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Infrastructuring togetherness: exploring eventification of community and advocacy in a European network of cultural centres

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ABSTRACT

Despite the numerous cultural networks within and outside of European contexts of culture-led urban development as well as transnational cultural policy-making, in-depth analyses of such networks remain scarce. In light of this, the article introduces the network *Trans Europe Halles* (TEH, est. 1983) as an empirical case study that illustrates cultural grassroots organising across its 165+ members throughout Europe. TEH works both inward-oriented towards the building of a community, and outward-oriented via practices of network expansion, eventification and collaborative policy-making efforts. Sensitised through the different temporalities of “project time” and “infrastructure time”, as well as conceptual engagements with critical event studies, we identify and temporarily disentangle the intertwined practices of (1) infrastructuring a community and (2) infrastructuring cultural advocacy. Understanding the TEH network as a socio-material and continuously evolving, relational infrastructure, our infrastructural analysis offers a theorisation that helps to understand temporal concatenations in their local and contextual specificity.

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European cultural networks are tricky beasts

“Networks are often misperceived as a magic stick. Just because you are in a network does not mean that your voice will be heard. Being in a network adds new demands to our everyday work, which is already very demanding”, states a cultural organiser from Belgrade (TEH75). What does this additional work consist of? Who does it, when, where and how? Insights into how cultural networks work and actualise themselves are scarce in existing cultural policy research, despite the relevance networks receive in policy contexts (Delfin, 2012), and as governance tools in the European context in particular (cf. European Commission, 2019; Magkou, 2021; Scioldo, 2024b). Broadly, cultural networks present “decentralised socio-political formations consisting of arts and cultural

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organisations working together towards shared objectives” (Delfin, 2012, p. 240). Since the early 1980s, the first European cultural networks facilitate cultural production through direct cooperation and support, avoiding hierarchical organising and the limits of stiff institutions (Cvjetičanin et al., 2011; Minichbauer & Mitterdorfer, 2000). Cultural networks act as advocacy actors (Magkou, 2021) with shared objectives including funding, arts and cultural promotion, mobility programs, capacity building, education, knowledge and information exchange, (Cvjetičanin et al., 2011; Laaksonen et al., 2016; Magkou, 2021).

Shaping and shaped by soft modes of governance (Scioldo, 2024a), cultural networks are best characterised as bottom-up civil society initiative on the one hand, and the product of a top-down European policy making on the other, which complicates their analysis (Scioldo, 2024a). Cultural networks have previously been analysed in terms of their functions and governance (Laaksonen et al., 2016; Magkou, 2021; 2024) and in relation to policy discourses (Scioldo, 2024b). Questions about what cultural networks *do* wrestle with their roles as cultural intermediaries between national, local and European levels, actors, policies (Littoz-Monnet, 2013; Scioldo, 2024b). They negotiate multi-scalar logics beyond the realm of cultural organisation (Bain & Landau, 2018), function as (EU-wide) policy actors and advocates (Magkou, 2021; Woddis, 2022), soft policy tools (Scioldo, 2024b), fertilising imaginaries of European community, and suggest trust in the EU as a socio-political project (Littoz-Monnet, 2013). As horizontal organisations, networks depend on relationship-centric concepts such as trust and commitment, turning communication into a major governance challenge (Newell & Swan, 2000; Provan & Kenis, 2007), especially in arts and culture where resources and funding are scarce and project-based (cf. Laaksonen et al., 2016). Cultural networks materialise the multi-level challenges the European cultural sector faces vis-à-vis both systemic and localised problems of diverse audience development, political populisms, growing urban-rural-divides, privatisation of public space, post-industrial urban development, gentrification etc. Further, research on cultural networks covers their emergence (Delfin, 2012; Magkou, 2024) and functions from the top-down perspective (Scioldo, 2024a; 2024b), yet address to a lesser extent how they self-organise their members and perform network maintenance, which this article addresses.

Acknowledging the networks’ importance in EU governance, the *European Commission* (EC) provides structural funding to 37 networks today¹ through the Creative Europe Program, on a project basis. While networks have similar functions, their internal workings differ greatly based on the aspects such as age of the organisation, membership structure, funding backgrounds and target groups (Delfin, 2012), but also in their mutual connections, ranging from loose ties to activist alliances and friendships. The network *Trans Europe Halles* (TEH, *1983), which serves as the empirical case study of this research unites 165 members, who are grassroots *cultural centres* with particular profiles and conditions (e.g. citizen initiative, with independent, multidisciplinary cultural programs in repurposed buildings (TEH, 2024)). In absence of a coherent definition of a cultural centre, Eriksson et al. (2017, pp. 26–29) developed a typology of four non-exclusive, rather overlapping types of cultural centres, including the (1) one-(wo)man centre, (2) the artist/activist group centre, (3) the neighbourhood centre and (4) the creative city/regional hub. Additionally, Pfeifere (2022) synthesises three common features of cultural centres as (1) building-based, (2) multi-functional, and (3) socio-culturally embedded in respective local contexts.

To conceptually situate TEH as an empirical case study of a self-governing cultural network, we discuss the multiple forms of encounters via diverse member-internal and public activities during the network's bi-annual meetings. In the following, we frame the network's bi-annual meetings as *events* that actively cultivate community and advocate for cultural networks through practices of *infrastructuring*. While trust is difficult to measure, infrastructuring attends to what is happening, indicating commitment. Accordingly, the research question underlying this article explores the socio-spatial constitution and organising of TEH over time, through the temporal lenses of *project time* (i.e. short-term, event-specific and finite understanding of temporality) and *infrastructure time* (open-ended, structural outlook on temporality) (Karasti et al., 2010). Specifically, we ask: How can TEH's cultural community and advocacy-building be understood through the temporally-sensitive analytical framework of infrastructuring? How does eventification amplify the building of community? More generally speaking, how does a network's underlying and concrete notion of time shape its evolution, adaptability and long-term persistence?

The article aims to nuance the socio-spatial specificities of the "infrastructural turn" to underscore (1) the often-invisible and micro-level interactions between cultural network organisers and members producing a community, and (2) to provide a temporally-sensitive analysis of cultural networks' organising. Overall, the article offers an in-depth portrait of TEH which illustrates the analytical merit of an infrastructural lens for the study of cultural networks. In addition, by placing emphasis on the meso-level infrastructural activity of network meetings, we offer a more fine-grained understanding of how cultural networks self-organise.

Trans Europe Halles

Founded in Brussels, Belgium, in 1983, TEH was started by seven activism inclined cultural actors, demanding the preservation of a historic building in Brussels. Since then, TEH advocates for numerous different grassroots cultural centres (until recently referred to as independent cultural centres). *Independence*, similar to autonomy, ideally implies having no direct relations of financial or decision-making dependence to (local) state or state-run institutions. This grants network members a high degree of self-direction to decide freely over cultural production, audiences and local connections, and to engage in different scales of political decision-making and activism. In light of its diverse member centres, TEH presents itself as a hybrid, connecting centres showing features of Eriksson et al. 's (2017) typology, blending artist/activist group centres, neighbourhood centre and creative city/regional hub. TEH is a non-governmental, member-driven organisation of organisations. Three organisational bodies are particularly important with regards to TEH's governance: the Executive Committee (EXCOM), the General Assembly (GA) and the Coordination Office (CO). In addition, TEH has ambassadors, i.e. people who formerly held offices and who continue to act in a representative-advisory capacity. The EXCOM, elected biennially, consists of five to eight representatives from member centres, preparing policy documents, administering (new) memberships, planning and finances. Those are discussed and voted on at GAs, coinciding with bi-annual meetings. Each centre has one vote, regardless of its size and length of membership. Since 2006, the CO has had a fixed location in Lund, Sweden, where it receives national, regional

and local funding. All member centres pay an income-based contribution; project and network funding comes from EU funds such as *Creative Europe*. Serving as coordinator of large projects and grants, the CO facilitates membership applications and processes, and supports the organisation of bi-annual network meetings. Ever since TEH's foundation, two network meetings have been held annually, taking place almost uninterruptedly throughout the past forty years despite being labour – and cost-intensive. As an organisational and communicative node, the CO establishes and cultivates relationships within and outside the network. Internally, the CO circulates information on opportunities for mobility, professional development and cooperation. Externally, at international conferences and seminars, it promotes TEH activities, advocates for its members initiatives and rights building partnerships with other organisations in Europe and beyond. On request, the CO advises on conditions of cultural spaces, sustainability and cultural policy matters.

Theoretical frameworks: on infrastructuring and eventifying time

Echoing the call for creative and hybrid theoretical frameworks to study cultural networks (Delfin, 2012) we introduce infrastructuring as a conducive theoretical approach to unpack the internal organising of a cultural network. In this context, infrastructuring appears as ongoing and utterly *temporal* practice and we operationalise the concept by linking literatures on infrastructure with critical event studies. Events, and eventification, help to visualise the infrastructuring practices that primarily serve to reproduce TEH as a cultural network.

From infrastructures to infrastructuring as a temporal verb

The growing debate on the social, political and technological prevalence of infrastructures, or the “infrastructural turn” (Addie et al., 2020; Amin, 2014), emphasises the need to better understand the manifold practices of how organisations and networks come about and persist. Most importantly, this turn pushes for a broader understanding of infrastructure beyond its object-oriented character, as analytical tool and mode of governance (Addie et al., 2020). Infrastructures describe dynamics between multiple actors facilitating the flows of things, people, or ideas (Larkin, 2013), at the heart of the network society and its demands (Castells, 2009), highlighting activities taken for granted, or happening in the background (Star, 1999). Turning to the role of cultural infrastructures in and of cities, Bain and Podmore (2023) conceptualise cultural infrastructures as ongoing activities of cultural workers which condition built environments, policy and interpersonal relations. Stretching across disciplines such as human geography, science and technology studies and anthropology, ontologies of infrastructure point to relationalities of people and “things as well as the relations between them” (Larkin, 2013, p. 329). Widely applicable, infrastructure has been conjured as a promise (Anand et al., 2018), or as a matter of politics (McFarlane & Rutherford, 2008). Addie et al. (2020, p. 13) have recently proclaimed a “renewed interest in the politics of infrastructure that positions them as the setting and stake of social struggle.” Beyond socio-technological, or object-centric understandings of infrastructure, we approach infrastructures as multi-faceted practices shaping and transforming socio-technological realities, “involving hardware and software technologies,

standards, procedures, practices and policies together with digital configurations in support of human communication and capabilities" (Karasti et al., 2010, p. 380) and aesthetic, affective and sensorial aspects of infrastructures also matter to understand meanings and structuring effects of infrastructures (Larkin, 2013).

Attending to the malleable dimensions of infrastructures, we deploy infrastructuring as a *verb* (Korn et al., 2019). A relational perspective on the socio-material and -technological aspects of infrastructures highlights infrastructuring as ongoing practice. While Korn et al. (2019, p. 15) draw attention to infrastructuring as repair and maintenance of techn(ologi)cal infrastructures as necessary means to prevent decay, these caring and repairing practices not only extend to cultivating interpersonal or interorganisational relations, but also to build wholly new ones. Hence, considering "infrastructures as cooperative accomplishments of socio-technological arrangements that operate the way they do because of evolved social practices", Korn et al. (2019, p. 16) reiterates the constitutively social dimension of infrastructuring.

Infrastructures can create spaces of care, collectivity and community (Power & Williams, 2020). Yet, infrastructuring unevenly embeds people and meaning into place, helping *some* infrastructuring agents or elements to become more active and networked while *others* become, or remain marginalised (Star, 1999). Put differently, infrastructuring materialises by including some people, places, policies, and things while simultaneously excluding others. While much infrastructural activity is conducted by humans, not all infrastructural development is purely agential and/or intentional. Rather, infrastructures can also emerge as self-reproducing, self-destructive and otherwise emergent practices (Ostendorf-Rodríguez & González, 2023). Within this constitutive mobility of infrastructuring, the latter implicates a variety of political possibilities to expand or restrict spaces of power, meanings and collectivity, which "underlie and powerfully shape current forms of social organisation and interaction" (Besedovsky et al., 2019, p. 581).

Besides the socio-spatial implications of infrastructural development, time significantly affects how infrastructures emerge, unfold, persist and develop. Besedovsky et al. (2019) consider time itself *as* infrastructure, and therewith address the multiple temporalities, rhythms, paces, frequencies, durabilities, and diverse temporal scales in terms of their (infra)structuring capacities. Karasti et al. (2010) attend to temporality as a co-implicating outcome of infrastructuring work, thus specify temporal dimensions of infrastructure. Karasti et al. (2010, p. 402) differentiate between "project time" as oriented towards and structured by short-term and achievable goals, in contrast to "infrastructure time" with a radically open-ended outlook on time, leading to rethinking projects' lifecycle, overall development and funding conditions. Regarding infrastructures' ambitions to thrive and to survive future contingencies, infrastructure time appears as a multi-agential, multi-scalar and open constellation between pasts, presents, and futures. We contend with Karasti et al. (2010) that short-term demands and long-term goals of infrastructures do not necessarily conflict with each other, but are analytically distinct; their real-life relational entanglements are to be unpacked throughout this article. Importantly, we do not consider that tensions between short- and long-term can be resolved but rather consider conflicts as constitutive of socio-spatial organisation (Landau et al., 2021).

Bringing this conceptual overview to a close, we highlight infrastructuring as a lens to keep track of multiple socio-material and -technological interactions that together *infra-structure* network organising. To empirically examine infrastructural activity in and of a

cultural network, we approach TEH as both as a socio-material *object* of infrastructure (or simply, TEH as infrastructure), and as an *analytical framework* (or simply, TEH as infrastructuring agent/capacity; Addie et al., 2020). As an intermediary heuristic device to mediate *between* empirical material/observation and theoretical development of infrastructuring, we unpack “eventification” as generative amplifier to capture *how* infrastructuring takes place: on the one hand, increasing eventification of bi-annual meetings over time suggests eventification as a means of *visibilising* infrastructure (which otherwise often goes unnoticed). On the other hand, eventification emphasises infrastructural activity as it bundles people in places into highly affective moments, enabling *togetherness*.

From cultural events to eventified meetings: Fostering togetherness

Events are loosely defined as “organised occasions” (Getz, 2005), taking the form of meetings, conventions, gala dinners, etc. Meetings, as specific forms of events, maintain organisations (Hall et al., 2024). Critical event studies attend to events as interventions in the mundane and stress the need for contextualisation (Spracklen & Lamond, 2016). Spracklen and Lamond (2016, p. 9) understand events as “lingua franca through which an enormous range of people [...] attempt to communicate, shape and frame the world around them.” Urban scholar Jakob (2013, p. 448) defines events as the “deliberate organisation of a heightened emotional and aesthetic experience at a designated time and space”. While an event might be conceived as a singular occurrence, thus finite, *eventification* presents an ongoing, multi-layered process of turning cultural spaces into experiences. The rhythms of such eventification structure the temporal and spatial resources of networks with varying degrees of (in)formality (Kern, 2016). In addition, eventification stems from selective agency (and related power) to organise events, concomitant with constitutively in- and excluding people, places and things. In Kern’s (2016, p. 443) words, eventfulness renders some relationships eventful while more mundane relationships or “uneventful moments fall out of sight”. In the analysis of infrastructural activity of cultural networks, the temporally-sensitive focus on events, and eventification in particular, thus helps to mark the specific timing of when and how a network operates. In this spectrum of orchestrated proximity and density of encounters or events, Taylor Aiken (2017) considers togetherness as not naturally given in any community, but as a specific modality of community-making in time and space. In short, “doing things together” creates a community experiencing togetherness and emphasises the process of “being and becoming together through practical action” (ibid.: 11). Togetherness emerges when *collectively* acting as community. For an infrastructural analysis, togetherness can be deployed to highlight the active interrelationships amongst community members as “both the means and product of their activities” (ibid.).

However, subtly increasing degrees of eventification might be barely noticeable to an event’s public. In addition, eventification might be desirable for network maintenance and persistence. Regarding the former, first-time event attendants have nothing to compare an eventified event with. Regarding the latter, eventified, spectacular events may serve attendees suggesting their money’s worth; providing an Instagrammable event to better justify their attendance etc. Hence, eventification illustrates the overall infrastructuring of an organisation by highlighting differently temporalized pre- and post-event community-building and advocacy, which we will analytically disentangle along the lines of project and infrastructure time. Let us proceed to outline the

methodological approach to advance this temporally-attuned analysis of cultural network infrastructuring.

Methodology

To understand how TEH, as one of Europe's oldest cultural networks, is *infrastructured* over time, this article presents a single exploratory, in-depth case study. Embracing contingencies and access to sources of data emerging during fieldwork, which was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, we draw on multiple methods to "tell the story in its diversity" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 238). The data corpus consists of 110 archived meeting reports (referred to and referenced as TEHxx, Appendix A1), and annual reports (AR) between 2008 and 2023, transcripts from ten semi-structured interviews with former and current TEH CO employees (2020–2022) and four conversation memos from non-recorded conversations, hand-written during, and directly after visits to the CO (Appendix A2). Notes from online and on-site participation in four bi-annual meetings in Nicosia, Cyprus (November 2020), Ebeltoft, Denmark (June 2021), Prague, Czechia (May 2022), and Leipzig, Germany (June 2023), are referred to as fieldnotes.

The opportunity to collect data over time began with the geographical proximity to the network's CO in Lund, where the first author collected observational and interview data in conversation with current and former TEH staff. Significant staff changes occurred during fieldwork, leading to an almost entirely new team at the end of the fieldwork. Snowballing enlarged the interview sample. Printed and digitised archival material provided a rich account of longitudinal data to gain understanding about temporally recurring practices, events and meetings we identify as crucial to TEH's continuous infrastructuring.

Our analysis focuses on meetings for both research practical and methodological reasons. Regarding the former, the strategic focus on meetings grants immediate access to one of the network's core activities. In addition, on-site participation in bi-annual meetings made it possible to experience the logistical, spatial and financial barriers members might have to overcome to attend these meetings. However, by experiencing these logistical challenges ourselves, we better understood the benefits that participants derive from it, which include creating new contacts, sharing and gaining knowledge and ideas, which ultimately made for a more in-depth analysis. Following Hall et al. (2024), organisations can be crucially understood through meetings as meetings *do* a lot through carrying identity-building, representational as well as network-maintaining functions.

Methodologically, we identified the recurring bi-annual meetings as crucial units of analysis to guide our data coding process to observe *how* and *when* infrastructuring takes place. Via interviews with long-standing members and former employees, we gained insight into anecdotal accounts of past meetings of particular significance because of their (increasingly) eventful character, while current employees rather emphasised contemporary and predominantly practical challenges to organise meetings. Digging deeper into the TEH archive, subsequent coding cycles were informed by our understanding of infrastructuring as continuous interrelating between people, places, things, and ideas (Korn et al., 2019). We sensitised empirical data along the two temporal indications of "project time" and "infrastructure time" (Karasti et al., 2010). Besides multi-stage coding, we used joint sketching (Figure 1) to clarify concepts and temporal nodes of

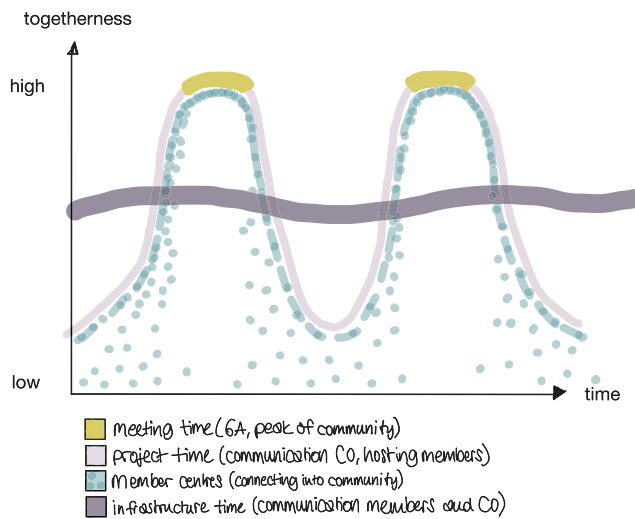


Figure 1. Infrastructuring of community through bi-annual meetings.

network infrastructuring, resulting in identifying two facets of infrastructuring – the infrastructuring of community and cultural advocacy, which we unfold hereafter.

Unpacking the infrastructuring of a cultural network empirically

In the following, we present how network members and functionaries activate and maintain the network. First, we identify practices and processes serving as the means of building community. Here, we emphasise the building of meaningful interrelations, commitment and trust, a nourishing membership process, and shared experiences of togetherness. Second, we analyse how a cultural community works inside and outside the network to continuously facilitate network advocacy for its members and the sector at large.

Infrastructuring community

Following Taylor Aiken's (2017) "togetherness", we consider the infrastructuring of a community to take place during and through TEH's bi-annual meetings as network-internal togetherness. The meetings enable the network's growth and realisation of recurring encounters, securing times and spaces to *act together* as a community. People as crucial infrastructural agents provide the backbone for network activities (Simone, 2004), and provide the resources and conditions for meetings to take place.

Relations amongst TEH members and CO coordinators are described as "friendly" (personal communication, May 5th, 2020); relations amongst members revolve around the exchange of ideas and support (e.g. knowledge, skills, experiences and other resources). This exchange constitutes a "core value", a TEH CO member explains (personal communication, June 10th, 2020). Campbell et al. (2021) remark that infrastructure activity depends on group connectivity and the scope of collaborative work. TEH continuously revises structures facilitating exchange during meetings, but also facilitates mobility for managers, technicians, support staff, accountants, volunteers, management and artists.

Cultural centre managers, individually carrying a lot of organisational responsibility (e.g. supporting people in precarious conditions) appreciate their peers' support (personal communications, May, October, November, 2020). As potential career platforms, bi-annual meetings offer time and space to announce vacancies and calls for collaboration – thus offering future possibilities to enhance togetherness.

Infrastructuring community through project time: organising bi-annual meetings

Bi-annual TEH meetings present the condition and joint product of the infrastructured relations. Meeting moments crystallise when “exchange takes place” (personal communication, June 10th, 2020). With Taylor Aiken (2017), who sees such activity and community-building as intertwined, we describe these moments of togetherness as *peaks of community infrastructuring*, when community activity in shared time and space, reaches its highest degree (Figure 1).

This imbrication becomes clear when a CO employee states: “Each meeting is an important moment for us to meet again, not only to work, but also to deepen the relationships we built over the years” (TEH75). These active relations provide the base for past, present and future network activity. An ambassador describes TEH's level of activity as remarkably high:

Attending as many network meetings as possible, I learned that TEH was the most active network. I ended up saying: “We are the network who *does* stuff.” Most other networks were just places for people to go and talk, but they didn't actually do much. They weren't active (...) whereas TEH was always about getting your hands dirty and having some fun at the same time (personal communication, October 29th, 2020).

From the above quotation, a self-produced understanding emerges relying on the explicit commitment to *this* network, as opposed to others. In analytical terms, TEH self-narrates as a network with a high degree of togetherness: During bi-annual meetings, members and guests (who both purchase tickets) participate in workshops, seminars, talks, and other interactive formats. Participation in these events varies, but ideally, a delegate from each member centre is present for the GA to convene and gain quorum. Well-resourced members participate in bi-annual meetings with their whole team, allowing shared experiences for staff, while actors from other TEH centres have to “earn” participation at TEH meetings through hard work, or draw lots (Fieldnote, June, 2022). Travel and accommodation costs for attendance are location-dependent, and can subtly exclude lesser-equipped centres, running counter to the aspired inclusivity and community-building of TEH as a whole. Thus, keeping costs low is a challenge for every bi-annual meeting-host. Balancing uneven resources in intersectionally inclusive ways thus presents a crucial aspect to infrastructure meetings in particular, and the network more broadly. To conclude, the CO accompanies hosts with advice and resources, aiming to strengthen both individual host-centres' and the network's infrastructural capacity.

Individual meetings, even though they are recurring, remain singular events whose temporal organising logic corresponds with project time (Karasti et al., 2010). An eventified meeting constitutes a unique yet concrete moment of gathering for the otherwise spatially dispersed centres, and TEH as network. Considering the bi-annual events as a specific form of eventification, the latter results partly from the meetings' programming,

offering important mediating platforms for both local artistic production, and the European cultural scenes. Each bi-annual meeting host organises artistic programming, introducing emerging artists from the region or country. Besides these impact- and activity-centric offers during the meetings, there is always space and time for spontaneous and/or informal hangouts and chats among friends that are uneventified.

Infrastructuring community through infrastructure time: membership process and politics of network expansion

Illustrative of infrastructure time, a CO member explains, meetings are not only important for nourishing existing relationships, but also crucial moments in the network's longer-term expansion (TEH75). "TEH has already existed for a long time, so we must be doing something right" (TEH65). Interwoven in meeting reports, changing ideas of how to infrastructure the community appear in the form of variously adjusting the membership admission process over time. Aware of the familiarity and intimacy of a small network, TEH's early membership approach was selective until the mid-1990s. Typical then, one ambassador explains, was that actively recruited members had to demonstrate their ability to host a TEH meeting and present their centre to everyone (personal communication, 29 October 2020). In comparison, cultural centres today queue and apply unsolicitedly; hosting a bi-annual meeting is not a formal requirement for admission, but considered common practice.

According to a CO member, the membership process has always been guided by a set of criteria to safeguard the "family-like small network" (personal communication, June 10th, 2020). Admission criteria include being a civic- or artist-initiated organisation with a legal structure, having a multidisciplinary cultural programme, and being located in a repurposed building (AR 2017). While gaining advocacy capacity is tightly connected with network growth, according to a former CO member, the idea of growth presents a contested subject since "it was important that we didn't just have a lot of members and names on the list, but actually relationships" (personal communication, May 12th, 2020).

Personal contact is key in the entire membership process: After the first contact with the CO, potential new members are invited to a first bi-annual meeting and a dedicated newcomer session, so they can "[...] see if they like the crowd [other members], if they feel comfortable" (personal communication, June 10th, 2020). Only after attending the first bi-annual meeting, a potential new member can fill out the official application form. Then, the candidate receives a visit from TEH representatives (i.e. CO or ambassador), who report back to TEH after the site visit. An ambassador explains the whole process as a "two-way thing", in which TEH wants to "meet the people, understand their motivation, and let the potential new member feel for themselves whether this is a place they want to belong to" (personal communication, May 12th, 2020). Until the application's approval, the new potential members present themselves publicly at the next upcoming bi-annual meeting, where the GA makes the final membership decision. A CO member describes the process as an ambitious hurdle: "If you are not motivated, you don't do it" (personal communication, June 10th, 2020).

Another facet of infrastructuring the TEH community is performed by former TEH stakeholders, who are appointed as "ambassadors" when leaving office. With this voluntary,

honorary position praising important contributions to TEH, ambassadors function as infrastructure agents who continue to represent, advocate and potentially provide support with their knowledge and experience. Drawing this to a close, the membership process requires efforts from existing and new stakeholders and constitutes an important infrastructural moment emphasising infrastructure time (i.e. inviting new members, perspectives and resources into the network in an open-ended way).

Fusing project and infrastructure time through eventified meetings

The question “Who hosts the next meeting?” constantly lingers in bi-annual meetings (personal communication, November 10th, 2020). Parallel to network growth, and increasing degrees of eventification of bi-annual meetings, stages of planning become more demanding and potentially more exclusionary, as an EXCOM member explains: “We now plan two years ahead [...] but we should not plan even longer, since we have new members entering the network. There should be a chance for them to be able to engage in the meetings as well” (TEH62). From an infrastructural perspective, the bi-annual meetings encapsulate both project time (i.e. contributing to the meeting’s cultural and content-related programming in the short-term), but also infrastructure time (i.e. hosting meetings as means for longer-term continuation and trust-building).

The CO in Lund and respective local meeting-hosts continuously work on challenges of including differently-resourced members, according to varying, yet intertwined temporal logics. Concretely, the CO advances and represents the notion of infrastructure time whereas the local meeting-hosts are closer to realising the meeting/event in the vein of project time. The CO works closely with two upcoming hosts at the time, drawing up financial plans, procuring funding and providing volunteers and staff. Simultaneously, and within the trope of project time, meeting-hosts face often localised, individual challenges such as combatting displacement, lack of funding or marginalisation within local urban politics. In response to these challenges, the CO strategically supports hosting a meeting to protest government decisions, which might not recognise, support, or in the worst case, dismiss the centre’s activities (TEH59). Lastly, even though the logic of project time pushes to plan meetings, and intensifies closer to date with more activities etc., the meeting duration of three to four days remains constant. While two years qualify as project time, eventification across spatial and temporal parameters enmeshes project time with infrastructure time. Continuous infrastructuring of the TEH community constitutes an important lever in both building and maintaining a broad base of political support, trust, legitimacy and representation, conditioning cultural advocacy efforts.

In sum, the infrastructuring of a community becomes tangible through ongoing meeting organisation efforts, shared across the CO and varying member centres. Eventification turns some of the project time-related planning efforts outward, and culminates in high-intensity peaks of togetherness (Figure 1). Here, experiences of togetherness present outcomes of project time, focused primarily on community-building in the (eventified) present. Yet, the meetings potentially spur generative moments of togetherness in the future, thus percolating into the logic of infrastructure time. Ultimately, the infrastructuring of a community hovers between moments of network-internal capacity and knowledge exchange (which is predominantly inward-oriented) and commitment for longer-term relations and collaborations.

Infrastructuring cultural advocacy

Infrastructuring of advocacy materialises in the form of written reports, recommendations and vision documents indicating how independent cultural centres shall be sustained and supported in both the present and future. On the one hand, the increasing eventification of meetings and a variety of outward-oriented activities increase the network's visibility on a European level of arts and cultural policymaking. On the other hand, this public exposure also reverberates within the centres' own local or place-based advocacy work. In these processes, the CO mediates between external political stakeholders, ranging from individual centres and their local policy networks, to cross-European conversations and alliances with decision-makers.

Infrastructuring advocacy through outward eventification: meeting expansion and local encounters

Over the years, TEH meetings did not only grow in size, but changed in character: Through the organising principle of turning the meetings into events (i.e. eventification), some relationships amongst members and meeting participants are rendered prominently *eventful(I)* (Kern, 2016). Notably, participants in bi-annual meetings increased from around 100 (2008) to 350 (2014; cf. TEH65; TEH77). On the one hand, the meetings' increased eventification broadens and publicises the carefully infrastructured sense of community whereas, on the other hand, first-time meeting participants might not experience togetherness right away. Togetherness thus emerges as a cumulative and continued co-presence during meetings, and a shared experience of doing things together.

A current member illustrates how meeting-hosts eventify the gatherings, and experience expanding meetings:

We were very keen on making a big impressive meeting, because it's a big thing, having people from all over Europe visit. At previous meetings, we were invited to the mayor and other high officials. It was a really big thing when the TEH meeting came (...) often in not-so-big cities, so it meant something; that a lot of cultural actors visit the city (personal communication, 10th November, 2020).

In addition, local encounters with mayors and political officials have been embedded in advocacy formats such as press conferences. Hence, bi-annual meetings produce communicative encounters where the network engages with its own outside of political stakeholders. As events *within* events, press conferences are eventful, raising TEH's public profile and the opportunity for discussions between policy actors and network representatives. In one case, TEH staged an encounter between a progressive mayor, who entertained good relations with the local independent art scene, a more conservative local politician and TEH representatives (TEH63). While the outcomes and effects of press conferences may vary, internal meeting reports point to the leverage function of such confrontations with public stakeholders mobilising financial, legal or moral support, and can translate into real-life changes for individual centres, such as approved renovation grants or other public subsidies (TEH41; TEH59).

Outward-oriented advocacy also implicates members' to "advocate for themselves" in their respective social, geographic and political contexts, particularly during and after a bi-annual meeting. The CO serves its members with mentoring, training, and other capacity-

building (personal communication, July 14th, 2022), thereby providing resources to self-professionalise, self-brand, and self-legitimise their work to strengthen their positions. A senior CO project manager states (personal communication, July 20th, 2022): “all these other centres from everywhere come to your place and they see it (...) you plant a lot of seeds for future collaboration. But also, we always invite policy makers and institutions, so the centre is really in the spotlight.” Summing up, the bi-annual meetings play a crucial role with the CO supporting individual members both symbolically and practically with argumentation and campaigning training (TEH74).

Infrastructuring multi-level advocacy: TEH reports and policy projects

Meeting reports contribute to materialise infrastructuring advocacy. Over time, TEH meeting reports have changed in terms of layout and language: Since 1983, the two- to three-page, black-and-white typewritten reports have gradually changed to thirty-page, digitalised brochures full of colourful visualisations. Early reports included wordy transcripts, personal addresses and expressions of admiration, frustration, and instructions to reach out to EU parliamentarians etc. (TEH18; TEH21; TEH30). In 1986, a TEH representative documents unsuccessful advocacy efforts and insufficient fundraising attempts, concluding “there is hope, but political pressure must be intensified” (TEH12).

With TEH’s increasingly outward-oriented, public appearance, seeking influence on various stages of policy-making, meeting reports become less self-critical but rather self-celebratory. Meetings are declared as “huge success” (TEH72), or highlighted as “best attended events” (TEH72; TEH74; TEH93). While these statements credit the (often voluntary) work a meeting requires, they also legitimise the network’s efforts to satisfy demands to perform well from sponsors and funders. Put differently, besides sharing information *within* the community, meeting reports increasingly serve as proof of the network’s outstanding performance to external stakeholders. Whereas TEH’s earlier reports served as internal memos, since 2008, newly introduced annual reports appear as professional, promotional materials with mission statements, governance overviews, meeting summaries and financial reports. In other words, reports gain traction as *documented* eventification.

Large multi-stakeholder projects (co-funded by the EU) contain high potential to infrastructure advocacy as they unfold in the form of longer-term efforts, yet still take place within a logic of project time. In addition, policy advocacy turns bi-annual meetings into increasingly powerful platforms for advocacy, as results of elaborate policy collaboration are often launched and discussed there. Hence, advocacy co-emerges from a logic of infrastructure time and contributes to create *eventified peaks of advocacy* (Figure 1).

Infrastructuring evidence-based advocacy

The TEH archive unravels numerous attempts to develop (digital) databases for cultural advocacy. As an internal knowledge infrastructure, its purpose is to support members’ self-advocacy, through creating “convincing numbers” accessible at any time (personal communication, April 22nd, 2020). Archives help preparing campaigns, advance grant applications, support political negotiations, and allow for reflection, comparison and benchmarking (ibid.). By collecting, storing, and processing information in a database,

such data can be used as a tool for translating experiential knowledge into more systematic information (e.g. statistics, lists, tables), compatible with bureaucrats' mindsets and language (ibid.). With regards to the notion of infrastructure time, (digital) databases provide comparatively uninhibited access to information, and from there onwards, further community- and advocacy building (given internet access). Historically, efforts to create databases were coordinated by the CO in response to increasing interest from network external actors like researchers, students, artists and cultural workers, but also public authorities (TEH48). A database was understood as a means to increase visibility. To realise a *TEH Database* later in 2007/08, members were responsabilized, as the report states: "The database will not be developed further unless all members agree to add and update their information on an annual basis" (TEH65). This instructive language signals that creating a database is a shared effort and responsibility to infrastructure advocacy. Yet, as a CO administrator self-critically observes, various attempts at online interfaces have created a "dead platform", which is dysfunctional and "doesn't meet the users needs" (personal communication, July 14th, 2022). As the creation and maintenance of a database presents a more latent resource to infrastructuring advocacy, at first glance, this infrastructuring of evidence-based advocacy appears decoupled from the process of eventification, and from project time. Because the labour of adding and updating data is an open-ended process, and there is no ultimately achievable end result, it is less concrete, less visible, and potentially less immediately rewarding, for member centres to contribute. As this evidence-based infrastructural work is not geared to create in-person togetherness, interpersonal, eventful(l), project time-related networks activities such as co-organising eventified meetings are prioritised. In sum, we find outwards- and inward-oriented advocacy interconnected: During meetings, network members and meeting participants experience important encounters with local stakeholders from politics, administration and the press. Such eventful encounters highlight that outward-oriented eventification can have internal effects on togetherness, as well as on advocacy for oneself, and the network as a whole.

Concluding thoughts

In this article, we identified and disentangled activities sketching the constitution and organisation of *Trans Europe Halles*, a well-established, yet understudied cultural network in Europe. With an infrastructural and temporally-sensitive analytical framework, and an empirical focus on the bi-annual TEH meetings as events, we have demonstrated how different temporal registers infrastructure both community and cultural advocacy over time. There are two temporal logics of eventified, outward-oriented, short-term project time on the one hand (i.e. working towards tangible, concrete, finite goals/projects/events), and more open-ended, inward-oriented, longer-term infrastructure time on the other (i.e. facilitating network cohesion as goal in itself) at play. We have offered this analysis to grasp the delicate construction of a sense of community through shared action and advocacy. Infrastructuring leads to manifold distributions of labour, which maintain, repair and advance the network through different agents.

In its current functioning, TEH works within project time, exercised during meetings that take place via the staged "doing things together" (i.e. curated programming, presentations, public dialogue). Infrastructure time, however, also percolates into project time

and informs concrete decisions, statements and moments of interpersonal togetherness. Accordingly, the socio-material infrastructuring of a community takes various forms – both inward-oriented in preparatory meetings, site visits, Zoom calls and emails, but also outward-oriented in the form of unique event locations, parties, gatherings and programmed, eventful activities during meetings.

Beyond this empirical case, and looking ahead in the study of complex cultural networks or organisations in Europe and beyond, the temporally-sensitive infrastructural perspective developed here can serve as a heuristic device to examine the ways in which a network juggles between short-term demands and pressures, and longer-term organisational idea(l)s and goals. Longer-term infrastructuring practices exceed the project time logic, yet continuously intervene with ongoing, and future ones, too. Infrastructure(d) time thus lingers between openness and closure, between planned, shared action and unknown possibilities for further collaboration. Notably, the infrastructuring of community and advocacy go far beyond the European level examined here – infrastructuring can be scaled down to the national or regional level, or scaled up to inter-continental or global cultural networks.

Furthermore, an infrastructural lens highlights the *conditional* access to experiencing community, and togetherness. For one, it is restricted by member centres' own financial, staff- and time-related scarce resources; furthermore, togetherness is conditioned by the mediating role of the CO to administer access to network membership and meetings. Especially with regards to the conceptual nuance we sought to provide between the inward- and outward-facing dynamics of infrastructuring and eventification, the latter is more often than not a public-facing and intensifying process. While infrastructuring presents a *constitutive* dimension of creating community and advocacy, eventification is a non-necessary component to make meetings happen. Put differently, even though meetings could take place *without* eventification, the fact that the meetings *are* eventified amplifies their infrastructural capacity. Here, we have uncovered eventification as an important analytical dimension that visibilises *how* the network activity builds community. A similar analytical take-away crystallises from the relation between the infrastructuring of community and togetherness. While togetherness emerges as a condensed form, or *peak* of an infrastructured community, togetherness is not a *necessary* component of network organising. Yet, the experience of togetherness spurs the commitment and trust in the community (including members and meeting participants). To encourage future infrastructuring work, togetherness serves to motivate and commit existing and new members to participate in future meetings, or even host a meeting themselves.

Ultimately, following Besedovsky et al.'s (2019) understanding of temporality as infrastructure, infrastructure(d) cultural network temporality presents a generative tool to design both networks' futures (e.g. by cultivating community further) and to trace networks' pasts (e.g. looking into the build-up of infrastructure time through initial stages of project time). Attending to both temporal aspects of infrastructuring, the many laborious, long-term *processes* of coordination and communication going into creating and sustaining a network (i.e. infrastructure time) have been read against the otherwise oft-(over)emphasised *products* of this labour (i.e. project time) – the meeting events. By acknowledging this, and further advocating to distribute workload and network ownership, cultural network futures can possibly become more integrated and inclusive.

Lastly, within this encompassing framework of infrastructural temporality, the multiplicity of cultural networks' pasts, presents and futures can not only be understood as unfinished projects, but as possibilities for diverse communities and advocacy infrastructures to arise.

Note

1. For a comprehensive overview of cultural networks co-funded by the European Commission see <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe/creative-europe-culture-strand/european-networks>

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Appendix

Table A1. Selected overview of TEH meetings and reports

TEH Meeting/ Report No.	Date	Location
TEH01	1983	Brussels, Belgium
TEH03	1983	Copenhagen, Denmark
TEH04	1984	Koblenz, Germany
TEH05	1984	Unna, Germany
TEH06	1984	Amsterdam, Netherlands
TEH12	1986	Zurich, Switzerland
TEH15	1987	Poitiers, France
TEH18	1988	Berlin, Germany
TEH21	1989	Barcelona, Spain
TEH22	1989	Vienna, Austria
TEH24	1990	Arhus, Denmark
TEH25	1990	Glasgow, Scotland
TEH26	1991	Gent, Belgium
TEH27	1991	Dublin, Ireland
TEH28	1991	Vienna, Austria
TEH29	1992	Geneva, Switzerland
TEH30	1992	Koblenz, Germany
TEH31	1992	Lund, Sweden
TEH33	1993	Bergen, Norway
TEH36	1994	Cambridge, England
TEH38	1994	Helsinki, Finland
TEH39	1995	Paris, France
TEH40	1995	Ljubljana, Slovenia
TEH41	1996	Mezzago, Italy
TEH42	1996	Leipzig, Germany
TEH45	1997	Labin, Croatia
TEH46	1998	Barcelona, Spain
TEH47	1999	Tilburg & Amsterdam, Netherlands
TEH48	1999	Esch sur Alzette, Luxembourg
TEH51	2001	Belgrade, (Yugoslavia) Serbia
TEH53	2002	Lisbon, Portugal
TEH54	2002	Bucharest, Romania
TEH 56	2003	Birmingham, England
TEH59	2005	Castelfranco Veneto, Italy
TEH61	2006	Ljubljana, Slovenia
TEH62	2006	Bremen, Germany
TEH63	2007	Vilnius, Lithuania
TEH64	2007	Helsinki and Verkatehdas, Finland
TEH65	2008	Brussels, Belgium
TEH66	2008	Stavanger, Norway

TEH67	2009	Zilina, Slovakia
TEH68	2009	Cracow, Poland
TEH69	2010	Budapest, Hungary
TEH71	2011	Tartu, Estonia
TEH72	2011	Bordeaux, France
TEH73	2012	Kosice, Slovakia
TEH74	2012	Gothenburg, Sweden
TEH75	2013	Riga, Latvia
TEH76	2013	Marseille, France
TEH77	2014	Amsterdam, Netherlands
TEH78	2014	Plsen, Czechia
TEH79	2015	Lecce, Italy
TEH80	2015	Budapest, Hungary
TEH82	2016	Verona, Italy
TEH83	2017	Pula, Croatia
TEH84	2017	Kyiv, Ukraine
TEH85	2018	Bilbao, Spain
TEH86	2018	Bagneu, France
TEH87	2019	Dresden, Germany
TEH88	2019	Timisoara, Romania
TEH89	2020	(Ebeltoft, Denmark)
TEH90	2020	Nicosia, Cyprus
TEH 91	2021	Ebeltoft, Denmark
TEH 92	2021	Bratislava, Slovakia
TEH 93	2022	Prague, Czechia
TEH 94	2022	Fengersfors, Sweden
TEH 95	2023	Leipzig, Germany

Appendix A2. Personal communications 2020–2022.

Role or function in TEH	Date and place	Data format
Coordination office staff	March 25th, 2020, online	Conversation memo
Coordination office staff	April 22nd, 2020, online	Interview transcript
External researcher, UK	April 22nd, 2020, online	Interview transcript
Former coordination office staff, ambassador	May 12th, 2020, online	Interview transcript
Coordination office staff	June 10th, 2020, online	Interview transcript
Coordination office staff	September 16th, 2020, TEH office in Lund	Conversation memo
Coordination office, project management staff	September 30th, 2020, TEH office in Lund	Conversation memo
Coordination office staff	October 7th, 2020, TEH office in Lund	Interview transcript
Founding member, ambassador	October 9th, 2020, online	Interview transcript
Former coordination office staff, ambassador	October 29th, 2020, online	Interview transcript
Member based in Sweden	November 10th, 2020, online	Interview transcript
Coordination office staff, management	July 14th, 2022, TEH office in Lund	Interview transcript
Coordination office staff, project management	July 14th, 2022, TEH office in Lund	Conversation memo
Coordination office, senior project management	July 20th, 2022, online	Interview transcript