Little willies as community-building heritage: A bottom-up approach to the European Capital of Culture initiative

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Abstract
The ambitious 11fountains project was a flagship feature of the programme that won Leeuwarden (Netherlands) the title of European Capital of Culture for 2018. Eleven international artists were invited to design fountains for 11 towns in the province of Friesland. Feeling side-lined in the project, local Frisians responded by erecting their own fountain, which was decorated with 230 stylised penises and concealed a toilet. Drawing on theories of heritage and community formation to frame this fountain as a case study, I develop a concept of ‘community-building heritage’. Community-building heritage is participatory, dependent on citizen contributions and explicitly aims to mobilise and connect individual contributors in a community. Understanding community-building heritage as an act of cultural self-signification, I argue that its facilitation within the European Capital of Culture initiative, either in official programming or as counter-initiative, may contribute to a more bottom-up and constructivist approach towards community constitution within European Union cultural policies.

Keywords
community, cultural heritage, European Capital of Culture, European heritage, Friesland

Introduction
Imagine a fountain. Now imagine a fountain made up of hundreds of poised penises. Imagine the penises on this fountain bouncing up and down, squirting water on the crowds gathered around it. Imagine this fountain on the road, skirting through the meadows of the province of Friesland in the Netherlands. Imagine a festive welcoming in every town it
enters, the locals gathering happily under its water jets, cheering on each person that emerges from the toilet hidden in the base of the fountain. Artist Henk de Boer from the Frisian town of Workum envisioned and built this fountain. Drawing from the Dutch expression of Jan Lul, which roughly translates to ‘John Willy’, and commonly refers to someone who has been side-lined or excluded, the fountain was designed and built to protest the implementation of the 11fountains project which was part of official European Capital of Culture (ECOC) programming for Leeuwarden-Friesland 2018 (LF2018).

The Pauperfontein, named after De Boer’s local art troupe De Paupers, was far from subtle. Measuring over 7.5 metres from base to tip, it featured no fewer than 230 white, stylised penises. The base of the fountain concealed a public toilet, the flushing of which triggered the penises to squirt water and bounce up and down. The funds for its construction and tour were raised through a snappy crowdfunding campaign that allowed people ‘to become a member by adopting a member’, as quipped by De Boer (11 Frieze Fonteinen, 2018). After its celebratory unveiling in Leeuwarden, the fountain followed the path of the Elfstedentocht (Tour of Eleven Cities) to be exhibited in each of the eleven cities that were also included in the 11fountains project. The Pauperfontein was built and funded by local Frisians and was explicitly conceptualised in opposition to the official 11fountains project, which was organised by an Amsterdam-based curator and did not include any Frisian artists. De Boer explains that, unlike 11fountains, everyone could contribute to the Pauperfontein: it was built from the bottom up and therefore demonstrates the aims and values of ‘mienskip’ (Van Dalen, 2018b). Mienskip, a concept that will be elaborated on below, is the distinctively Frisian sense of community. After the Pauperfontein’s tour was over, De Boer remarked, ‘We noticed that people saw this fountain as a real mienskip project. It really belonged to them’ (Van der Meer, 2018: 34).

In this contribution, I take the Pauperfontein as a case study to outline and explore the concept of community-building heritage. Drawing from a transdisciplinary theoretical framework that combines Heritage Studies with theories on community constitution and philosophy, I will first delineate the concept of community-building heritage. In the main body of this text, I will introduce LF2018, placing it in the context of Friesland as a minority language and culture area within the Netherlands, and discuss several elements from the programming, including the title ‘Iepen Mienskip’. I will then turn towards the Pauperfontein, analysing it as a case study of community-building heritage represented within the framework of European Union (EU) cultural policy, and argue that it functioned to constitute a community among local contributors. In doing so, the Pauperfontein complemented rather than undermined the aims of the 11fountains project in opposition to which it was initiated. Ultimately, the Pauperfontein mirrored and reinforced one of the main objectives of the overall ECOC initiative to advance social cohesion – despite its explicit positioning as counter-project to the official programming of LF2018. In conclusion, I will argue that community-building heritage and its instrumentalisation by cultural actors as counter-project to the overall ECOC initiative may inspire a more constructive and bottom-up understanding of European heritage and provide a possible means to inspire and engage local communities in EU cultural policies.
and my own observations of the Pauperfontein and 11fountains made during a visit to Leeuwarden in 2018 and an excursion in October 2020 past the 11 cities of Friesland, respectively. Another important source of data was the three-part 11 Frisian Fountains (11 Friese Fonteinen) documentary, which was commissioned by Dutch public service broadcasting and televised on national television channel NPO. This documentary, directed by Roel Van Dalen (2018a, 2018b, 2018c), humorously documents the clash between the idealistic pragmatism of the committee and the stubborn protests of local Frisians against the implementation of 11fountains. The documentary is narrated by Dutch comedian Jan Jaap van der Wal, who was born on the Frisian Wadden island of Vlieland, but moved to Amsterdam when he was a teenager. On one hand, the documentary features interviews with the initiators of 11fountains, several visits of participating artists to their respective towns, the design and construction process of several fountains, participation evenings and the festive presentations of several fountains. Anna Tilroe, initiator and curator of 11fountains, is filmed inviting artists and explaining the value of the project, both on a local and on an international level (Van Dalen, 2018a). On the other hand, the documentary features dozens of angry and indignant Frisians voicing their sense of powerlessness against the project. Artist De Boer, for instance, explicitly states that 11fountains ‘was organised top-down, it was dropped down on us from above’ (Van Dalen, 2018b). One inhabitant of Workum added the project was ‘being shoved down our throats. There is no participation. There is no democracy’ (Van Dalen, 2018b). The documentary also includes interviews with artist De Boer, footage of the construction and erection of the Pauperfontein and its celebratory inaugurations in several Frisian towns.

It should be noted that the documentary constitutes a significant additional layer of interpretation of both projects and therefore by no means provides an unbiased account of either LF2018, 11fountains or the Pauperfontein. The narrator of the documentary, Van der Wal, appeared on national television in March 2015, proclaiming that the designation of Leeuwarden as an ECOC was ‘an absolute disaster’, adding that ‘ultimately, it was all about money’ and mocking the organisers’ dream of inviting the Colombian singer Shakira to perform at the opening ceremony (RTL, 2015). The overall documentary, however, consistently oscillates between gently mocking the organisers of 11fountains and poking fun at the Pauperfontein and its makers, thereby presenting multiple perspectives on and from both projects, interspersed with footage of Van der Wal who summarises and comments on the course of events in front of an audience of people featured in the documentary, including 11fountains curator Tilroe, several locals and artist De Boer. Cautious of the supplementary layer of interpretation that the documentary constitutes, I focus less on these humourist interventions and concentrate on the featured interviews and footage of the Pauperfontein. Before I turn to analysing 11fountains and the Pauperfontein, however, I will first elaborate on what I understand as ‘community-building heritage’.

Theoretical framework: Community-building heritage

In this contribution, I present the Pauperfontein as a case study of community-building heritage. To delineate this concept, I will draw from a theoretical framework of heritage discourse, theories on community formation and writings on European heritage. I
conceptualise community-building heritage as effectively intangible and process-based, yet relating to or revolving around a material site or object (see Smith, 2006; Smith and Akagawa, 2008). The concept of community-building heritage has its roots in Laurajane Smith’s understanding of heritage as a cultural process or performance. In her seminal research, Smith draws from Bella Dicks (2000) and David Lowenthal (1985) to propose that heritage constitutes a cultural process that engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present, and the sites [or objects] themselves are cultural tools that can facilitate, but are not necessarily vital for, this process. (Smith, 2006: 44)

She emphasises that this understanding of heritage acknowledges that heritage may be mobilised to legitimise or delegitimise identity discourses. According to Smith (2006: 52), heritage can indeed be understood ‘as an important political and cultural tool in defining and legitimizing the identity, experiences and social/cultural standing of . . . the authorizing discourse’. Conversely, heritage can of course also be mobilised to challenge the authorising discourse and contest the identities that are communicated through it.

Following Smith’s understanding of heritage, community-building heritage is characterised by its markedly participatory nature, its dependence on citizen contributions and, of course, by its explicit aim to mobilise and connect individual contributors in a community. In this sense, the concept also draws from contemporary heritage studies that focus on the performative character of cultural heritage and how participatory conservation processes may reinforce a sense of community (Adell, 2015; Haldrup and Børenholdt, 2015; Roued-Cunliffe and Copeland, 2017). The community that arises around community-building heritage bears some similarities to the ‘heritage community’ as described by the Council of Europe (2005) in the Faro Convention. The document of this convention specifies that:

a heritage community consists of people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations.

The community that arises from community-building heritage is similar to this notion of the ‘heritage community’ in that both are defined in the absence of, or even by the absence of “societal parameters, national, ethnic, religious, professional or based on class” (Gabi Dolff-Bonekämper quoted in Zagato, 2015: 147). A heritage community, however, is characterised by its aim ‘to sustain and transmit to future generations’ fuelled by ‘the awareness of the resource value of its cultural heritage’ (Fabbricatti et al., 2020: 2). The heritage community thus looks towards the past, focusing on the communal conservation, preservation and maintenance of already existing heritage.

Conversely, the community that arises from community-building heritage is actively constituted in the present, in dialogic interaction with the construction – both symbolically and physically – of a heritage site or object. In this sense, community-building heritage adds a tangible asset to Smith’s (2006: 3) understanding of heritage as ‘a multi-layered performance . . . of visiting, managing, interpretation or conservation’. The community-building heritage object is also a performance of construction. The resulting
community-building heritage object may, however, be transient or even deliberately temporary. It is not necessarily intrinsically or immutably valuable. Rather, the symbolic social value that is gained though the contributions of individual people during the construction process is reinforced as long as the site or object is being constructed, maintained, used or contributed to. Community-building heritage therefore functions in the present as ‘cultural tool and part of the wider process of creating and recreating meaning’ (Smith, 2006: 65). The community-building heritage object can also be mobile – although it may draw meaning from its location, its value depends on action rather than its environment. Similar to the community-building heritage object, the community that arises around it is not necessarily permanent but will often gradually diminish as the heritage site or object deteriorates through usage or when it is abandoned or dismantled.

The process of community formation is of course imperative in understanding the concept of community-building heritage. As mentioned before, the emergence of a community-building heritage object relies on participation and contributions – either financial, physical or both – by individuals who thereby become part of a collective process of creation. The knowledge that others have also contributed may inspire a feeling of ‘we did it together!’ Such an emergence of a sense of connectivity with other contributors implies the constitution of a ‘we’ and a sense of communal interest or agency. Edmund Husserl (1970 [1936]: 109) proposes that a sense of community may arise through what he terms ‘we-subjectivity’. He notes that

it is to this or that object that we pay attention, according to our interests; with them we deal actively in different ways; through our acts they are ‘thematic’ objects . . . As subjects of acts (ego-subjects) we are directed toward thematic objects . . . Constantly functioning in wakeful life, we also function together, in the manifold ways of considering, together, objects pre-given to us in common, thinking together, valuing, planning, acting together. Here we find also that particular thematic alteration in which the we-subjectivity, somehow constantly functioning, becomes a thematic object. (Husserl, 1970 [1936]: 108–109)

In other words, through a shared interest, motivation or action (‘thematic object’), individuals may come to relate to or identify themselves with another individual. A sense of community is constituted through subjectivation, in the form of active communal striving towards common aims or interests. These communal aims are dialogically intertwined with the co-constitution of a we-subject – shared interests lead to shared goals which are strived for communally, thereby reinforcing the sense of a common subjectivity, which in turn reinforces the experience of sharing interests and goals. Ronald McIntyre adds that Husserl’s understanding of community constitution should not be defined ‘in terms of how it is constituted or experienced by others or even by its own members. A community is characterized as a we-subject and thus by how and what it constitutes’ (McIntyre, 2012: 20, emphasis in original). Following McIntyre’s reading of Husserl, a community is not experienced only by labelling it as such. Rather, it emerges from the shared actions and interests of the members that constitute it.

The mobilisation of community-building heritage in the context of EU cultural policies, either as part of ECOC programming or as counter-initiative, would mirror Gerard Delanty’s understanding of European cultural heritage in terms of
a cultural model by which societies interpret themselves. Viewed in these terms we can reconcile the contested conception of culture with a more general view in that a cultural model can constitute itself a site of conflicting interpretations of the world but in which there are possibilities for acts of signification. This essentially communicative concept of culture also opens up the cosmopolitan possibility for a reflexive relation between cultures. (Delanty, 2010: 5)

Following Delanty, the active creation, mobilisation and instrumentalisation of community-building heritage by citizens in an attempt to reclaim local conceptions of culture, could be interpreted as acts of cultural self-signification. With this in mind, European cultural heritage would not be understood as tangible or intangible, but rather within a cultural framework that facilitates and identifies the acts of signification that render matter cultural heritage in the first place. For Delanty (2010: 6), such a framework would involve moving beyond how people identify with Europe or the EU and revolves instead around a constructivist approach towards community constitution.

The active inclusion of community-building heritage in the ECOC initiative would allow local cultural identity and a sense of community to emerge from collective action, fuelled by the mutual recognition of shared values and a constructivist approach towards their realisation. By actively facilitating and identifying such ‘acts of signification’, EU cultural policy could mobilise the idea of European heritage towards actively stimulating social cohesion and strengthening a sense of belonging to a community, thereby mirroring the objectives of the ECOC initiative. Before turning towards the community-building heritage object in question, the Pauperfontein, I will first sketch the context in which it was erected, starting with the overall ECOC initiative and its potential for instigating cultural counter-initiatives, before zooming in on the Frisian context.

**The ECOC initiative**

The ECOC initiative is one of the longest-running EU cultural policies. Since the first appointment in 1985, over 60 cities throughout Europe have been designated ECOC. The ECOC initiative was devised by Greece’s Minister of Culture Melina Mercouri and her French counterpart Jack Lang with the intention of ‘highlight[ing] the richness and diversity of cultures in Europe’ (European Commission, n.d.). Initially, each year one European city was designated ECOC but after the special millennium-edition in 2000, in which nine cities were appointed the title, two cities have been appointed annually from 2001 onwards. A recent addition to the initiative includes the designation of a third ECOC: from 2021 onwards and every 3 years thereafter, an additional ECOC will be appointed in countries that are EU candidates, potential EU candidates, or part of the European Economic Area.

The ECOC designation process takes the form of a national competition. EU Member States take turns nominating several cities, from which a committee gathered by the European Commission initially selects a shortlist of three and consecutively appoints one winning city. Cities competing for the title must prepare a so-called bid book: an extensive overview of planned activities that must demonstrably contribute to the aims of the ECOC initiative. Besides functioning as a pre-programme, these bid books often offer an
exhaustive yet concise survey of the aims, ideas and concepts around which a particular ECOC year is developed. Therefore, the bid book may provide insight into the position and positioning, from a local, national and EU perspective, of a particular country and city within a European context.

Over the years, certain trends have become discernible in the ECOC programmes. Between the mid-1990s and the 2010s, many ECOCs were focused on urban economic development and regeneration of the host cities. Over the past decade, however, the focus has shifted towards engagement, participation and social regeneration. Particularly ECOCs from the 2010s onwards ‘appear to be characterised also by a clear focus and a systematic approach to “social regeneration” and participation in particular’ (Tommarchi et al., 2018: 158). In 2015, Tibor Navracsics, then EU Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sports, explicitly stated that the ECOC initiative aimed to ‘promote mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue among citizens and increase their sense of belonging to a community’ (Navracsics, 2015: 2). Besides offering opportunities for cultural and socioeconomic development, the ambition of the ECOC initiative shifted to advance ‘social and territorial cohesion within the city boundaries and beyond’ through socially sensitive events and projects aimed at the inclusion of all citizens and neighbourhoods of the host city (Navracsics, 2015: 2, 6). Increasingly, the ECOC initiative is considered a ‘soft power resource’ intended to celebrate the diversity of EU Member States while actively contributing to social cohesion and reinforcing the sense of belonging to a local and a European community (see Sassatelli, 2009 and Sianos, 2017) – thereby mirroring the EU’s slogan United in Diversity (see Sassatelli, 2002). Yet, despite these objectives, the implementation of the initiative frequently arouses debate and protest among local citizens.

In some cases, citizens even organised their own alternative counter-programming. In her study of Turku2011, Tuuli Lähdesmäki notes that such activist forms of ‘resistance [do] not necessarily mean rejection or revoking a norm: it also can aim to renegotiate the borders or elaborate more interpretations or alternative viewpoints to the norm’ (Lähdesmäki, 2013: 603). Lähdesmäki found that critical discussions that arose during the planning and implementation of Turku2011 centred mostly around conflicting attitudes towards urban space, local heritage, cultural institutions, citizens and culture (Lähdesmäki, 2013: 600). In her analysis of Marseille2013, Angela Giovanangeli found that issues identified by locals were perceived to have been ignored or glossed over in the cultural programming and that plans for economic advancement through urban development and investments in tourism were countered by initiatives that contested the mobilisation of culture towards these ends (Giovanangeli, 2015: 310).

Some have pointed towards the ECOC mechanism itself to explain the often conflicting approaches to its execution. In his study of Cork2005, Cian O’Callaghan (2012) argues more generally that conflicts concerning the implementation of the ECOC year are inevitable due to the antagonistic objectives of the initiative. These objectives, he argues, are not mutually reinforcing and sometimes even contradictory. The ECOC initiative has come to be considered by the European Commission and competing cities as needing to satisfy a competing set of explicit and implicit demands, O’Callaghan elaborates. The initiative should (a) incorporate economic and cultural ambitions; (b) address and showcase both local culture and heritage as well as European culture and identities; and (c) stage an international cultural event while simultaneously advancing the local
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cultural sector and meeting social inclusion objectives (O’Callaghan, 2012: 186). Not only can these objectives be interpreted in countless different and opposing ways, their implementation can take many different forms. In similar vein, the following analysis of the bid book of LF2018 will reveal that the clashes between the committee and local citizens revolved around conflicting understandings of culture and tensions between its representation and how it is experienced.

Leeuwarden-Friesland 2018: From Mienskip to Iepen Mienskip

Before diving into the Pauperfontein, I will analyse the bid book for LF2018, which was presented under the title Iepen Mienskip (Frisian for ‘Open Community’). The bid book echoes the social objectives of the ECOC initiative described above, emphasising that our local culture of mienskip seeks to engage with ongoing developments in present-day Europe: a renewed interest in a sense of belonging in a community, a new wave of citizens’ initiatives and bottom-up thinking, powered by the vital energy of old and newly formed communities. (Van Heezik, 2013: 1)

This approach included the reconceptualization of mienskip to Iepen Mienskip. The Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage defines mienskip as ‘the interconnectedness between people that is utilised to protect the community’ (Kenniscentrum Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland, n.d.). The concept of mienskip originates from the beginning of the twentieth century, when the people of Friesland lived among small tight-knit communities in tiny villages. Many of these villages in Friesland were self-reliant and self-sufficient, generating a deep sense of interconnectedness and interdependence among their citizens. This interdependence is said to have been strengthened by the constant threat of the sea, as the people were dependent upon each other to protect the land and their community from water by building and maintaining dykes and terps (Kenniscentrum Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland, n.d.). The LF2018 committee affirms this, stating that the Frisians protected their communities and culture. By building these artificial mounds, their horizon changed, as did the hearts and minds of the people. This protective side of mienskip still has its consequences today . . . a deep-seated fear of diversity. (LF2018 bid book Q&A, quoted in Immler and Sakkers, 2014: 23)

Arguably, the bid book hints towards a romanticised idea of Frisian culture, based on and contributing to what Goffe Jensma (2018: 151) refers to as a ‘remystification of medieval Frisian history’. Building on imagery of Frisia as a peripheral rural region stemming from the nineteenth century, Frisia is considered to offer fertile ground for the blossoming of various ‘origin stories’ and myths (see Jensma, 1998). Jensma (2018: 154) poses that ‘[t]hrough its particular history of inhabitancy, its loss of former greatness, and perhaps, its seaward focus, Frisia may well have strong mythogenetic traits’. An example of such an ‘origin myth’ is the narrative of Frisian freedom. According to Jensma (2018: 156), ‘the alliterating adjectives Frisian and free have been attributed to the Frisians throughout most of
their history and as such implicitly (but falsely) suggest unbroken continuity’. This narrative is based on the medieval tale of Frisia’s exemption from feudal domination, allegedly granted by Charlemagne (also known as Charles the Great). Jensma traces the ways in which this narrative has been interpreted and instrumentalised at different moments in history. For instance, around 1815, when Friesland became part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the narrative served to culturally compensate the loss of sovereignty. The narrative fuelled a process of selfing and othering between the centre of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (Holland) and the Frisian periphery, [which] led to the creation of a hierarchically organised, subnational “nation” of Frisians’ (Jensma, 2018: 157). It was only at this time that a self-aware, coherent and consistent idea of Frisian culture and history emerged, including a shared and standardised language. Arguably, the concept of mien-skip as an inherently Frisian idea of community still feeds into the contemporary positioning of Friesland as separate and different from the urbanised centre of the Netherlands.

The LF2018 bid book deploys but reframes mien-skip, and the narrative of Frisian freedom and independence, as a more open and Europe-oriented community. This novel mobilisation is summarised in the concept of Iepen Mienskip. The bid book acknowledges that ‘there is a dark side to mien-skip. Frisians are prone to being wary of external input, clinging to a static definition of their culture and landscape’ (Van Heezik, 2013: 2). It is for this reason, the bid book explains, that the committee has chosen to modify the traditional Frisian concept into ‘an open mienskip’, or ‘Iepen Mienskip’, retaining ‘the action-oriented, bottom-up spirit, but incorporat[ing] the open-minded, outward-looking attitude that is needed if our society is to evolve and connect with Europe’ (Van Heezik, 2013: 2). While acknowledging the ‘deep-seated fear of diversity’ as characteristic of mien-skip, the re-contextualisation of the concept has the potential to transform this conceivably problematic ‘dark side’ into a more open idea of community.

Accordingly, Iepen Mienskip is described as ‘an outward-looking, 21st-century version of Frisian community feeling’ (Van Heezik, 2013: 1). This transformative ambition stated in the LF2018 bid book echoes the general aims of the Maastricht Treaty (1992). Article 128, the section dedicated specifically to culture, states that ‘[t]he [European] Community shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore’ (European Union, 1992: 48). Adherence to these overarching objectives within an ECOC initiative is not without risk. When attempting to connect the European framework to local culture, committees may impose certain ideas and interpretations upon local communities, reducing local culture to a set of stereotypical images, making them intelligible for a wide European audience (see Sassatelli, 2009). Furthermore, the ECOC nomination of the city of Leeuwarden was conceptualised to represent the entire province of Friesland in one programming. The risk in this approach is that local particularities may be glossed over in favour of emphasising regional similarities, thereby presenting a comprehensible image of Frisian culture. Arguably, the LF2018 committee succumbed to these risks in several elements of the programming, including the opening ceremony and the 11fountains project.

Before turning to 11fountains, I will briefly discuss the opening ceremony for LF2018, which was broadcast on national television and described in local newspaper the Leeuwarder Courant as ‘a caricature’ (Van Westhreenen, 2018: 2). Jesse van Amelsvoort
Has argued that the opening ceremony features a series of Frisian stereotypes, such as fierljeppen (the Frisian sport of jumping over moats with a pole), ice-skating and a renowned football coach, and provided clichéd representations of Frisia as a peaceful and rural province in which the Frisians reside as a minority culture at one with nature and physical activity. Although the committee hoped to transcend this social imagery, he points out, the opening ceremony ‘presented a province consisting of strong but simple links between its people and the land, which stands in stark opposition to the urbanized and metropolitan center of the Netherlands’ (Van Amelsvoort, 2020: 4). Arguably, the stereotypical imagery used in the opening ceremony serves as an illustration to the re-interpretation of specific elements from Frisian culture, which were imposed upon local communities. Where the opening ceremony presented an overview of stereotypical Frisian imagery, 11 fountains revolved specifically around the origins of mienskip and the communal battle against the water, as well as the Elfstedentocht.

The 11 fountains project was a flagship feature in the bid book for LF2018. Eleven internationally renowned artists from countries including the Netherlands, Belgium, Britain, China, France, Portugal and the United States were invited to design a fountain for each of the 11 major towns of Friesland. Each artist was assigned a city and tasked with designing a fountain that would inspire ‘citizens [to] feel related to their history and at the same time see their community tradition in a new and broader cultural perspective’ (Van Heezik, 2013: 57). Lofty promises of dynamic water fountains that would become new ‘highlight[s] in the Dutch landscape’ and ‘place[s] where myths, history and wishes come together’ were bolstered by pledges of internationally renowned artists, including Marina Abramović and Olafur Eliasson, to contribute to the project (Van Heezik, 2013: 57). The support among the local community was considered an important aspect of the project. In each city, a committee of inhabitants was assembled to represent the local community and to gather and voice their opinions about their respective fountains. In the years leading up to the ECOC year, artists were flown in to examine local traditions and tour regional history museums in search of inspiration.

By May 2017, half a year before the ECOC year would begin, both Abramović and Eliasson had cancelled their participation in the project. When the time came for the public presentations of the initial fountain designs, local inhabitants were overwhelmingly critical. The 11 Frisian Fountains documentary features several so-called participation evenings, during which locals condemned the appearance, imagery, size and location of the future fountains. They felt the designs had been imposed on them and did not reflect their individual identities or needs. This is understandable when one considers how the project was developed. The project was conceptualised and curated by Anna Tilroe, a well-known Dutch art critic based in Amsterdam who had not visited Friesland before starting the project: ‘Why have I never been here before?’, she begins the How it started section on the official 11fountains website. In her impressions of Friesland, Tilroe describes the Elfstedentocht, Friesland’s ‘history marked by what the sea gave and took’ and ‘a landscape where the light brushes over the many lakes, pools and ditches with a silver paintbrush’ (11fountains, 2018b). This emphasis on stereotypical Frisian imagery and the connection between the Frisians and nature is consistently referred to throughout the project.
The 11fountains website divides the 11 fountains along four themes: *Dream and dare, Nature and climate, Sea and trade* and *Art and churches*. Arguably, the descriptions of these themes dovetail neatly with Jensma’s (2018) understanding of the ‘remystification’ of Frisian culture. In *Dream and dare*, the Frisians ‘never let anyone tell them which king to serve, they refused to give up their language and saw contests and trade opportunities in even the most threatening elements’, mirroring the narrative of Frisian freedom (11fountains, 2018a). In *Nature and climate*, references are made to stereotypical Frisian imagery, and it is noted that ‘[t]here may never again be an Elfstedentocht . . . on the frozen canals that all Frisians dream of (11fountains, 2018a). The theme *Sea and trade* refers to the proximity of the sea, noting that ‘Frisians have always had an intense relationship with the sea. As a boundary, it threatens and protects, while also offering great opportunities’ (11fountains, 2018a). Finally, the theme of *Art and churches* refers to Friesland as ‘[a]n old country steeped in traditions, with people that honour the country and culture with exceptional art’ (11fountains, 2018a).

Despite this last assumption, several fountains were exceptionally contested. In Bolsward, for instance, locals protested against the placement of an enormous black bat-shaped fountain designed by artist Johan Creten in front of an old fire-damaged church, questioning whether the combination between the design and its location could be considered appropriate in a religious sense. Others opposed the location of the fountain, noting it would take up a significant part of the parking lot (Van Dalen, 2018b). Similarly, in Workum, locals petitioned against the placement of two colossal water-squirting lions, motifs which artist Cornelia Parker had adopted from the city’s coat of arms, on either side of a waterway. When a new location had been confirmed, a local inhabitant disputed the placement of the fountain directly in front of his window (Van Dalen, 2018b). Communities also contested the fountain that artist Mark Dion designed for the central square in the harbour city Stavoren. Allegedly inspired by a drawing of Southern-Netherlandish artist Pieter Brueghel the Elder, the fountain was shaped like a giant fish with a gaping mouth, water spouting from its lips. Locals protested the design and its location, arguing that the portrayed fish, a cod, is not native to Friesland and that the fountain would obscure the view of the tourist offices (Van Dalen, 2018a).

Throughout the whole 11fountains project, people reported feeling side-lined, as not a single Frisian artist had been invited to contribute and local protests were largely ignored. In the documentary, locals argue that the project had been imposed on them from the top-down by an external party. Although locals were given the opportunity to voice their concerns at participation evenings, the documentary implies that their arguments were not always taken into account. As the documentary demonstrates, most eventual fountains hardly differ from the initial designs, although some of them have been relocated in consultation with the locals. It was in this atmosphere of exclusion and discontent that the *Pauperfontein* was erected.

**The Pauperfontein**

As an activist counter-discourse against the 11fountains project, the *Pauperfontein* ultimately generated a sense of interconnectedness among all who contributed to it, serving as a humorous carnivalesque symbol of protest (see Bruner, 2005). Interestingly enough,
the initiators of the *Pauperfontein* made no references to Europe or EU cultural policies during the organisation, construction or presentation of their project, but focused specifically on 11fountains and its effects on a local city-level and within Friesland. In an interview, artist De Boer explains why 11fountains demanded a local response:

The LF2018 wanted to organise a big celebration. But it is done by bigwigs, who meet up and then forget where they come from. They are actually the big willies that attempt to squirt and piss the farthest, but they seem to have lost sight of all the little willies that are also part of the fountain. . . . All those little willies – the common people, the *mienskip* – they need to get behind the plan and then we can have a celebration. Then we can truly celebrate together, with everyone. (Van Dalen, 2018b)

Relating the critical sentiment of this quote to the physical object of the fountain is fundamental in understanding how the *Pauperfontein* contributed to a mutual sense of community among those who used it, enjoyed it, or contributed to its construction.

The entire process of construction and subsequent tour of the *Pauperfontein* was crowdfunded among local Frisians. On the website of the initiators, the funding campaign was marketed to potential contributors as an opportunity to ‘become part of a real *mienskip* project’ (Stichting De Paupers, n.d.). David Gehring and D. E. Wittkower (2015: 65) have analysed the community-building potential of crowdfunding and propose that the appeal of contributing to a crowdfunding campaign lies ‘not in the promise of any particular material return for [a] donation, but the feeling of participation in the creative process’. They draw from Bourdieu’s (1984) notion of consumer identity in suggesting that crowdfunding initiatives convey ‘the idea that funding is . . . a striving together toward a vision based in the creator’s identity’ (Gehring and Wittkower, 2015: 68). These ‘perceived intimacies’, both between consumer and creator, and conjointly between consumers, ‘create community as a symbolic value available for purchase through broadcasting structures’ (Gehring and Wittkower, 2015: 69). Following this line of thought, contributors to the funding of the *Pauperfontein* fulfilled the promise of the initiators, potentially constituted a perceived community through the performative act of contributing financially to a creative process, thereby demonstrating their support for De Boer’s creative vision and simultaneously becoming part of ‘a real *mienskip* project’. Before the physical construction of the fountain began, the process of crowdfunding already allowed contributors to collectively strive towards a common goal via a market-based mechanism which channelled and mediated the bottom-up spirit, thereby initiating the emergence of an imagined community between creator De Boer and his ‘consumers’, and mutually among contributors. Considering that locals could contribute to the project, the process of crowdfunding also enforced the ‘action-oriented, bottom-up spirit’ that, according to the LF2018 bid book, characterises *mienskip* and constituted a communal experience distinctly different from that of a project funded by external parties, as was the case with, for instance, 11fountains (Van Heezik, 2013: 2).

It is, of course, important to bear in mind that the *Pauperfontein* emerged from a feeling of protest against 11fountains. The communal ‘thematic object’, to borrow the term from Husserl once again, thus revolved around a shared *dis*interest. This dialogic constitution of a we-subject could be understood through Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1993) literary concept of ‘dialogism’, which attempts to explain the constitution of a self – either individual
or collective – that emerges in reaction or in opposition to an ‘utterance’ posed by an other.

Bakhtin (1993: 74) proposes that ‘[l]ife knows two value-centres that are fundamentally and essentially different, yet are correlated with each other: myself and the other; and it is around these centres that all of the concrete moments of Being are distributed and arranged’. This dialogic constitution of the self in relation to an other stimulates the emergence of a self-consciousness (Bakhtin, 1993: 9). Thus, it is in dialogic confrontation with the ‘common undertakings’ of the other that a communal sense of consciousness can arise among the self – a process closely tied to the constitution of a ‘we’ as described by Husserl.

To summarise, the community constituted around the Pauperfontein was reinforced in two ways: through a communal striving towards shared interests (thematic objects) or, in this case, disinterests, and through the constitution of a collective self (we-constitution) that arose in dialogical interaction with a communally perceived other.

Once the construction of the Pauperfontein was completed, it departed on its tour along the 11 cities of 11fountains, also landing in several smaller towns along the way. There, the Pauperfontein, originally built in a dialogic act of protest against 11fountains, became a tangible yet transient site of memory dedicated to the successful communal undertaking of its construction process. In October 2018, the tour of the Pauperfontein ended in Leeuwarden, where conversations between De Boer and director of the Fries Museum Kris Callens about including the fountain in their permanent collection led to nothing. ‘It doesn’t fit there and there is no space for it’, De Boer commented, ‘exactly the reaction we had to [the eleven fountains] the “elite” gave us’ (Leeuwarder Courant, 2018). There was no ultimate or transcendent destination awaiting the Pauperfontein once it had completed its tour. On 1 December 2018, the last month of Leeuwarden’s title as ECOC, the Pauperfontein was dismantled and its members scattered among the contributors (see Omroep Fryslân, 2018). What remains is the fading memory of 230 penises and De Boer’s assertion that ‘you can say whatever you want about the Pauperfontein, but you will never have seen anything like it’ (Van Dalen, 2018c).

Conclusion

The Pauperfontein and its festive inaugurations were such a success among local Frisians that the LF2018 organisation eventually decided to include the fountain in their official programming. It is important to realise that, although the Pauperfontein was conceptualised in direct opposition to 11fountains as part of the official LF2018 programming, initiators of both projects ultimately aimed their projects towards the same ends – albeit through the mobilisation of completely different discourses. As I have attempted to demonstrate, the LF2018 organisation adhered and contributed to discourse revolving around the remystification of Frisia, constructing a comprehensible yet stereotypical image of Friesland, which stands in direct opposition to the urbanised and metropolitan centre of the Netherlands. This was apparent in the overall theme of Iepen Mienskip, the descriptions of which relied on a mythologised narrative of Frisian freedom and independence, yet reframing this narrative as a more appealing, open and Europe-oriented community. In a similar vein, the opening ceremony presented Friesland through stereotypical imagery and as ‘a province consisting of strong but simple links between its people and the land’ (Van Amelsvoort, 2020: 4). The 11fountains project was also conceptualised
along this discourse, emphasising the Frisians’ connection to water, the sea and, of course, the Elfstedentocht, while also emphasising Frisia’s ‘strong mythogenetic traits’ (Jensma, 2018: 154). Conversely, as is reflected in their use of language, the organisation of the Pauperfontein attempted to demystify LF2018’s discourse, calling upon ‘the common people, the mienskip’ to protest the imposition of this project by ‘bigwigs’ (Van Dalen, 2018b).

As a case study and exploration of community-building heritage, the Pauperfontein, demonstrates that activist counter-projects within the ECOC initiative may have the potential to reify the aims of both the specific host city’s ECOC year and the overall ECOC initiative. As such, the Pauperfontein illustrates that the mobilisation of community-building heritage both by cultural actors and by engaged citizens, facilitate an understanding of European cultural heritage in terms of what Delanty (2010: 5) describes as ‘a cultural model by which societies interpret themselves’. If incorporated and facilitated as part of EU cultural policies, community-building heritage may contribute to developing frameworks of joint action within which the objectives of the ECOC initiative to stimulate social cohesion and strengthen a sense of belonging to a community are advanced.

Notes
1. ‘Men kan lid worden van de fontein door een lid te sponsoren’. All translations are my own unless specified. In Dutch as in English, ‘lid’ (‘member’) may refer both to an associate or contributor as well as to the male genitalia.
2. The Elfstedentocht is a long-distance ice-skating competition that connects 11 Frisian cities in a tour of almost 200 km, starting and ending in Friesland’s capital, Leeuwarden. The cities of the Elfstedentocht are, in order: Leeuwarden, Sneek, Ielst, Sloten, Stavoren, Hindeloopen, Workum, Bolsward, Harlingen, Franeker and Dokkum. As the event can only take place when the thickness of the ice exceeds 15 centimetres throughout the entire course, the event has not been held since 1997.
3. ‘Wy koene fernimme dat de minsken dizze fontein echt as in mienskipsprojekt saegen. Dat it ek fan harren wie’.
4. ‘Het is een absolute ramp’ and ‘[u]iteindelijk gaat het natuurlijk allemaal om geld’.
5. LF2018 presented a regional programme, half of which was to be organised in Leeuwarden and half across the region of the province of Friesland. Leeuwarden was selected as ECOC for 2018 along with Valletta, the capital of Malta.
6. ‘Mienskip is de onderlinge verbondenheid die wordt ingezet om de gemeenschap te beschermen’.
7. “‘Hy past hjir net en der is gijn plak foar”, aldus De Boer. “Presys de reaksje dy’t wy hienen op de liuwen dy’t wy fan de ‘elite’ krigen”’.

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