.

Cultural rights bring constant attention to any form of prejudice or assumption about what people can contribute. All these participatory initiatives, and all the political frameworks in place to enable them to happen, must be careful not to standardise the ways in which projects are developed. Not everyone holds meetings, not everyone writes up reports, not everyone plans ahead. There are many ways to develop relevant projects and initiatives, and many ways to participate in cultural life.