

Reframing Participation in ICH in a Decentering and Decolonising Design Perspective

Drafting guiding principles from a review of literature and of funded projects

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Abstract

This exploratory paper aims at providing some early theoretical insights contributing to the redefinition of the evolving landscape of Participatory Design (PD), hypothesising a set of principles for reframing it with a decentering perspective in the field of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). ICH, as local knowledge and cultural practice, is a potential trigger for mutual understanding, dialogue and coexistence, addressing transformative changes towards sustainability; on the other hand, participatory as well as co-design process, practices and methods, are increasingly used in community projects, as means to foster inclusion, equity, and resilience for ICH activation (acknowledgement, sharing, transmission, experience and re-use), especially in sensitive contexts, like minority groups, marginalised and impaired people. However, these processes often (sometimes unconsciously) see design acting as a structure of authority and power that, according to a Western model based on a tendentially colonizing approach, is placed in a position of presumed superiority (of knowledge, resources, capacity, skills) with respect to the object of the project, i.e. the heritage and the communities. Drawing from a mixed narrative and integrative literature review approach (from which it emerges that awareness on this topic is beginning to make its way into the scientific-academic community) alongside a qualitative analysis of about 30 research projects funded under European research programs (that shows how these critical positions are applied and work in practice), the paper proposes some guiding principles to “decentralize” the practices and habits related to participatory design in the field of intangible cultural heritage, in order to support a real epistemological and disciplinary change towards an ethic and decolonizing approach in participation.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing** → Interaction design; Interaction design process and methods; Participatory design.

Keywords

Intangible Cultural Heritage, Participation, Decolonising, Distributed Leadership, Endogenesis



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1 Participatory design and ICH rhetoric

In a changing world of Cultural Heritage (CH) [1], as declared by European Commission [2], the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is a fundamental driver for more resilient societies. Anyway, if embracing the rhetoric of multiculturalism, it can be also subject to radicalisation, extremization and cultural fundamentalism led by conservation choices.

Advocating for a dynamic and evolutionary nature of ICH, in addressing the DEAI (diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion) imperative, always more often participatory and community-cantered approaches promote active citizenship and valorization of cultural differences and identities with the assumption that they constitute the basis for truly effective and sustainable plural processes.

Accordingly, the literature on participation in the field of cultural heritage is extensive and consolidated. To name just a few, we speak of community heritage [3], indigenous curation [4], interpretive communities [5], participatory museum [6], crowdsourcing in CH [7], participation in CH [8, 9], co-creation [10].

However, some criticisms have recently emerged that highlight how there is a risk of “romanticizing” and idealizing participation [11], when instead it can inadvertently reinforce forms of control [12], generating divisions based on how the concept of democratization is practiced [9]: for example when the role of participants is ambiguous (requiring continuous re-negotiations of leadership) [13], or because experts are the only source of power and authority [14, 15]. We speak of *tokenism*, or the possibility of having a role in a hegemonic narrative, but without being able to significantly transform it [16]. Torretta et al. [17] explicitly address the need to become aware of our position in society and the power, privileges, politics, and access (3P-A) that comes with it, proposing the notions of *pluriversal participation*, *pluriversal presence*, and *pluriversal directionality*. Scholars framed the concept of decolonising design [18] and design research to advance design practice towards pluriversal-ity [19]. The *Decolonising Design Collective* too aims at challenging mainstream design and universal ideas about design and participation. Udoewa [20] introduces the concept of Radical Participatory Design as a meta-methodology to support equitable processes of

initiation, participation and leadership. Finally, as demonstrated by Paananen et al. [21], whereas technology itself appears as neutral, it is applied in CH context through a lens of values which can be intertwined with politics and power.

In this framework, the Cultural Heritage (CH) system amplifies the enormous urgency of decolonizing and decentralizing its processes [22, 23], with a design approach [24–26], to truly address a pluriverse development [27, 28].

2 SCOPE and methodology of the study

This is a scoping paper that acts as preliminary work for further investigation, attempting to provide initial indications of the potential extent and nature of an emergent topic at the intersection of PD, decolonising design, and cultural heritage policy.

The aim is to provide the reader with a first background for understanding current knowledge and highlighting the significance of the research that is needed to be developed in this field.

The paper uses a semi-systematic research approach, suitable for exploring complex and interdisciplinary topics.

The literature review is based on a mixed narrative and integrative method. According to a narrative review, it is structured to qualitatively identify primary studies within the topic and extract relevant content, using several keywords, combining them in an appropriate manner by the use of inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure validity and minimizing bias of subjectivity in data selection and interpretation [29]. According to an integrative review, it critically analyzes, integrates and interprets the existing literature in a holistic understanding, in a way that enables new theoretical frameworks and perspectives to emerge [30]. The process of review and analysis of the articles is qualitative, focusing on identifying themes, narratives, and contextual meanings.

The case study research has been semi-systematic as well, employing a qualitative selection framework and a comparative cross-case analysis.

A more detailed analysis of empirical data is still ongoing and, as a result, the paper does not provide definitive conclusions, but a firm basis for further exploration.

3 Literature review

The objective of the literature review (and its primary research question) is to discuss how the participatory approach is framed in the dominant scientific narrative of design: if it is affected (inadvertently) by exogenous thinking that leads to bias or misuses of participation, or conversely, if it is consciously employed to address effective decolonizing processes in CH.

Therefore, the analysis has been conducted on design research articles in mainstream design journals which present, to different extents, reflections or case studies employing community-based participatory design practices in CH.

The selection (inclusion/exclusion) criteria for LR are as follows:

- Span of years: 2013–2024;
- Search base: a list of renowned international design focused journals selected from Gemser et al. [31] plus some recently established international journals (see table 1).
- Only paper from the chosen list of design journal (no paper from any conference has been considered, nor open access

articles or books: a deliberate choice in order to reveal the mainstream narrative promoted by such journals).

- Two keyword lists have been defined, the first about PD and the second about CH, using as inclusion criteria the direct reference of the keywords in the title or in the article text (see table 2).

More than 100 design research articles have been scrutinized, and 50 have been considered relevant and analyzed.

The analysis has been qualitative, reviewing the content by detailed reading to compare and evaluate the different assumptions, definitions, aims, developments and uses (or misuses) of participatory practices in CH.

Two panels have been determined: Panel 1 related to Participatory Design and Panel 2 focusing on Participatory Design in CH, with a focus on ICH.

Many of the articles of Panel 1 on PD are merely instrumental, discussing methods, tools and techniques [32] without questioning or even mentioning the possible risk of a domesticating approach and falling into solutionism and toolification. Others have a paternalistic approach in the way they try to use design to empower low-income and “developing” contexts to overcome “deficiencies” in knowledge [33]. Some authors acknowledge that in PD with vulnerable groups, any attempt at “genuine inclusion” can be challenging, since barriers to participation remain [34]. Some others instead raise concerns about PD: Kelly [35] calls for ethical principles for PD practice; Dore [36] emphasizes the potential instrumentalization and failure of PD, challenging its claims to be democratic if it is used with a technocratic and uncontested institutionalized approach; Kraff [37] explores “agonism” within PD processes to question power structures, but also highlights some preconditions for engaging. In general, the concepts of indigenous design became relevant when discussing the legacies of colonialism and entrenched systems of “othering”. Indigenous-focused design methodology based on storytelling is conceived as a co-design space for cohesiveness and conversation by Barcham [38]. Akama, Hagen & Whaanga-Schollum [39] propose respectful, reciprocal and relational approaches as an ontology of co-designing social innovation, to overcome the asymmetry of collaboration by reciprocity and mutual understanding; these authors also contest the use of binary categories like “Indigenous” and “non-Indigenous”. Raman & French [40] claim to contribute to a right-based ethos for PD and provide a framework to shift the mindset of PD by individualized and subjective methods on sensitive topics. Finally, a few papers explicitly rebut optimism about participation [41], or highlight the risks co-design poses for democracy in the redistribution and delegation of power [42].

Most of the articles related to PD in CH and museums consider participation and co-design as instrumental to enriching the experience of the heritage [43, 44], without mentioning any potential bias. Critical thinking emerges in the problematization of PD in CH, but without explicitly mentioning the word decolonizing. Taffe & Kelly [45] highlight the difficulty of using PD approaches for creating community museums, because participants’ roles became ambiguous; Tang & Nakarada-Kordic [46] claim to use critical design as a means of sparking discussion and debate in participatory exhibitions. Finally, a few studies explicitly refer to decolonizing

Table 1: List of design journals

Journal	List
The design Journal	from Gemser <i>et al.</i> 2012
Design and Culture	from Gemser <i>et al.</i> 2012
Design Issues	from Gemser <i>et al.</i> 2012
Design Studies	from Gemser <i>et al.</i> 2012
International Journal of design	from Gemser <i>et al.</i> 2012
She-Ji	added
CoDesign	added
Strategic Design Research Journal	added

Table 2: List of keywords

PD	CH
Participation	Cultural heritage
Participatory	Museum
Co-design	Collection
Co-creation	Human Treasure
Co-production	Identity
Co-curation	Expression
Citizen Curation	Performance
Collaboration	Craft
Collaborative	Dance
Engagement	Art
Involvement	Theatre
Inclusion	Language
Integration	Traditional Knowledge
Diversity	Living Heritage
Community	Intangible cultural heritage
Accessibility	

PD in CH. According to Rizvi [47], decoloniality becomes a critical heritage discourse when it is critically negotiating the past and can be unfolded by community-based participatory practices. Kambunga, Smith, Winschiers-Theophilus and Otto [48] argue that it is an intentional design practice that is capable of supporting alternative ways of knowing and doing in practice, even in the PD field: in a participatory memory-making project in Namibia, they employ a safe space framework for decolonizing PD, a space informed by the notion of “cultural hybridity”.

In general, however, in the papers analysed, all the critical stances on decolonizing design, participatory practices and cultural heritage remain at a somewhat theoretical level, discussing such concepts as sensitivity, reciprocity, dignity, positionality, dialogue, democracy, intersectionality, activism and resilience in PD. It is also not yet evident how these critical stances are applied and working in practice, nor any clear assessment of their effectiveness is provided. Therefore, a systematic analysis of applicative research projects is provided in the following section, to critically discusses and evaluate the effectiveness and impact of inclusive, participatory and co-creative design processes in the cultural field, in a decolonizing perspective.

4 review OF EC funded projects

The objective of the case study research is to give evidence, if any, of how decolonising participatory design processes is applied and works in practice in projects within the cultural heritage domain, and especially the ones informed by the top-down research agenda of heritage policies in the framework of EU.

The analysis is developed on collaborative research projects, funded under the European Community (EC) competitive calls, which employ community-based participatory practices in the valorisation of CH (understood in a broad sense: traditional, intangible, contemporary...).

The selection (inclusion/exclusion) criteria for the projects are the following:

1. Projects funded by EC Calls.
2. Years 2014-2023 (to include the H2020 and Horizon EU programs).
3. Calls related to to CH, by the presence of keywords (see Table 2).
 - Declared presence of participation or
 - Implicit participation detection (by the presence of keywords: e.g. engagement, codesign, co-creation...) (see table 2).

In particular, the cross- case analysis has been conducted on the dimensions of participation, if described or appreciable through project reports or results, and beyond the quantification of the actions and the number of stakeholders and public involved, in the following three variables:

1. Processual dimension: the phase(s) of the cultural heritage value chain [49, 50] in which participation is designed and/or occurs;
2. Relational dimension: the breadth or extension and intensity of the interaction between the entire ecosystem of stakeholders
3. Performative dimension: the real freedom in action and contribution allowed by participatory design practices and its transformative effect.

In addition, the comparison of the cases addressed the declared presence or implicit detection of any decolonising, plural and ethical approach applied within the projects (by listing them through key words: e.g. plural narratives, ethics for participation, etc.). Finally, the ways of using technologies in participatory processes (declared presence) has been detected.

Table 3: List of projects funded by EC

Call	Projects (and sub-call)
H2020-REFLECTIVE-2014-2015	Traces; Cohere (REFLECTIVE-2-2015- Transmission of European cultural heritage) Crosscult; Arches (REFLECTIVE-6-2015- Innovation ecosystems of digital cultural asset) Culturalbase (REFLECTIVE-9-2014)
H2020-SC6-CULT-COOP-2016-2017	Reach; Culture Labs; (CULT-COOP-06-2017- Participatory approaches and social innovation in culture) Pluggy (CULT-COOP-08-2016- Virtual museums and social platform)
H2020-SC6-TRANSFORMATIONS-2018-2019-2020	Incultum; Textour (TRANSFORMATIONS-04-2019-2020- Innovative approaches to cultural tourism) Uncharted; Spice; So-Close; Traction; Memex (TRANSFORMATIONS-08-2019- Collaborative approaches to cultural heritage) Mingei (DT-TRANSFORMATIONS-12-2018-2020- Curation of digital assets and advanced digitisation) Sophia (TRANSFORMATIONS-16-2019- Social platform on the impact assessment) Artformation (TRANSFORMATIONS-17-2019- Societal challenges and the arts) ReInHerit (TRANSFORMATIONS-19-2020- Cooperation between European museums and heritage sites) inDICEs (DT-GOVERNANCE-13-2019 - Digitisation and European culture)
H2020-SC6-GOVERNANCE-2018-2019-2020	
HORIZON-CL2-2021/2022/2023-HERITAGE-01	Shift; MuseIT (HORIZON-CL2-2021-HERITAGE-01-04- Preserving and enhancing cultural heritage with advanced digital technologies) Glammons; Recharge (HORIZON-CL2-2021-HERITAGE-01-02- New ways of participatory management) Rise-up (HORIZON-CL2-2022-HERITAGE-01-01- Safeguarding endangered languages) Culturati (HORIZON-CL2-2022-HERITAGE-01-02- Europe’s cultural heritage and arts) Nardiv (HORIZON-CL2-2022-HERITAGE-01-03) Tracks4Craft (HORIZON-CL2-2022-HERITAGE-01-04- Traditional crafts for the future) Epic-We; Great (HORIZON-CL2-2022-HERITAGE-01-09- Games and Culture) Heritact (HORIZON-CL2-2022-HERITAGE-01-10- NEB) Reevaluate; Digicher; (HORIZON-CL2-2023-HERITAGE-01-03 - Re-visiting the digitisation of cultural heritage) Conciliare (HORIZON-CL2-2023-HERITAGE-01-04- CH in Transformation)

23 Calls have been considered relevant and scrutinized, and among the 91 projects initially included, 34 (see table 3) were considered to meet the criteria and were therefore analysed in detail (by websites and project deliverables, such as reports, articles etc). It is necessary to underline that, differently from literature review, a specific focus on institutional forms of ICH is not present in all the selected projects: some projects are dealing with performative arts, community memories and identities, contentious histories, endangered languages, traditional craft and minority practices and knowledge, but the majority of the projects work longitudinally among the wide spectrum of CH, especially the ones dealing with technologies or with social cohesion aims. Therefore, in order to not reduce the sample, CH projects have been considered too, and the reflections on participative approaches can be related both to institutional ICH forms and to immaterial values, meanings and processes of tangible CH, in a more comprehensive interpretation of “intangible”.

Since the cases are different for contextual conditions and outcomes, the analysis of the projects has been qualitative, using a causal-process observation to identify pattern or causal mechanism that could provide insight into the relationship among the three variables of participation considered and the decolonising approach

eventually introduced. In particular, by inductive reasoning, necessary and sufficient conditions [51] have been hypothesized to make correlations among them.

However, at this stage of research, and due to length constraints, in this exploratory paper, only a chronological synthesis will be provided by citing specific projects (which, however, cannot be described in detail) and two specific examples will be provided (by anonymized projects) to illustrate the prior considerations..

By observing the calls and the projects, it is possible to read the evolution of research trends and trajectories on participation in the different temporal phases with respect to the “canonized” participatory methodologies and their application, but also with respect to how the very concept of participation is understood and interpreted, especially in the early years examined.

At the beginning of the time considered, terms such as inclusion and accessibility are often used inappropriately if not instrumentally: they are only declared but not substantiated by a clear practical application in the projects, because they are cited as indirect results of the application of emerging technologies in that time (immersive technologies, virtual and personalization) but are not connected to real and designed participatory processes. With the publication of a call explicitly addressed to participation (CULT-COOP-06-2017 Participatory approaches and social innovation in culture)

this approach is brought to the fore. However, even though emancipatory concepts such as “community-controlled and community-managed research” are starting to be made explicit, participation often remains an objective of the projects, to be achieved through technologies, and not an approach also used in the design process. With the subsequent calls (H2020-SC6-TRANSFORMATIONS-2018-2019-2020) participatory models are acquired and used widely, and are applied, in addition to experiences addressed to end users of the heritage, for co-curation, co-creation, participatory management projects in very different cultural heritage areas (work, art, intangible heritage...). Participation is often supported using technologies and becomes more concrete, because it is a structural practice of some processes (e.g. co-design methodologies declined in the co-curatorship of contents), and not only a result to be achieved and enabled. Two other interesting aspects emerge: reference is often made to sensitive targets (migrants, minorities, disadvantaged groups) and a systematic assessment of the design processes begins, albeit sporadically. With the launch of the new Horizon Europe program, the importance of the participatory management approach is confirmed through a dedicated call (HORIZON-CL2-2021-HERITAGE-01-02: New ways of participatory management and sustainable financing of museums and other cultural institutions), that is, deploying the potential of participation not only towards the end users of the heritage but also in the initial and intermediate phases of value creation of the cultural supply chain, thus recognizing the contribution of the entire ecosystem of stakeholders (and in particular also Cultural and Creative Industries CCI) in the creation and management of the heritage [52]. At the same time, thanks to subsequent calls, attention is growing towards an ethical dimension of participation (through concepts such as equal opportunity principle, cultural diplomacy to counter identity-based post-colonial discourses, minority communities, colonial heritage) and finally also a critical approach towards technologies. In this way, the foundations are laid, through a series of proposals for “conscious design practices”, for a more mature approach to the heritage enhancement project.

Concerning the case comparison regarding the three variables, a preliminary synthesis is reported as follows. At the processual level of participation, this schematization of the phases of the cultural heritage value chain was used [52]: Infrastructure & management; Preservation.; Audience development; Services. The phases where participatory processes are located in most projects are those of audience development and infrastructure and management; in this last phase in particular, co-design actions are promoted when the projects are also oriented towards organizational changes in cultural institutions linked to digital transformation or in the co-creation of cultural offering (an example is *Culturati* project, a platform that enables CCIs, and citizens to create content collectively); anyway the projects do not really question the power dynamics between institutions and the constellation of actors in the system. At the relational level, a significant extension of the types of participants involved is appreciated, ranging from communities that hold the heritage, users of the heritage, businesses and creative studios, technological partners. An example of extending the relational dimension of participation is the *Digicher* project, whose methodological approach for revisiting the digitization of CH towards more equitable process for minority communities, flattens the one-way

hierarchical relationship among stakeholders and used multilingual communication. However, at the performative level, it is difficult to evaluate (from the reports and results of the projects) the real authorial contribution (i.e. genuinely unguided) of the participants involved as well as its transformative impact on the overall project. This is mainly because although the projects explicitly declare an attention towards cultural diversity or disadvantaged targets, what is generally evaluated is the overall impact of the project on society, policies etc. and not the quality and effectiveness of the participatory models and processes adopted in themselves. One example is the *Heritact* project, that seeks to enable and enhance the performative and transformative levels of participation by digital tools for community-led design and negotiation among stakeholders, but the impact assessment is mainly on the effect on heritage.

Anyway, in term of conditions and successful pathways to the adoption of a truly decolonising approach, enabling in deep both the performative and relational dimension proves to be a necessary pre-requisite for decolonising participatory processes, but not a sufficient condition. A large processual dimension (participatory processes adopted along the whole heritage value chain) can partially replace the extended relational dimension needed to support plural approaches but don't guarantee the decolonising of participation as well. Similarly, the presence of ethical concerns (especially about sensitive targets) does not automatically lead to a genuine and transformative participation.

Finally, the role of technologies has been scrutinized: their use has increased consistently in the last 10 years, following the trends of adoption promoted by the EC (especially at the beginning of the period considered: see calls CULT-COOP-08-2016- Virtual museums and social platform; DT-TRANSFORMATIONS-12-2018-2020- Curation of digital assets; HORIZON-CL2-2021-HERITAGE-01-04- Preserving and enhancing cultural heritage with advanced digital technologies). Only in recent years a more critical approach was proposed to rethink the role of technologies (see call HORIZON-CL2-2023-HERITAGE-01-03 -Re-visiting the digitisation of cultural heritage). Anyway, the use of technologies is mainly instrumental and there are very few references and critical and ethical measures to mitigate the biases caused by technology in including or excluding actors depending on their gender, cultural inclination or digital literacy. An example is *Digicher* project, that designed a framework for ethical digitisation. Therefore, a genuinely critical stance on digital decolonization must go beyond forms of accessibility and inclusion enabled by technology. It should dismantle the widespread equation of digital inclusion with digital decolonisation, as well as the rhetoric of digital solutionism in CH, to overcome any possible ambiguity of digital decolonisation [53]. Instead, it should prioritise issues of control, power, and decision-making over technological choices, placing these in the hands of bearer communities in order to sustain the living and transformative nature of ICH. As several scholars argue, decolonising digital heritage entails discussing how digital systems are designed and by whom [54], through a structural rethinking of the ways in which knowledge is produced, organised, and disseminated through digital infrastructures—such as platforms and archives—often informed by Western digital ontologies [55], explicitly linking local agency and epistemic justice by design practice.

Here two anonymized cases are presented to exemplify and summarize the considerations drawn from the projects.

Project 1 claims the transformative role of technological advancement to foster collaboration among cultural sites, CCI, creative professions and citizens (extended relational dimension) for content co-creation (focused processual dimension) to create an inclusive cultural-educational ecosystem empowered by cutting-edge digital solutions. Anyway, in the pilots (as far as was possible to observe from the official online documents), accessibility and audience engagement are prevalent, in a quite passive performative dimension of participation, where active engagement is still framed as personalisation of visit and learning strategies. Content creation was led mainly by museum curators with users' needs managed through crowd sensors and tracking system in the cultural sites to detect also practices for disadvantaged or unrepresented individuals (in an extractive process not allowing autonomy nor creativity). Just in one site a more collaborative effort has been adopted (engaging experts, artists, creative professionals, and small and micro-enterprise, including the participation of young people and women). However, the policy brief report mentions that due to their low educational level, their contribution needed to be legitimated under a "governing body", an institutional entity that holds authority on content quality. Even with ethical consent and compliance respected, if it is not exactly tokenism, it certainly cannot be considered an example of distributed authority and transformative empowerment.

Project 2 claims inclusive and fair digitization and reuse of CH of minority communities (extended processual dimension) by their participation in the decision-making process (focused relational dimension). It advocates community-led governance, ownership and control for respectful, and ethically empowered practices. Anyway, the participatory workshops are not described in detail, and the minority communities appear to have a consultative role ("exploring their needs, opinions and desires") that according to Arnstein [56] is a degree of tokenism.

More detailed analysis of empirical data is undergoing, but as preliminary conclusion, within the research and innovation projects funded by the EC in the field of ICH that refer to the use of participatory processes, even within the frame of more ethical or sensitive positions, a decentering and decolonizing approach to participation does not emerge explicitly and consciously. There is a persistent use of the term that is sometimes superficial, sometimes rhetorical, and even a biased or distorting application of participation. Regarding the use of digital technologies for participation, few projects raised concerns on the way in which technology practices can create barriers for access and inclusion, but concepts such as digital decolonisation, digital pluralism, technodiversity [57, 58] are even not mentioned by the calls, and consequently overlooked by the projects. Therefore, inequalities in cultural participation persist and patterns of cultural participation remain socially and spatially divided in the EC [59] and as a matter of fact, the scope for participation is easily overstated and yet to be adequately substantiated.

5 LOOKING FOR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

At this stage of research progression, given the difficulty of finding out a significant number of projects applying truly decolonizing participatory processes (which in any case have always a contextual

dimension and are therefore partial and not easily replicable or scalable), it seemed more appropriate to hypothesize a set of guiding principles, which can act as a lens for the assessment and amplification of virtuous approaches, in an open-ended and non-prescriptive perspective.

The objective of this drafting is twofold: from one hand, to better focus the research to find concrete examples that can illustrate (even partially) the guiding principles (not only among EC funded projects, but in other regional or local funding and bottom-up initiatives too); on the other hand, to specify requirements and actions to set up pilots for practical experimentation in the field, in order to pass from the level of framing to the one of execution and actionability of the principles.

As starting point, the concept of intersectionality [60], that concerns the interaction between a plurality of differences and their context and positioning which defines systems of privilege, is posed as a reference background to defuse distorted logics of assimilationist and paternalistic inclusion in participation.

Then, some key concepts emerged from the review of the literature and of the projects have been selected as the more promising, and correlated to the dimensions of participation (see table 4)

Therefore, reframing the three dimensions of participation, in the light of the abovementioned concepts and the interdependencies of multiple actors and agencies in the CH ecosystem [61], we advocate for:

1. At the processual level of participation, distributing agencies in the whole process and phases. Participatory processes must structurally happen and inherently pertain (and not being "enabled") at all the CH value chain stages (also considering if using or not to using technologies, and which ones), generating a transformative impact of capacitation on the whole CH ecosystem itself.
2. At the relational level of participation, leveling power by sharing leadership. All the different typologies of actors should be interconnected and involved in shaping the whole process, by different ways of engaging and shared leadership of the design process.
3. At the performative level of participation, valuing impermanence and promoting adaptive endogenesis for transformation. Participatory design approaches should not be grounded in deterministic approaches and focused on predefined outcomes typical of the culture of planning and over-control of the future. Instead, it should value the autonomy and improvisational agility of the ICH ecosystem in continuously reshaping the directions of the design processes over time.

According to these principles, it is necessary to re-negotiate our human entrenched system of understanding right and emancipation (as something acquired and not given by other entities), fair exchange (as action and responsibilities built on uniqueness) and objectives (as something not predetermined nor exactly predetermined).

For this reason, to put these principles in practice requires a continuous attentive monitoring and self-analysis of the most potentially triggering and cumbersome processes in participatory

Table 4: Correlation among key concepts and dimensions of participation

Key concepts	from	Relevant for
Renewed Engagement	Digicher project	Processual and performative dimension
Pluriversal participation	Torretta et al. 2023	Processual and relational dimension
Empowered participation	Epic-We project; Culturati project	Performative dimension
Radical Participatory Design	Udoewa (2022)	Processual, relational and performative dimension

design for CH, but no detailed operational procedures can be conclusive or permanent, unless they possibly fall into prescriptive solutionism again colonizing. Anyway, a framework of practical implications and precautions, as well as of non-prescriptive assessment, is under development and will be presented in a future work, to better support our claim.

6 conclusion: limitation and future directions

In this exploratory paper we give evidence to the necessity of challenging the democratic claims of participation and PD in CH for a truly decolonising approach, by the critical analysis of literature in design journals and of research and innovation projects funded under the EC scheme. We advocate an ecosystem thinking and pluriverse approach to decolonise the participatory paradigm, proposing some guiding principles that disentangle participation on three levels (processual, relational and performative) and imply design sometimes is taking a step back, because only an intentional aware design practice can support alternative worlding.

The most relevant research limitations anyway are the limited list of journals considered for the literature review and the exclusion, from the research projects typologies, of projects not funded by competitive calls or smaller scale independent or applied research. Finally, some projects are still undergoing and official documents and data are not completed or available at the time of the study. These choices and factors could have generated some path dependencies in data and therefore in finding, assumptions and claims.

Further work can be conducted to deepen the focus and specificities of ICH as living agency and its correlation with transformative participation as well as its triangulation with digital technologies, that can be better explored in literature too.

Finally, it is crucial to experiment first-hand how to fully succeed in adopting a real and effective decolonizing approach in participation for CH, by concrete applicative projects. Some of the proposed principles (e.g. prioritizing autonomy and adaptive endogenesis of ICH, instead of predefined outcomes) could challenge EC project bureaucratic requirements (KPI, deliverables...) and be therefore difficult to set in practice in a rigid funding scheme structure. It's necessary to underline that this work constitutes a preliminary study for drafting a proposal for an application for EC funding and that the principles are at a developmental stage, therefore they could be further modified, refined, or even amended. Hopefully the project could offer the opportunity to improve and operationalize the principles, challenging in practice the privileged Western-centric perspective, not only at the level of the authors and researchers involved, but at the macro-level of the epistemic power of research policies too.

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